

Tor 1

To explore the relationship young women have with sport & physical exercise, in particular, thinking about how certain protected characteristic and socio-economic situations might impact on the barriers to participation.

Methods

We decided to use a survey as our main source of data collection. The survey was attached to TOR 2's survey who were reaching out to young women's experience of P.E. in school. This decision was made as we felt that engagement in one survey would be more successful than trying to acquire responses for two separate surveys. The survey was promoted on social media for a 3 week period and was also sent through a targeted approach to organisations and individuals voices who we wanted to ensure we heard.

In addition to the surveys we also reached out to organisations who worked with groups of women who fell under one or more of the protected characteristics and sports facilities in general to find out if they had anything in place to encourage young women with protected characteristics to participate in sports. Feedback from these organisations was limited but will still support to back up the data found through the survey.

Protected Characteristics

As has been identified by many other organisations and academics already, young women have a number of additional barriers in accessing sport and physical exercise due to their sex. However, we proposed that there would be even more barriers for young women who come under one or more of the below protected characteristics: Sexuality, Race, Religion, Disability, Pregnancy and Single/Young Parenthood.

In addition, we also acknowledged that socio-economic barriers are important to consider and although not a protected characteristic, we felt it linked with our research aims and therefore explored how they can act as a barrier as well as protected characteristics and how they can intersect.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Young Women Lead Survey Responses

The survey responses indicated that socio-economic situations were a huge barrier to young women in Sport. **81%** of respondents commented that they thought family income and disposable money impacted on their relationship with sport. The reasons varied but those

coming in highest were membership fees (**38%**), cost of competing (**18%**), costs of equipment (**14%**) and travel costs to sport facilities (**10%**).

A selection of quotes from the responses are included below and highlight the difficulties in participating due to financial barriers:

Participant 43

“Definitely. Growing up in an affluent area it was an assumption I came from money which was so far from the truth. I was naturally interested in sports however due to the lack of money I wasn't able to join any clubs. It was heartbreaking. At school it was so sexist and gender specific UBS only I miss out greatly doing the sports I wanted to do; rugby and football. If I tried to play them I suffered terrible bullying and abuse from both kids and teachers. This occurred throughout primary and secondary school.”

“Women (cis + trans) and non-binary people are under so much pressure from the media and from peers that whether we exercise or not we are judged on our bodies. On top of that our access to sports and exercise is limited if we are low income. In high school, I would skip PE class because I was bullied for being fat. Now I am choosing between saving up for a proper pair of running shoes that won't injure my feet or being able to save for a safety net. Money and body image are the two things that have held me back and I hope that in the future young people are able to access sports and exercise more easily and with less pressure on their looks and bodies.”
- Participant 521

Organisational Feedback

Some examples where organisations are acting to combat cost barriers are Active Stirling who responded that they have been making a conscious effort to target girls and young women in economically disadvantaged areas in Stirling. They have established a project in partnership with Stirling Council's Learning and Employability team to break down barriers for “women and girls who are experiencing specific barriers to participation into sport and physical activity” (Stirling Council, 2019).

Single & Young Mums

Young Women Lead Survey Responses

67 of the Young Women who responded to the survey ticked to say they have children or caring responsibilities. 65% of those young women commented that motherhood had negatively impacted their relationship with sport. Time (22%), Finance (7%), Lack of childcare facilities (9%) and having low self-confidence (7%) were the four main barriers to their participation since becoming a mother.

“I wish there were more maternity options. The Edinburgh leisure website sucked, and I couldn't find a single water based class. I feel social exercise can be really good physically and mentally but it can be expensive.”
- Participant 187

However, 14% also commented that they had noted an increase in participation as they wanted to be healthier for their children.

