Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Psychology

at Massey University,

Albany, New Zealand.

Katrina Pfitzinger

2021

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Abstract

Sport participation has been found to decrease with age particularly in the later teenage years. According to a survey conducted by Sport New Zealand (2019), participation in sports in New Zealand was reported to decrease between the ages 15 and 17, and young females were found to participate in sports 1.5 hours less per week than males of the same age group. The aim of this research was to explore the barriers and motivations for participation in sport of 16-18-year-old females in New Zealand. By identifying what young women enjoy and what holds them back in their sports participation, changes should be made to the sports environment in order to increase and retain the participation of young women in sports. Semi-structured interviews took place over email with 16, 16-18-year-old female high school students who participate in sport for school and clubs. Participants were recruited from a secondary school in Auckland, North Shore. The interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis guide. The identified themes were divided into barriers to participation and motivators for participation. The overarching barrier themes were: 1. too much pressure in sport 2. time restraints due to sports participation 3. poor health due to overtraining 4. financial strain and 5. gender inequality in support and recognition. The overarching motivating themes were: 1. sport is fun, 2. enjoy the improvement of skills and competence and competing, 3. friendships and socialising 4. sports related health benefits 5. support, and 6. professional sport. The findings found differing and welcome more positive perspectives in regard to health, body image, and weight and sports role than previous research. Students did face major difficulties in balancing their academic commitments with their sports and socialising. Another key factor found by this study was the important role parents play in their child's sport plus also identified coaching techniques as being highly influential on participants enjoyment of their sport. A lack of peer support for female sports was also identified as a barrier for females as male sports are taken more seriously and regarded more highly. An area that I recommend more research should be done on is the culture surrounding individual sports. This study is one of few who have conducted qualitative research into the views of young women in sports. The implications of this research and possible future directions are discussed as well as my recommendations.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Acknowledgements

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Table of Contents

Contents

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

List of Figures

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

In 2020 the most popular school sports were netball, basketball, rugby, volleyball, hockey, touch rugby, athletics, and cricket with all of the sports mentioned having over 9000 participants that year (NZSSSC, 2020). Of those sports, netball, volleyball, and hockey had more female participants than males. Netball had 24,327 females compared to 715 males, volleyball had 14,081 female participants and 8060 male participants and hockey had 7216 females in comparison to 6316 male participants. The other six most popular sports were all male dominated. Basketball had 16,819 males and 7393 females, rugby had 20332 males and 3729 females, touch rugby had 6246 males and 5474 females, athletics had 5499 males and 4405 females, and cricket had 7420 males and 1911 females.

This study will explore participation of 16-18-year-old females in New Zealand and their sporting experience including barriers and motivators for participation. Sport participation has been found to decrease with age increase particularly in the later teenage years in New Zealand and internationally and participation rates are lower in females than males. According to a survey conducted by Sport New Zealand, participation in sports in New Zealand was reported to decrease between the ages 15 and 17, and young females were found to participate in sports 1.5 hours less per week than males of the same age group (Sport New Zealand, 2019). A variety of factors may contribute to females having lower participation rates than males and why this gap increases with age. Some of these factors may include but are not limited to: limited number of teams, lack of competence, limited resources, and fear of judgement (Hohepa et al., 2006). There are currently only a few studies that have been conducted within New Zealand exploring the experiences of 16–18-year-old girls in sports which allow them to share the barriers and motivators they have within the sporting context. Many studies up until this point have focused on finding the statistics around participation and policies put in place. In order to create change to retain and increase young women in sport, their voices should be heard and listened to. This study aims to engage in conversation with 16-18 year old female students in Auckland to give them a space to share their experiences surrounding different factors within sport to further our understanding of young women's experience of sport in New Zealand.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