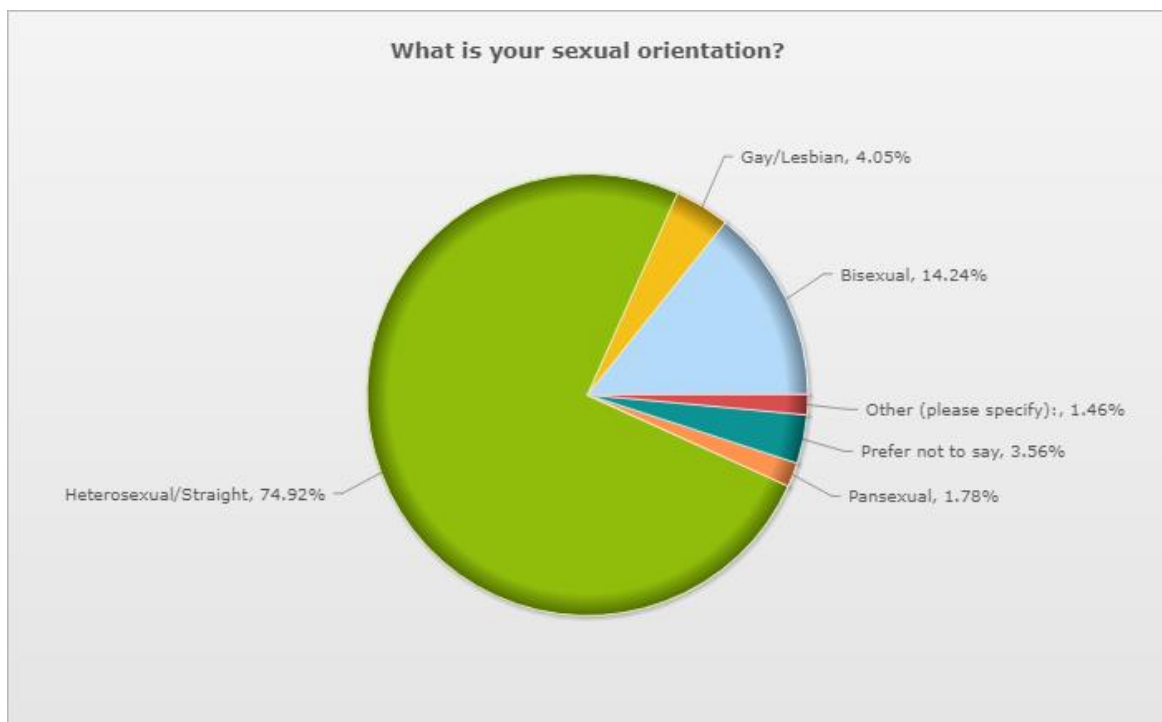
Organisational Feedback

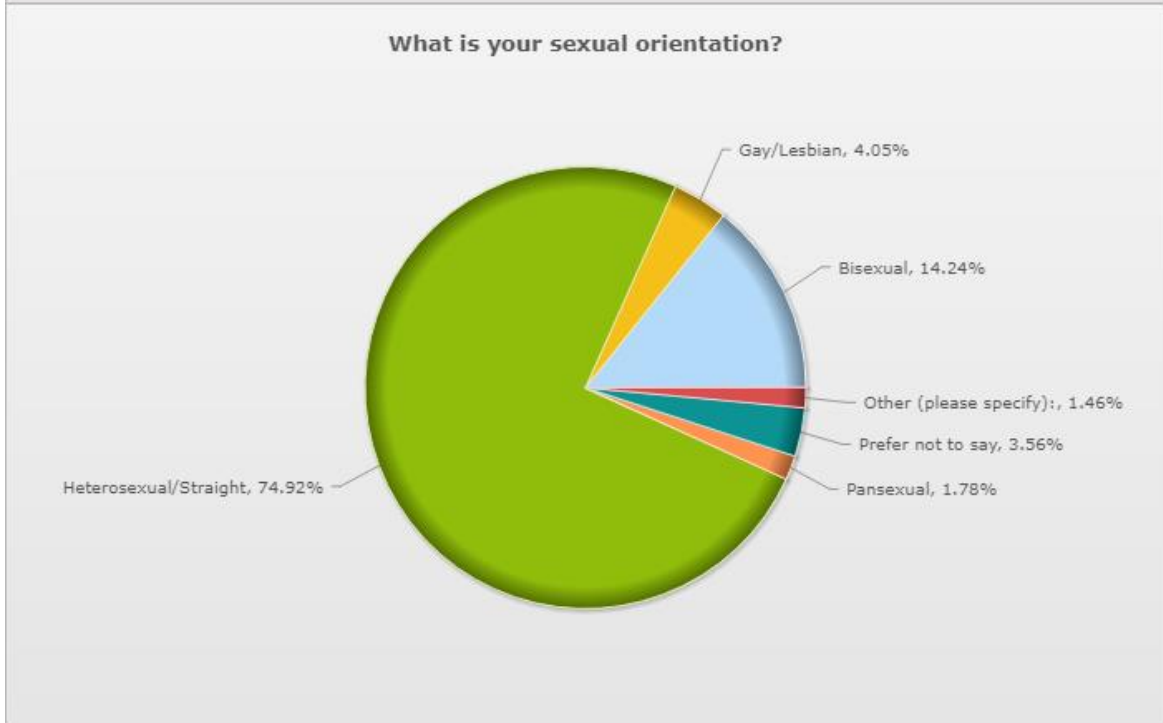
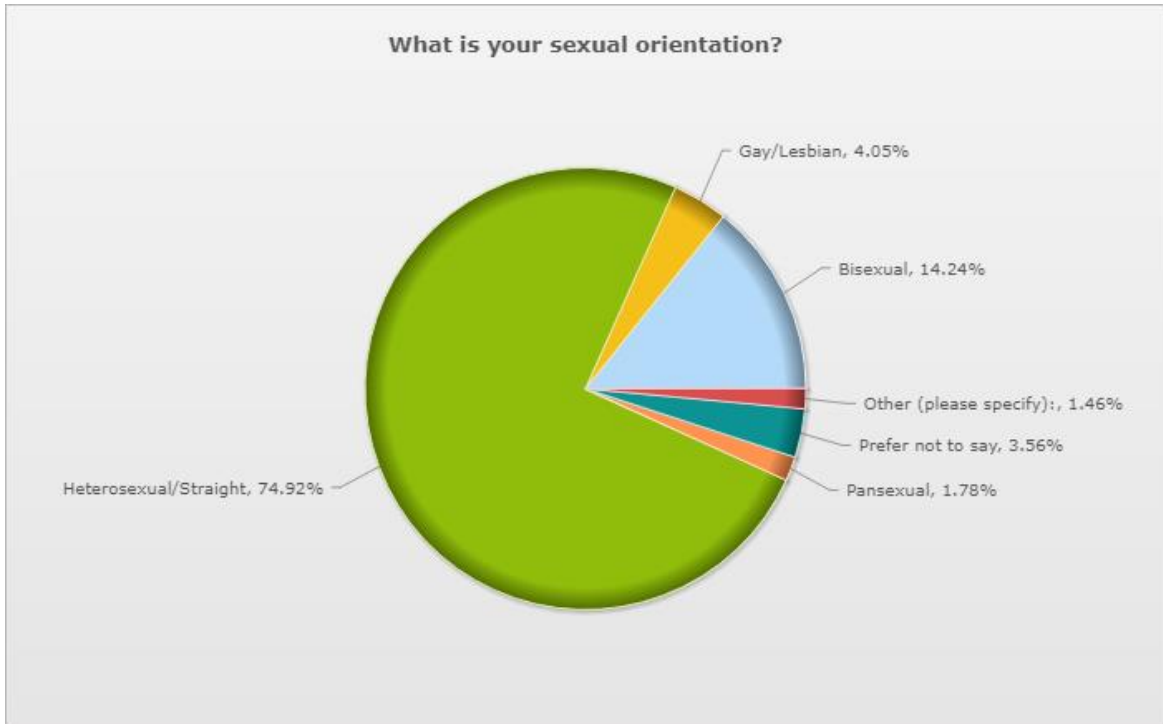
Active Stirling offer buggy walks for mums five times a week throughout Stirling.

LGBT+ Community

Young Women Lead Survey Responses

Participation in the survey from those who identify as LGBTQ+ was quite high with (25.8%) responding. In regard to the question of whether a protected characteristic impacts their relationship with sport, LGBTQ+ came in the highest. 22% of young women commented on that they had negative experiences in sport due to their LGBTQ+ identity.





Some of the feedback in the survey is:

"I was told I was not allowed to participate in girls only sports nor get changed with the other girls during sport due to my sexuality."

- Participant 133, identifies as pansexual

Participant 15 names gender dysphoria as a major barrier to her participation in sports.

"I went to a catholic secondary school and was always very well aware of the thoughts and feelings against LGBT young people by teachers. I avoided taking part in PE as I felt uncomfortable in the changing rooms as I didn't want anyone to think I was looking at them purely because I was a lesbian." - Participant 265

"It's difficult to walk into a new place such as a gym and be a fat bisexual woman. I like lifting weights, and that means in commercial gyms I can be surrounded by cis-male gym culture which is exclusive and intimidating. I've recently found a gym which is lgbt+ friendly and inclusive to all. Since going there I've been able to participate with confidence - however, the cost is more expensive than Puregym or other places. So it's unlike I'll be able to continue there for much longer."
- Participant 521

A recurring theme were issues faced by women identifying as being part of the LGBTQA+ community in changing rooms.

"Not particularly sport but PE used to make me freak out a bit because my class acted like I was a pervert and all didn't want to change with me in the room."
- Participant 26, identifies as gay

"I was outed in school as bisexual. Shortly afterwards, I overheard friends in my class gossiping that i had been staring at them in the changing rooms. From then, I didn't want to risk looking at anybody directly either in the changing rooms or during PE in case it furthered this false narrative."
- Participant 29

"At school when i was incredibly confused about my sexuality, the idea of getting changed in a room full of other girls for PE terrified me. I was so anxious that someone would catch me looking at them and accuse me of being gay. I had a lot of excuses up my sleeve to get me out of a situation where i had to be vulnerable/physical with other women."
- Participant 278

"Anxiety about which changing facilities to use as a trans person. Using the right one for my gender presentation is intimidating as it's very difficult to pass while undressed, and the possibility of being harassed or assaulted for being perceived as out of place is high. On the other hand using the wrong one for my presentation means I'm visibly the wrong gender when entering or leaving fully dressed and similarly vulnerable to harassment or attack, and my gender may be misread or undermined by anyone who sees me leaving the wrong changing room. Swimming and other activities that require form fitting clothing are also very stressful, as passing in those circumstances is difficult and there is a nasty perception among some people that trans bodies are 'obscene' or unsuitable for public places / where children may be present. Many sports teams and exercise groups are gender segregated, which raises the same issues - e.g. which football team to join, how to negotiate group shower blocks or changing rooms, fear of rejection by teammates, etc."
- Participant 323

"I was made to change in a disabled changing room in high school when I came out as bi. it upset the other girls that I would be possibly attracted to them. This affected how comfortable I am in a changing room despite how comfortable I am in my own body. However I feel this is not an issue as an adult as obviously people don't know my sexual orientation by looking at me. But it massively affected me as a teenager not being welcome and more likely to try and get out of P.E."

- Participant 546, identifies as bisexual

1.6% of responses reflected current media coverage around the inclusion of trans people in sport. The comments that we received, some of which can be seen in our report, highlight a current atmosphere which can understandably prevent those in the trans community from participating in sport.

Organisational Feedback

The Equality Network published two reports looking at homophobia and transphobia in sports in 2013, 'Out for Sports'. They found that homophobia and transphobia were massive barriers for LGBT people's participation in sport, particularly for trans people:

'Is homophobia or transphobia a barrier to LGBT people participating in sport?'

The impact of discrimination can be seen in the answer to this question which 79% of trans people answered in the affirmative. The following comment succinctly sums up why this may be the case: "...who wants to be teased, mocked and be made the butt of jokes in the showers, on the playing fields, in the pub?"

The number of trans identified participants who felt transphobia is a barrier to sports participation was fairly significantly higher than the number of non-trans respondents who see homophobia or transphobia as a barrier – that being 65%. This suggests that prejudice may be more of a barrier to trans people participating in sport than it is to those who do not identify as trans. The figures as to respondents' involvement in sport or physical activity tend to support this suggestion. 22% of trans respondents stated that they never participate in sport or physical activity and 30% stated that they are never involved as spectators, compared to 15% and 18% respectively of non-trans respondents.

However, in looking at these figures consideration must be given to the fact that a higher proportion of trans identified respondents indicated that they are disabled, 25% compared to 13% of non-trans respondents, and this may have an impact on their sports participation.

'One of the main barriers to participating in sport raised by trans respondents was the lack of changing and leisure facilities which meet the needs of trans people. Transgender interviewees identified a number of issues around changing rooms including the fact they are usually gender specific and lacking in privacy. Respondents related their concerns about their ability to pass as the gender they identify as in such an environment. Issues around body scarring or body image and fears of having their gender identity challenged by staff and other facility users meant that many transgender people were anxious about entering sports facilities and taking part in sport.'

The following recommendations were made as a result of the report. It would be good to check in and see if these recommendations have been followed.

1. Visible Leadership 2. National Reference Group 3. Action Plan 4. Policies 5. Education 6. Changing Attitudes 7. Tackling abuse 8. Supporting LGBT Participation 9. Capacity Building 10. Employment

<http://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Transgender-specific-companion-report.pdf>

Religion:

Young Women Lead Survey Responses

5% of those who commented that a protected characteristic impacted their relationship with sport, acknowledged that it was due to racial factors.

*"I feel that since I wear the hijab I am judged when coming into the gym, coming to a sports club. I do not feel welcome, therefore I mostly exercise at home."
- Participant 85*

*"I'm Arab / British - and also a Muslim. There's a lot of difficulty with swimming and other sports that comes with that. It took a while to be comfortable with working out in the clothes that I do today."
- Participant 161*

Race

Young Women Lead Survey Responses

There was a very low return rate from BAME young women on the survey, despite targeted approaches to organisations working within their communities. Overall in regard to survey responses there were only (4%) from a BAME background and no comments on how it impacted relationships with sport.

Disability

Survey Findings

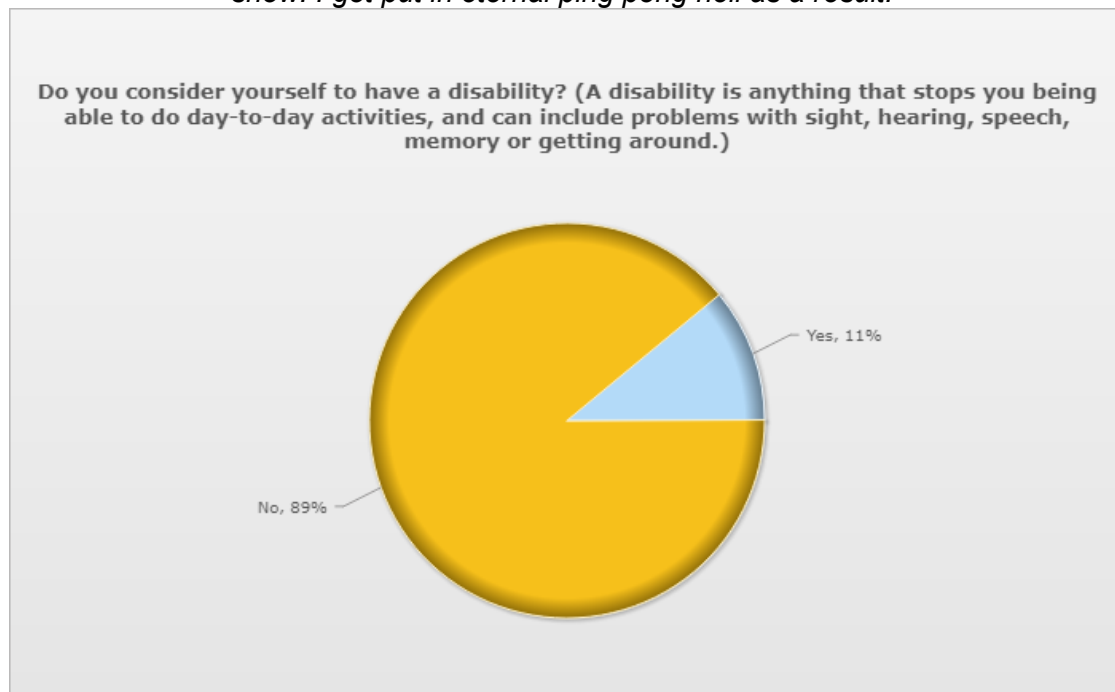
67 respondents to the survey highlighted that they considered themselves to have a disability and of that 67, 12 (18%) responded that they felt it impacted on their relationship with sport.

There was a diverse range of disabilities and conditions mentioned, some of the quotes from survey respondents are below:

“Since being diagnosed with an inflammatory condition I have very limited energy to take part in sport or to exercise the way I used to, and am also less inclined to try something new or different, even if it might help, for fear of doing it wrong and hurting myself.”

Another theme that was identified was that there is a lack of awareness and training for teachers to support young women with disabilities. One quote from the survey highlights this lack of knowledge and the impact it had on experience of sport:

“I am autistic and have Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. I didn't know this until more recently. I always hated doing PE as I felt like I was being watched and judged by other people. I was never good at it and seemingly had some developmental delays. I started getting knee pains in p6 and was diagnosed with Osgood Schlatters. Some teachers kept saying only boys usually got that. I don't think I had it long term, but it wasn't really reviewed. I continued to use it to get out of PE even when the pain had lessened. All my school reports say "need to be more confident in PE" with no practical advice on how to go about building that confidence. P1 says poor motor skills development, but no referrals were made. In high school I started doing PE again, and the boys would make fun of me. My knees got bad again and they tried to put me in swimming all the time. I couldn't swim, probably due to lack of strength and coordination. I was also nervous about pubes and tampon strings on show. I got put in eternal ping pong hell as a result.”



Organisational Feedback

Active Stirling

They offer weekly walking netball sessions for women with disabilities at The Peak.

Incontinence - Elaine Millar (Pelvic Physiotherapist)

20% of young women (15-25) wet themselves which is a big reason why girls don't participate in PE at school and drop out of sport. It's a massive, under-recognised and under-treated issue which most young women are embarrassed to speak about.

Currently, there is no pelvic health education in PHSE. If women knew what they could reasonably expect from their genitals through the course of their lifetime then they would be able to seek help. Young women should leave school knowing what normal peeing, normal pooing and normal sexual function is - without that knowledge they don't recognise problems, believe that leaking is just how it is and set themselves up for a lifetime of bladder and bowel problems, impacting on their relationship with sport.

In particular Stress incontinence, where you wet yourself laughing, jumping, sneezing, has up to an 84% cure rate with 6 sessions of physio. Many young women have rigid pelvic floors, which some basic education could fix before they become too complex.

Unfortunately due to embarrassment & stigma it takes an average of 7 years for women to seek help. PE teachers and sports coaches should be trained to identify and support prevention of incontinence and vaginal prolapse which impacts 50% of women over 50. If we teach the teenagers to do their pelvic floor exercises we can prevent prolapse in the majority of women. This was not a topic which came up in the survey, however, factors such as limited awareness and embarrassment, as suggested by Elaine, could have prevented young women wanting to discuss this.

Written Evidence Submission for Tor-2

To look at the provision of sport and physical activity in schools and how this influences attitudes amongst young women

Section 1 - Method of Engagement

1.1 Young Persons Survey

Alongside the Tor-1 group*, we created a survey in order to gather data regarding young women's experience of Physical Education (PE) in school. After discussing our method of data gathering with the rest of the Committee, we agreed with Tor-1 that our engagement strategy would work better as one large survey. The survey was aimed at young women, aged 16 to 30, allowing those women who were no longer at school to bypass specific school related questions. For three weeks, the survey was promoted through social media platforms - Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram - with individuals and organisations from a variety of sporting and political backgrounds being targeted.

Our group's questions focused on the following areas:

- Enjoyment of PE in primary school and secondary school
- Whether school has helped to understand diet and benefits of exercise
- How to improve enjoyment in PE at school

- The barriers to taking part in PE
- Exercise outwith school

**Tor-1 group focus: Protected Characteristics.*

1.2 Teacher Survey

Our group's main focus and area of research centres around PE at school. Following the evidence submitted by Professor David Kirk, Professor of Education at The University of Strathclyde, we identified the issues we wished to explore - young women's direct voices, the curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching methods. As the main survey with Tor-1 was aimed primarily at young women who are still in school, the group created a separate survey aimed at teachers in Scotland. We invited teachers from any discipline to take part in a short survey consisting of five questions. Our aim was to gain an insight into how sport and PE at school is viewed, understood and valued by those who teach.

1.3 Teacher Interviews*

In order to add more qualitative data to our survey results, we arranged to interview three Physical Education teachers from different areas in Scotland to gain an insight into their career experiences. Employed at both state funded schools and independent fee paying schools, these individuals provided us with lived experiences of PE teaching. As we were only able to interview three teachers, we wish to stress that these interviews are not a fully accurate portrayal of PE teaching throughout Scotland.