New Zealand statistics

A number of surveys have been conducted that highlight the issue of gender differences in both sport participation and dropout rates in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2019; Maddison, et al. (2014); & Wong et al. (2016). Each study is discussed in turn below. Sport New Zealand conducted a survey throughout 2017 to 2019 involving 11,599 young people between the ages of 5-17 and 52,188 adults aged 18 plus. Participation in sports in New Zealand was reported to decrease between the ages 15 and 17 for all genders but also that young females participated in sports 1.5 hours less per week than males of the same age group (Sport New Zealand, 2019). While sports participation lowers for both males and females from the age of 15, this is more concerning with regards to females due to participation already being lower for this group. The survey showed that participation for fun drops between ages 12 and 14 and 15 and 17 with 77% between ages 12 and 14 participating for fun and only 61% between ages 15 to 17. Another important finding was that participating for physical wellbeing starts between ages 12 and 17, contributing to participating for 49% of participants between ages 12 to 14 and 58% between ages 15 and 17. Females are suggested to have lower participation rates than males due to a greater number of barriers occurring for females, including being too busy, having other commitments, and struggling with self-motivation (Sport New Zealand, 2019). As female participation rates lowering is a concern, identification of these broad barriers alone does not provide enough information and qualitative research could help to decrease dropout rates by providing insight into this matter.

Maddison, et al. (2014) collected existing nationally representative survey data in 2013 about physical activity, organized sport, free play, sedentary behaviour, and initiatives across New Zealand by the community or Government and also found that physical activity decreased with age in New Zealand youth particularly among females. The aim of the study was to understand the physical activity levels of New Zealand youth due to the increase in sedentary leisure activities available and increasing barriers to physical activity. The study assigned report card grades to each physical activity indicator from existing research regarding organized sport and free play, sedentary behaviour, and community and government initiatives in New Zealand. The physical activity indicator showed a significant age-related decline in participation going from almost 100% for children 5-9 years old, 78% for 10–14-year old's and 32% for 15–19-year old's. The study found that 15–19-year-old girls spend an average of 36 minutes being physically active per day compared to males 55 minutes per day, consistent with the results found by Sport New Zealand (Sport New

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Zealand, 2019). It was also found that approximately 60% of New Zealand children participated in organized sport. Across all age groups excluding 5–9-year-olds, females were found to participate less than males (Maddison, et al., 2014). Within the school environment 56% of male and 49% of female high school students participated in school sports. The barriers identified to participation included lack of sports facilities in the area (15%) and costs (12%).

While Maddison's et al. (2014) study was very useful for identifying the physical activity levels of different groups, the study used existing literature of physical activity in New Zealand. While the sources of the data are likely reliable, limitations may have occurred within those studies and may have carried over into this study. For future report cards it may be useful to conduct research to collect current information for the study. The grades assigned to the indicators were also based on previously defined benchmarks for report cards conducted in Canada, meaning that the benchmarks were not designed specifically for the New Zealand context. An incomplete grade was also given to the government initiatives indicator due to a lack of agreed international criteria for assessment, this means that in future report cards there will be no initial grade to compare the results to making it difficult to identify whether improvements or changes have occurred. Further information including research into trends within the data such as decline in physical activity with age would be useful to further understanding of these statistics.

The last survey I will discuss was conducted by Wong et al. (2016) who carried out a national cross-sectional survey on young people in New Zealand aged 5-24 years. The aim of this study was to identify at risk groups by describing sport participation in New Zealand young people. Of the 2503 participants surveyed, 68% of participants reported engaging in sport, with sport accounting for 31% of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). Consistent with Sport New Zealand (2019) and Maddison et al. (2014), sport participation was found to be higher in males than females. This study identified females as being at risk for lower sport participation and suggested targeted intervention for this group. Males participated in sports for 19 minutes more per day than females and 26 more minutes in moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. The gender difference in sports participation was statistically significant. As the previous studies found, there was also a difference in participation by age group and they found10–14-year-old participants had a greater engagement in sport and MVPA than the 15–18-year-old participants, illustrating a decline of participation with an increase in age.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