We interviewed:

- **Ross Johnson** - Young coach of the year 2018. Coaches rugby at an Edinburgh state-funded school. Works with girls of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Jude McMullen** - Physical Education teacher and Hockey Coach at an independent fee paying school in Dundee.
- **Jess Jameson** - Physical Education teacher who has worked at both independent fee paying and state funded schools throughout the central belt.

We asked the following questions:

1. What do you think the main barriers to sport and exercise for young women are?
2. What measures (if any) do you try to take to be as inclusive as possible when dealing with young women in sport/exercise?
3. Do you think this is effective in encouraging more young women into sport?
4. Do you think that PE uniform (or lack of) impacts young women's participation in sport? If yes, why do you think that is?
5. In your opinion, what could be done to ensure young women feel more comfortable participating in sport at school?
6. Do you believe enough time is spent on physical education at school?
7. What do you believe are the biggest barriers to young women participating in sport or physical activity outwith school?

**Transcripts of the interviews can be provided for further information.*

1.4 Focus Group

In an effort to hear the voices of a broader range of young women whilst not limit ourselves to those who use social media we contacted local girlguiding groups. Due to time constraints, we were only able to hold one focus group. A session plan was created by a member of our group and a youth leader, who already knew the group, conducted the exercise with 20 young women, aged between 10-12. The girls were divided into four groups, each with a flipchart paper, post-its and pens. They were then asked the following four questions:

1. What you like about PE in school?
2. What you dislike about PE in school?
3. What would you change?
4. Why did it change (is it did) between primary and secondary?

The girls were then asked to write their responses individually or with a friend and walk around the different tables adding their responses to the flipcharts. After this, they were all provided with stickers which they then put beside the responses they thought were the most important. A discussion was then held where everyone was able to discuss the themes that came up and add any extra information.

Section 2 - Results

2.1 Survey of Young Women

Number of Completed Surveys	618
Respondents who answered the school questions	31% (192)
Main area of responses	South Lanarkshire - 20% Edinburgh - 19% Fife - 14% <i>We received responses from 31 out of 32 Local Authority Areas</i>

The response to the young persons survey highlighted some interesting results:

- Only 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school had taught them about the importance of a balanced diet
- Just under half (49.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that school had helped them to understand the benefits of physical activity and exercise
- 83% of young women stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'at primary school I enjoyed Physical Education lessons'
- 54% of young women stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'at secondary school I enjoy Physical Education lessons'
- 53% of respondents advised that their enjoyment between primary and secondary school declined and 14% advised that it increased
- 74% of respondents took part in sport or exercise outside of school.

Our survey included open-ended questions which allowed those taking part to provide additional information. When asked why respondent's levels of enjoyment had changed between primary and secondary school the results highlighted four main trends - Gender Dynamics, Competitiveness, Judgement, and Body Confidence.*

**Direct quotations from the surveys can be provided for further information.*









When asked what would have increased participant's enjoyment of PE in primary school respondents advised:

- More choice of activities (57%)
- Better facilities (39%)
- More focus on fun as opposed to competitiveness (36%)

In comparison, the top suggestions for secondary school were:

- More choice of activities (54%)
- More focus on fun as opposed to competitiveness (47%)
- Better facilities (29%)
- Teaching methods (29%)

Question posed to pupils: Are any of the following barriers to your participation in sports?











Dislike of PE kit		10.94%
Dislike / unsuitable facilities (e.g. changing rooms, showers)		16.15%
Body confidence		55.73%
Ability		35.94%
Bullying		17.19%
Menstruation		35.94%
No motivation		35.42%
Other (please specify): View		18.23%

2.2 Teacher Survey and Teacher Interviews

Question	Result
Number of complete surveys	257
Female Respondents	89%
Primary School Teachers (non-PE)	54%
Secondary School Teachers (non-PE)	33%
PE Teachers	6%

86% of teachers who took part in our survey agreed or strongly agreed that young men in the school that they teach at are enthusiastic about participating in PE lessons, whereas when posed the same question regarding young women only 61% agreed or strongly agreed.

Question posed to teachers: From your experience, what, if any, barriers do young women face in regard to participating in sport or exercise at school?

Body confidence issues		72.76%
Provision of activities within the school		26.07%
Facilities available within the school		27.63%
Mixed gender activities		31.91%
Perception of gender roles		31.91%
Menstruation		34.63%
Bullying		20.23%
PE kit		45.14%
I'm not aware of any barriers		9.73%
Other (please specify): View		7.78%

The three PE teachers that we interviewed and the variety of responses to the open-ended questions in our survey stressed how different every school is, however, there appear to be common trends.

Lack of Equipment and Facilities:

Lack of equipment can act as a barrier to pupils according to the responses from our teacher survey and interviews.

- ❖ 28% of teachers cited school facilities as a barrier to young women’s participation.
- ❖ 41% of teachers agreed that better facilities would increase young women’s participation in physical education.

Body confidence:





This was cited by each of the teacher’s that we interviewed as a particular barrier to young women’s participation in PE at school and especially noticed between senior one girls and senior two girls. The results from both the teacher survey and young person’s survey would appear to back this up.

- ❖ 56% of the pupils who took part in the young persons survey cited body confidence as a barrier.
- ❖ 73% of teachers stated that body confidence acted as a barrier to young women participating in Physical Education at school.
- ❖ 36% of those that did not take part in sports outwith school stated that this was due to body confidence issues.

PE Kit/Uniform:

45% of teachers advised that PE kit was a barrier. Interestingly, only 11% of young female pupils stated that dislike of their PE kit acted as a barrier for them.

Question posed to teachers: What do you think can be done to increase young women's participation in sport and/or exercise at school?

More choice of activities		55.25%
Better facilities (e.g. changing rooms, showers)		40.47%
Different teaching methods		18.29%
Single sex lessons		23.74%
More female PE teacher(s)		19.84%
Better PE kit		14.40%
No need for a PE kit / ability to wear own clothes		28.40%
More focus on fun as opposed to competitiveness		49.03%
I don't know		10.12%
Other (please specify): View		8.56%

The teachers that we interviewed agreed with these survey results. They also included having more female role models as a way to increase participation. By inviting female athletes to their schools to talk to the students or by taking students to watch matches, the teachers were able to provide role models and encourage young women to engage with the sport.

2.3 Focus Group with the Girl Guides

The focus group found that the top things young women disliked about PE were:

- ❖ When you have to do dancing with the boys (4)
- ❖ Our PE Teacher is sexist (3)
- ❖ Competitive attitude (2)
- ❖ Not academic enough (2)
- ❖ You might find it boring when you do a block for ages (2)

When asked what they liked about PE, the reasons given were:

- ❖ It's fun (4)
- ❖ The cool games and activities, it's really fun and gets you fit (3)
- ❖ Team sports (3)
- ❖ Gymnastics (3)
- ❖ Different types of sport (2)

When asked if they would like to change anything about sport, young women advised:

- ❖ Better variety of sports (5)
- ❖ Reduce sexism towards girls (3)
- ❖ Do more of pupil's choice sports (2)

- ❖ Female PE teachers (2)
- ❖ More group / team work

We intentionally kept these questions to the girl guiding group open so we could check the responses in our online surveys (which were more directive in offering options for responses) aligned with what young women would come up with themselves when asked about these issues. As can be seen above the focus group mentioned barriers including the gender of their teachers, activity choices and mixed gender activities in their responses, which is in line with the evidence from the survey.

TOR 3 - Engagement work document

Words associated with sport/physical activity

There was a real mix of words submitted from young women, and not a clear majority of positive or negative language. Many entries suggested a complex and changeable relationship such as:

“Anxious” “fluctuating” “fickle” “guilt”

We feel the responses shown here (see Fig 1) demonstrate the unique experiences of young women; it is clearly not the same for every one and this must be considered in interventions and research in this area. The amount of words that suggest relationships can vary gives us reason to believe there are many factors at play when young women interact with sport and physical activity.

Fig 1

*What one word would you use
to describe your relationship with sport?*



How social media makes us feel

It is interesting to note that, despite the majority of respondents saying that social media makes them feel worse about sport and physical activity (Fig 2), most also follow fitness (Fig 3) and body positive accounts (Fig 4), with the latter being more common. We feel this

suggests young women indeed want to engage with fitness related content but that it may not always lead to positive outcomes (Fig 5). When more positive accounts are viewed, it makes young women feel better - although not always (Fig 6).

Fig 2

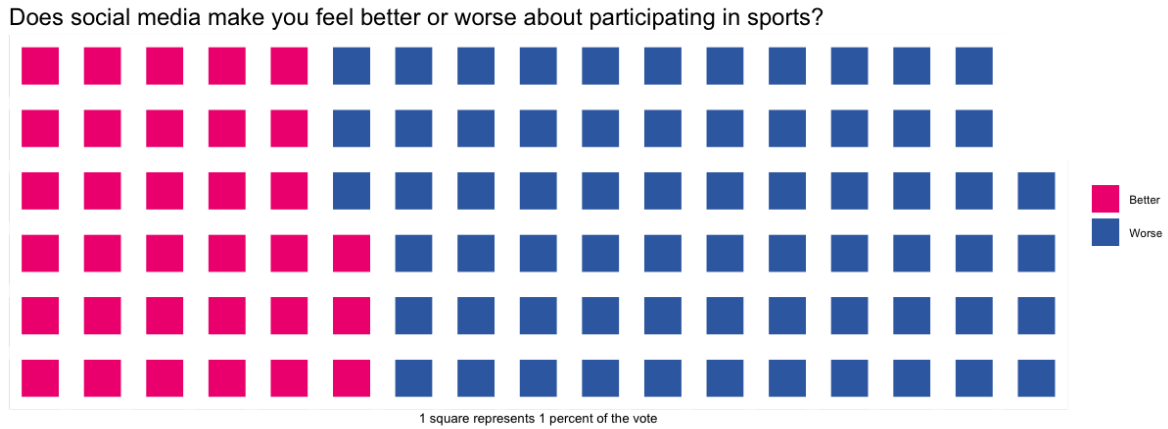


Fig 3

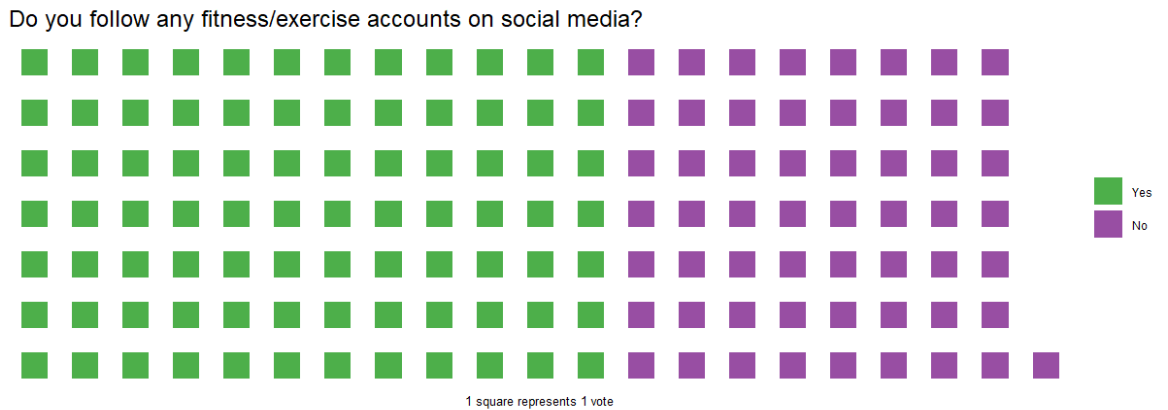
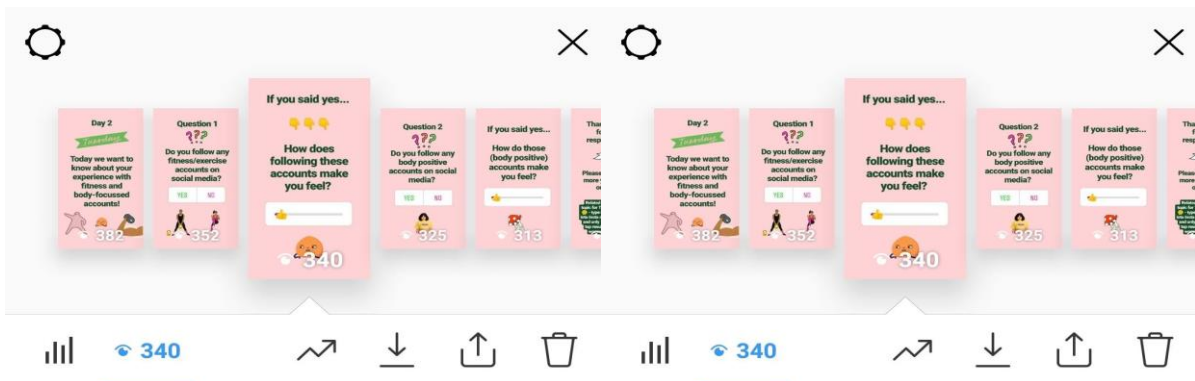
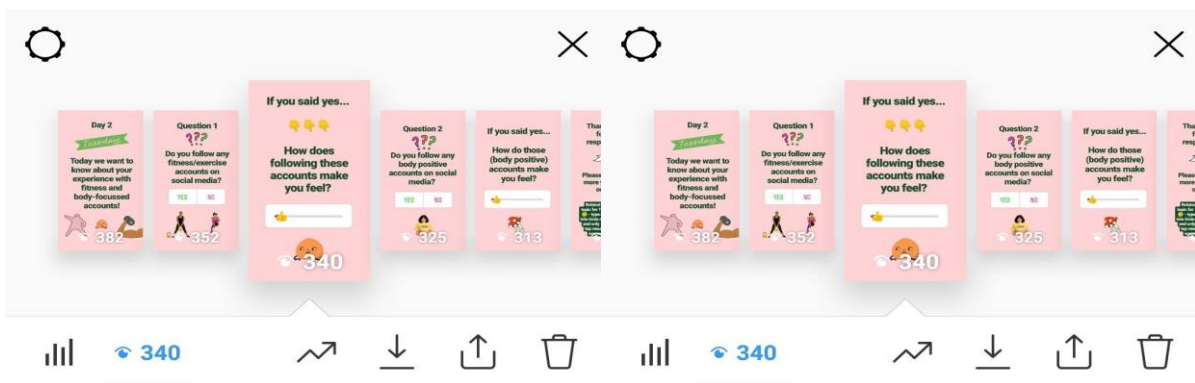
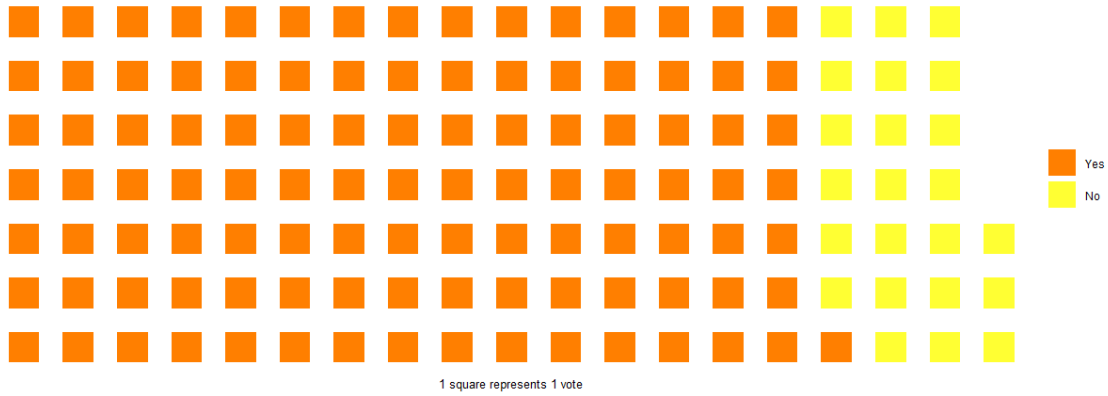
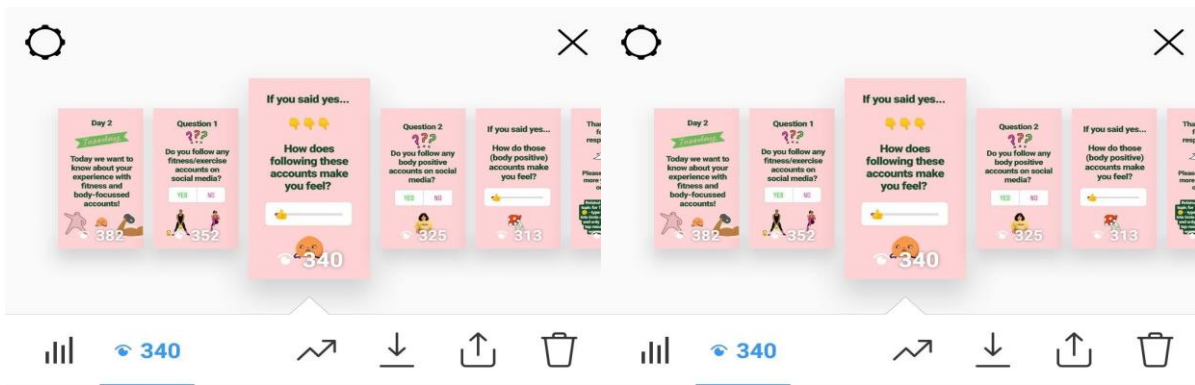