A strength and point of difference of Wong and colleagues (2016) study was using a sample that was representative of the ethnic composition of New Zealand. The method of data collection was face-to-face interviews at the participants' homes, followed up with phone interviews one to two weeks later. This data collection method is beneficial for providing participants with the opportunity to clarify their responses and add detail to their answers. However, as the researchers were conducting a quantitative study, this may not have been necessary as there is the potential the researcher being present may influence the answers given due to being an authoritative figure. Weight and height measurements were also taken by the researchers during the home visit ensuring consistency in measurements and current data were collected to calculate BMI. However, BMI has limitations such as not accounting for muscle mass as different from body fat and therefore may not be a reliable indicator of health (Mahadevan & Ali, 2016). Sport participation was measured using the Multimedia Activity Recall for Children and Adolescents (MARCA) tool which allows activities to be recorded in 5-minute time slots and energy expenditure or intensity of the activity to be rated. Providing a measure such as this is beneficial to allow comparison of activities and less confusion and variance in reporting of activities. There are limitations to this tool however, for example potential bias due to self-report. MARCA also does not allow for differentiation between organized and non-organized sport therefore limiting understanding of the percentage of participants engaging in competitive sports. Not differentiating between organized and non-organized sports may also limit the understanding of what interventions should be put in place to increase physical activity. In addition, the researchers chose to exclude the data collected from 5-9-year-olds and 19-24-year-olds due to parents submitting the data for the younger participants and not being present for all parts of the participants' days. The older participants were excluded due to differing life stages being observed. While this may limit the amount of data, I believe this is useful for providing a fair comparison between the participants. A further limitation of the study is that it was conducted in a 9-month period rather than over a year, which may have omitted some sports that are played seasonally.

From the three studies discussed above, there is evidence that physical activity levels drop for both males and females as they age and there are gendered differences in both participation, dropout rates and activity levels. The three surveys did find differences in participation in age bands suggesting school levels and periods of transition might be important points for interventions to increase participation. It would also be interesting to see if there are ethnic differences in the changes in type of participation as Wong et al. (2016)

identified that Pacifica students had high rates of team sport involvement and low rates of individual sport involvement during high school in comparison to other ethnicities.

Transitioning to university has also been identified as an important period for dropping of participation rates in sport. Wilson et al. (2012) looked at the time period of high school to university and found that with female participants participation shifted from team based to individual physical activity due to team based physical activity being too time consuming. Wilson et al. (2021) also identified costs of team sports as being a barrier as most of the participants were living in university accommodation this is likely their first time living out of home and having large costs; therefore, this result is not surprising. Prioritizing social life and studying was also identified as a main barrier to physical activity, suggesting time management may be difficult during this transition. Stress level increased due to studies was identified as a barrier to participation and enjoyment of participation. Increased pressure on academic performance being identified as a key barrier to physical activity may also be applicable to high school students and this was highlighted in the studies by Wong et al. (2016), Maddison et al. (2014), and Sport New Zealand (2018), who all found drops in participation around the age of 16 which is when NCEA becomes more challenging, and grades contribute to university entrance. Lack of transport and distance to training was also identified as a barrier which is likely applicable for many age groups.

The studies discussed above paint a picture of decreased participation in sport and exercise with increased age in young people due to a number of barriers and other social and individual factors. These studies also found participation to decrease more for young women than young men. These studies all used quantitative measurement, suggesting a need for qualitative research with young women to better understand the factors that may contribute to decreased participation.

International trends: England, Australia, Canada

The data shown by research on New Zealand sport participation is not unique, with international studies finding similar trends. Studies in England, Australia, and Canada, which are discussed below, have also investigated decreased sport participation among high school aged females with results that are largely consistent with the New Zealand data.

England

A survey by Sport England shows that sports participation decreases with age for both genders starting at around 15-years-old, and shows males participate more than females. Sport England's Active Lives survey (Sport England, 2018) involving 130,000 participants found that between the ages of 5-17 boys are more likely to be active every day than girls

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

with boys being 20% likely to be active and girls being 14% likely. This gap increases from ages 9 to 17. This survey also identified that with increase in age, level of enjoyment in sports participation decreases as well as confidence, competence in sports and understanding of why sports are beneficial. These decreases were found to be more prevalent for females, than males. These results were taken from females from many areas with different variables occurring, these results therefore suggest a larger issue occurring within the sporting system for females. Direct comparison between Sport New Zealand's survey and Sport England's survey results is difficult due to varying measures being used for example weekly participation being the key measure for Sport New Zealand and daily participation being the key measure for Sport England. However, both data sets show that males participate in physical activity more than females, and this gap between gender increases as age increases. The barriers for sports participation that occur for differing ages and genders were not discussed within this survey.