Fig 4

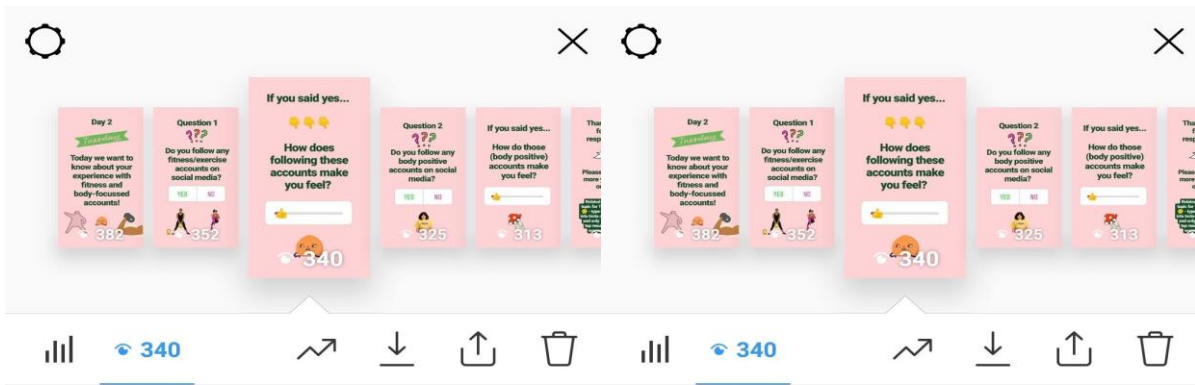
Do you follow any body positivity accounts online?





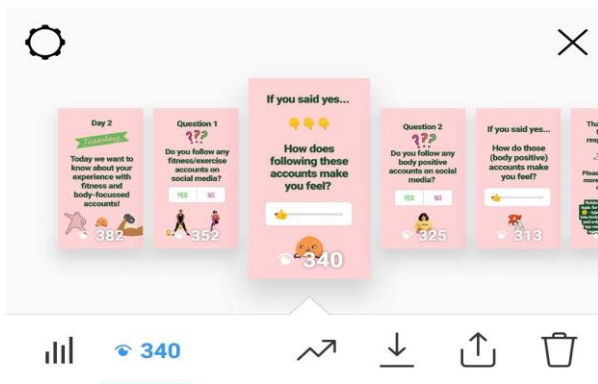
84 people voted. This is the average answer.

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Fig 5

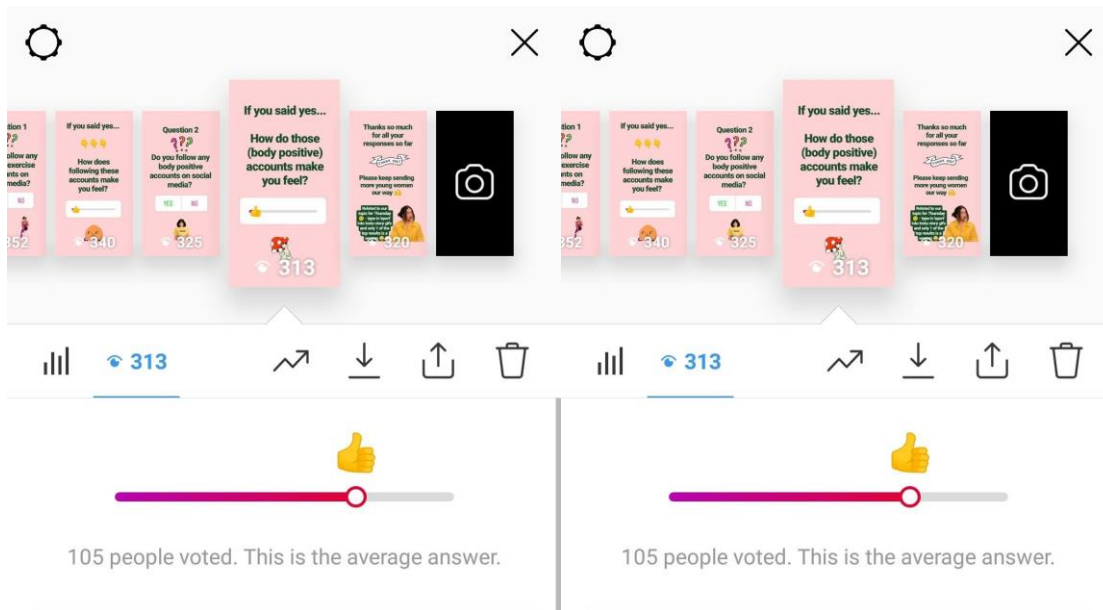


Fig 6

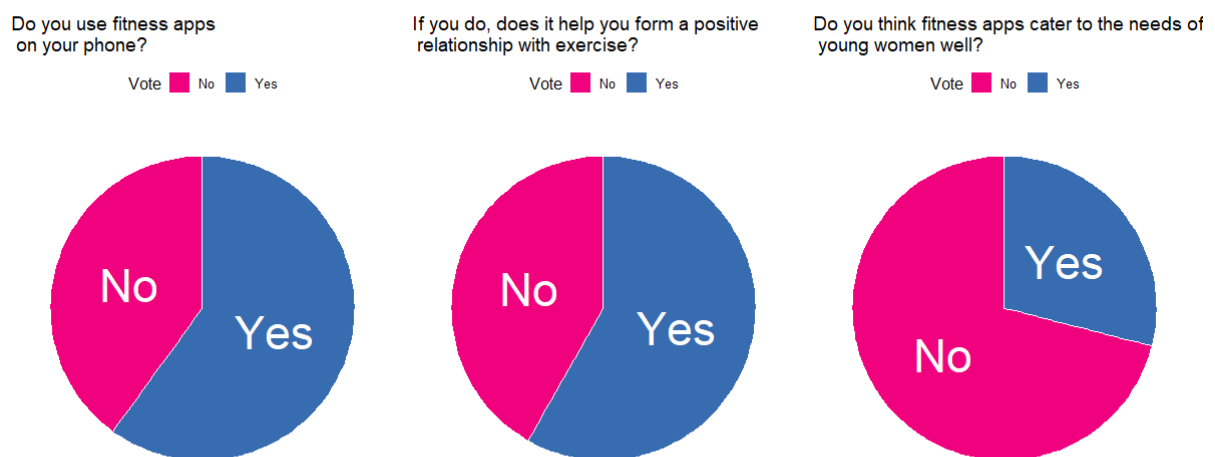
The evidence collected around these themes is some of the most interesting as it highlights social media does have a part to play in young women's relationship with exercise and thus accounts must take on a level of responsibility for this. Social media has the power to make us feel both better and worse, depending on circumstances. We would be keen to investigate further whether the amount people use social media and in what way is considered within legislation around relevant areas. It is likely young women, and especially

those with protected characteristics, are most at risk of negative experiences and this should be accounted for and researched further.

Fitness apps

It is clear that, from our data, the majority of respondents used fitness apps but sadly do not feel they meet their needs or help their relationship with sport and exercise:

Fig 7



There is clearly potential in this area to improve our engagement but, again, must be developed responsibly. Some key suggestions which emerged across several responses were:

- Important they don't induce guilt, by features such as notifications and focus on calorie counting
- The functional and well-being side of exercise should be emphasised over aesthetic outcomes
- Must be realistic and representational

Role models

We received many different responses to who young women consider their sporting role models to be. Interestingly, only 8 out of 22 people mentioned a well known athlete. People young women know, such as their mum, sisters, coaches and even themselves, are seen as role models. Again, the varied responses here emphasise the unique relationship each young woman has with sport and exercise, built up over their specific experiences.

Fig 9 shows the words from the responses we received:



Fig 9

Recommendations

We received several realistic suggestions about what social media could do to be more positive for young women. Some key themes were:

- Less focus on aesthetic
- Should be realistic images and avoid sexualisation of women exercising
- Regulations about weight loss and dieting in place
- Promote positive spaces, clubs, opportunities, etc for women

Fig 10 illustrates the language young women used when suggesting how social media could improve for them:

TOR 4 – Best Practice

To explore the relationship young women have with sport and physical activity, with particular regard to issues that might prevent participation.

1. In your opinion, what are the most important things to consider when trying to engage people in sport?
2. Why do you think young women struggle to engage with sport in adolescence?
3. What is your approach to engaging (chosen demographic) in your sport?
4. What are the steps you have taken that have been successful?
5. As an organisation, what support would you like to receive, either from the government or external organisations?

As part of our research we have contacted a number of sporting teams and institutions who have created positive environments for sport/physical activity. We have asked five questions, noted above, to each and with some, probed for further information on some key points. From this anecdotal research we have identified some recurring themes which we believe fit within three key areas. We have split the evidence into 'Barriers to Engagement', 'Successful Engagement Techniques' and 'Recommendations for Further Support'.

Barriers to Engagement

While researching best practice for keeping women engaged in sport, a number of barriers have been highlighted, which these groups have been able to either overcome or remove. The majority of our evidence is anecdotal and comes from groups who have had success with age ranges largely from 25 and above. Some of the engagement techniques that they have used to get women interested in sport at a later age could potentially be used to encourage continued participation from primary school onwards. The responses below have been highlighted as barriers people or organisations have found while engaging young women in sport:

“The majority of our members are women over the age of 25. While we do have some younger women taking part in activities they do make up a lower percentage. We hope to reach more girls through our youth fitness club.” **Project 42**

Project 42, an inclusive gym in Edinburgh highlighted something we began to hear repeatedly, which is that gyms are able to attract older women back into exercise, but can't retain them from school age. From our research we believe there are a number of successful ways to re-engage those not physically active especially through social groups. However, it is clear that young women are dropping out of sport around high school age and even groups who have had successful engagement with women find it hard to attract this age group. A number of issues have been suggested as the reason for this:

“It is definitely more challenging to get females engaged with football than with males. It is possible...The key to this has been trial and error and a lot of feedback and asking females what they find are barriers to getting into sport” – **Street Soccer**, encourages homeless people in to sport.

“Many women feel more comfortable working out in an all-female environment. It is not that they cannot workout with men, but members have suggested that in mixed gender classes and gyms they have previously attended, there was often a more competitive environment and they found that to be off-putting and demotivating. By creating a welcoming, unintimidating environment, we are giving local women who are often lacking in

confidence and often haven't taken part in exercise in years, a safe space to ease back into a healthier lifestyle.”
Feel Good Fitness Training, Women only Gym in Troon

It is especially important for women with children to find a space which encourages exercise as part of a lifestyle rather than a short term weight loss experience. For those who have stopped exercising it can be intimidating to return so a lot of groups such as Feel Good Fitness and Run Mummy Run have focused on how to bring women back and encourage them to make the first step. Both Street Soccer and Run Mummy Run suggested they have had success through encouraging 'exercise buddies' or pairing them up with others.

“For many, it's not having anyone to start with and trying to find a running buddy in their local area. Time is also a key factor, so it's having options that fit around life, especially with children involved.” **Run Mummy Run**

“Go and meet them and bring them to the session so they don't feel daunted to walk into a new environment, encourage them and treat them as individuals and make sure they feel valued and important. Most importantly, be genuine.” **Street Soccer**

Ideally we would like to make sure that women have a positive attitude to physical activity and are not dropping out of sport at school. This would hopefully encourage a more active lifestyle into adulthood with a base level of fitness. As Run Mummy Run have noted it is much easier to engage with sport later on in life if that understanding of an active lifestyle is already adopted:

“It appears that those with a natural talent find it far easier to engage, but it's harder to engage women for whom sport is not a part of their lives.” **Run Mummy Run**

Time and lifestyle have been mentioned consistently in relation to women not seeing sport as a part of their life. This does not seem to be as much of a problem with men who seem more engaged at a young age and make sport a part of their life as they age. A large reason for women not seeing sport as a part of their life is their relationship with sport at school. Physical education at school is continually noted by numerous organisations as a barrier to participation for women. This seems to be intrinsically linked to ideas surrounding body image which seem to be created around experiencing puberty at school. As a result the relationship between school lessons and body image creates a sense of trauma surrounding sport and physical activity as noted below:

“I think school sport still offers, in places, a poor sporting experience in an often male-dominant environment. Separately, there is a great deal of body-conscious propaganda at that age which might cause people to withdraw from physical activity in general.” **University of St Andrews, Saints Sport**

It is clear that even by the time women get to University level opinions around physical activity have already been made and these appear to be largely negative due to school experience. Participation in social media is usually highest within this school age group and the link between damaging images of 'ideal bodies' and decreased engagement with physical education have a strong link. Jog Scotland also highlighted this as an issue with regards to puberty and the changing nature of a woman's body at this age. The increased focus on body image created by social media and puberty clearly affects young women, changing rooms and uncomfortable P.E kit seem to only further highlight insecurities in young women:

“Body image – change in body shape, the commencement of menstruation and what to do when participating. Sweating, getting washed and changed can be daunting for some young women” **Jog Scotland**

There seem to be mixed opinions in current research in regards to mixed participation in sport and Jog Scotland noted that physical exercise in a mixed environment can sometimes highlight these insecurities and further distance young women from participating fully in sport.

“Some young women have said that lower self-esteem has been a reason as to why they do/did not participate in sport during adolescence as well as being aware of people who they are attracted to. One other reason is that sport is usually seen as something that is taught at school or college environment, therefore learning about certain technical aspects can be off-putting and lacking in the ‘fun’ element that physical activity can sometimes provide” **Jog Scotland**

With all of the above to contend with it is of little surprise that physical activity is very rarely seen as ‘fun’ by women at least young women of high school age. As noted by Jog Scotland learning about the technical aspects of sport can sometimes be off putting and perhaps we need to take a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing generally in schools. It is crucial that we get physical education correct in school and make it accessible and relatable in order to not put women off. This is an opinion expressed often at clubs which manage to re-engage women later on in life that experiences need to be re-learned as noted by Run Mummy Run in response to our questions:

“a lot of women talk about bad experiences with regards to running at school, which has put them off engaging with sport in later life.” **Run Mummy Run**

If we are able to create a more well rounded approach to physical education in schools hopefully these experiences which follow women throughout their life will be positive not negative.

Successful Engagement Techniques

Our evidence suggests that women generally seem to be drawn back to sport by community driven initiatives which offer peer support and a sense of purpose. Often this seems to be linked with the birth of children and trying to create a new community whilst fitting in to a new and busy lifestyle. From the information we have gathered it is important for a younger generation that the focus should be on creating positive messages on body image while in an inclusive environment: projekt 42 who specialise in creating a positive inclusive space for exercise highlighted the importance of fitting activity into women’s lifestyles:

“We are [also] a child friendly facility, this makes it easier to mums to come along and exercise as their kids can come along too, this has been met with a great response from the mums who attend classes with their kids. The kids area is situated in the studio so while exercising mums can keep an eye on their little ones.” **Projekt 42**

The Daily Mile and Strathclyde Sirens also highlighted how crucial it is for children to feel like everyone can take part and that differing abilities should be supported as a community, not just by organisers. Sport and physical exercise should be a space for children to learn not just technical aspects but how to understand others and work as a team based on the ability and skills of those around them. The Daily Mile have looked to do this by making physical activity a part of children’s everyday routine, encouraging them to go and enjoy being outside: ‘It’s always fully inclusive – every child, every day. They should all be out together in the fresh air. Children with mobility difficulties should be supported to take part.’ Similarly Strathclyde Sirens have understood the need to educate children on their ‘perception of wellbeing’ in their programme Sirens for Success. The programme looks to engage children who have low engagement with P.E. in school and change their outlook:

“We learned that we need to be mindful that young people’s perception of wellbeing, levels of activity and disability is somewhat skewed and requires further education.” **Sirens for Success**

As a result of their programme which takes place in 42 schools across Scotland attracting 600 pupils to take part, teachers have confirmed that 79% of attendees have recorded increased positivity and engagement towards physical activity with 55% now leading a more physically active lifestyle. They believe that by creating accessible positive female role models it makes the idea of participation more relatable. This was supported by jog scotland who highlighted creating accessible role models is crucial for all ages:

“Having real-life role models such as our jog leaders, who people can relate to, can show that anyone can overcome obstacles and feel the benefit of getting active and support their wellbeing.” **Jog Scotland**

Given that a number of role models for young women come from social media it is important to consider the pressures from social media facing young women and make sure that their understanding of physical activity is not just about physical appearance. As highlighted by Projekt 42 this is crucial for all, but especially the generation we are most concerned with:

“When engaging anyone to take part in sport or physical activity we believe it’s important to promote the benefits to physical and mental health rather than focussing on body image... This is most important when engaging teens to take part in sport and physical activity as there is a greater proportion of under 16 years olds affected by body dysmorphia.” **Projekt 42**

As a result of body image issues women can often hold a negative idea that exercise should be used as a form of punishment only there to change aspects of their bodies. From evidence submitted we have gathered that it is important to re-train these ideas and successful organisations have found that removing the thought process and encouraging coach or peer led initiatives can be a successful way of countering any barriers:

“I think it is important, for those who are not extremely self-motivated, to find an environment that is fun and where the people around you support and motivate you. All of our sessions are coach-led... This way, there is no need for the women to self-motivate, or make decisions regarding their exercise.” **Feel Good Female Fitness**

As noted in our comments on barriers one of the best ways to create successful engagement is to emphasise community and emphasise fun rather than punishment:

“it is pretty evident that the ladies pursue active hobbies as a way of getting exercise without it feeling like a chore. For many the enjoyment may be linked to social ties (weekend walking clubs to meet friends) or more solitary expeditions like a morning swim in the local pool where they take time for themselves. So, in many cases I think just taking part in exercise with the primary aim to have fun, seems to be the most engaging way to get women into sport and fitness” **Feel Good Female Fitness**

“our jogscotland groups have a focus on the social element of running and creating community based groups led by local leaders is key to our success” **jog scotland**

Naturally, our responses which relate to successful engagement almost directly correlate to the barriers that have been highlighted. Organisations which have had success, have identified barriers first and used these to create

programmes tailored towards engaging women. A great example of this was that St Andrews University understood that there was a perception that the weights area was a predominantly male place which women were intimidated to enter. As a result they introduced a free womens weight lifting course to encourage more women to feel comfortable in the gym. Initiatives such as this are crucial to encourage participation and show women that they are welcome in sporting environments. We should be encouraging as many positive examples such as this and it is crucial that women feel comfortable enough to champion others to participate. Creating communities which understand women's bodies and requirements are crucial to eliminating barriers faced not just by young women but for all. Run Mummy Run make a point of highlighting those who encourage each others saying that they:

“see random acts of kindness in our community all the time – little exchanges of gifts, offering to run together, sacrificing their own race to run with someone who is struggling. We have a Salute each week where we honour these” **Run Mummy Run**

Recommendations for Further Support

As part of our research we asked organisations to suggest ways that they could be supported to create a larger impact either through help from the government or through collaboration with wider organisations. Our responses were mixed but the majority highlight the importance of creating positive role models. St Andrews University believe the best way to do this is by encouraging more women not just to play but to coach and work in the industry:

“There needs to be greater emphasis, by government, Scottish Governing Bodies and others, on female role models in position of influence; coaching, officiating, sports administration and performance” **University of St Andrews, Saints Sport**

These role models not only have to be active across diverse areas of the sporting industry, but must also represent a broad spectrum of abilities, not just from elite athletes; we all have to be role models for each other:

“showcase individuals across the sporting spectrum, not just the (unattainable for the vast majority) elite.”
University of St Andrews, Saints Sport

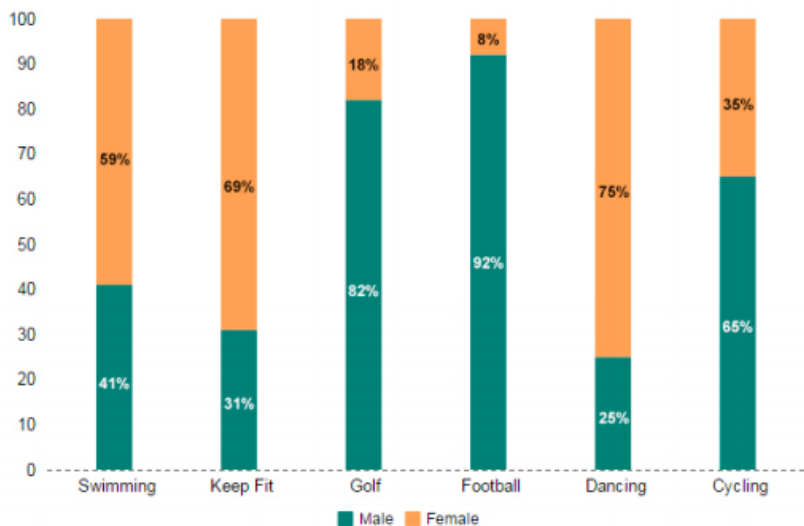
Here we see striking similarities to the findings reported in the evidence presented to the committee by Julie Gordon on behalf of the Judy Murray Foundation. Relatable role models and representation, from amateur sports to professional, are a necessary part of improving young women and girls' relationship with sport.

Without women's input it is difficult to imagine how we will change stereotypes on physical activity and without positive examples it is hard for young girls to imagine that there is space for them. In order to see more women reaching the elite level we need to start by creating more female coaches who understand the female body.

The word that has come up most in our research has been 'environment', reflected in our world cloud below (Fig.2), so it is clear that we have to not just create positive role models but also positive spaces where women feel comfortable. Projekt 42 are doing a great job of creating such a space, from providing pronouns on their personal trainers' information boards to hanging the Trans Pride and LGBTQ+ flags on the wall of the gym. Their offering of women-only, trans-masculine and trans-feminine classes and a play area for gym users' children in the hall make for a more welcoming, inclusive environment. They believe creating such a safe, inviting space is the key to future success for other organisations as well as celebrating the positives of sport:

“Creating positive environments with positive roles models, where every act of sport and exercise is celebrated for the benefit it has to both physical and mental health.” **Projekt 42**

Sportscotland and the Equality and Human Rights Commission published their Equality and Sport Research report in 2017 and in it noted that women interact with physical activity differently from men*. Fig.1



This should be better reflected in physical education. Relating back to previous evidence given to the committee by Professor David Kirk, it is evident that this safe and accessible environment must also exist within the education sector. One Scottish high school noted a marked increase in PE attendance for swimming lessons when they introduced girls-only classes. Mirroring the interest in women-only classes and gym offerings in later life, teenage girls appear to benefit from being given the safety of girls-only spaces. Such single-sex classes provide teachers with the opportunity to tailor physical education and Curriculum for Excellence framework to girls' interests and needs; something Professor Kirk noted as playing a key role for improving girls and young women's relationship with physical activity and their general wellbeing.

Run Mummy Run noted that a common shared experience among their membership of 61,000 women is that they had a "bad experience at high school", were put off exercise and are now getting back into exercise later in life. A supportive, positive physical education in schools is vital for an ongoing positive relationship as women get older.

Perhaps the most obvious recommendation to come from this engagement work is that of further monetary support from local authorities. As budgets are cut and resources for charity-run or volunteer-led activities continue to shrink, the impact has been widespread across Scotland and the population has suffered. Many of the issues faced by the Scottish public at large; illness, low self-esteem, and loneliness, could be tackled in a safe, healthy environment through local leisure centres and clubs. We know from other research areas within this committee's remit that young women suffer even more as they try to contend with societal pressures and, at best, mixed messages fed to them by the media. It could prove economical in the long run to invest more money and

resources in young women's sports education and offerings to support and prepare women for adulthood and the responsibilities awaiting them as they mature. Embedding healthy, positive relationships with physical activity and exercise from a young age is, as many studies have proven, likely to result in continued physical activity and overall improved health and wellbeing in later life.

[*https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/2598/learning-note-women-in-sport.pdf](https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/2598/learning-note-women-in-sport.pdf)

Fig.2