Australia

Unlike Sport New Zealand and Sport England, the Australian Sports Commission (2019) found in their 2019 survey of Australian children and adults that females participate in physical activity more than males. The survey found that 67.1% of females over 15 participate in sport or physical activity 3 times a week in comparison to 60.2% of males over 15. However, the statistics show that of among women who participate, 54% of women do some form of sporting activities, while 35.6% only participate in physical activity outside of sport. Therefore, while females in Australia are physically active, approximately half are not participating in sports. The survey results for children however were similar to that of New Zealand and England, children between the ages of 5-14 showed that 60% participated in at least one organized sport, participation rates for boys were 67% and girls were 54%. The Ausplay data for 15–17-year old's found that 81.0% of males participated in sport or other physical activity at least once per week compared to 78.6% for females.

Canada

The Rally Report by Canadian Women and Sport (2020) used a quantitative method to collect their data. An online survey was conducted in the early months of 2020 by IMI International on behalf of Canadian Women & Sport. The research participants were 13–63-year-old Canadians, the study had an oversampling target for women. Participants with children between 6–18 living with them answered some of the same questions on the survey on their child's behalf if the child was between 6-12, 13–18-year old's answered themselves. Only one child from each family could take part and girls and boys of various ages were

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

equally represented. 415 females between ages 13-18 took part in the survey. The results show that 1 in 3, 16–18-year-old females who used to play sport have dropped out. In comparison, 1 in 10 males of the same age group have dropped out. 38% of 16–18-year-old females participate in sport weekly in comparison to 56% of males in the same age group, this decline in participation rates of females in sport continues with age. The survey shows that 82% of females between 16-63, do not take part in sport weekly. These results are supported by the 2020 Canadian children and youth report card. The 2020 Canadian children and youth report card found that there are gender related disparities in physical activity levels at all ages between 5-19 with males participating more than females, and children aged 5-11 engaged in more physical activity than youth (12-17). These results are in line with those shown for New Zealand, England, and Australia.

From the statistics provided by the government sporting organizations of New Zealand, England, and Australia we can see that females are less likely to participate in organized sports than males. The key barriers identified for children ages 9-14 were not having enough time, not liking or having an interest in sport, not being able to afford it and transportation issues.

Summary

The survey data provided by the government sports organizations provide an overview of the sporting participation situation within their respective countries. The English data found that boys aged 5-17 are more likely to be active every day than girls and this gap increases from ages 9 to 17. The Australian data shows that females participate more in physical activity however participate less than males in organised sports. The Canadian data shows that more females are dropping out of sports than males. From the data gathered it is evident that females, particularly in their later teenage years and above, participate less than males in sport and have greater drop put rates. Greater insight and understanding of the trends being shown is needed to create change and provide intervention to increase female sporting participation and retention. The barriers for females and males were not discussed in depth in any of the surveys, however Sport New Zealand did touch on barriers briefly. Questionnaires of this nature use a mass distribution method in order to gain access to large sample sizes for investigating trends and to find percentages, therefore are less useful for gathering specific, personal information. Barriers and motivators for participation may be personal and differ depending on the participant and their context. Qualitative research exploring and understanding these factors may allow changes to occur to relieve some of the barriers occurring and to improve the future of females in sport. The following section will explore

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

qualitative research involving female participants to provide a further understanding of the barrier's females face in participating in sports.

Barriers to sports participation

        The research has clearly identified barriers to sports participation that apply to all young people playing sport. These are summarised in the table 1 below. I think discuss the factors that are unique to females.

Table 1: Barriers to sport participation summary

Barriers	Examples
Limited access to equipment and easy access to sedentary activities	Hohepa et al. (2006) found having easy access to equipment was key to increasing casual physical activity.
Seriousness of competition	Increased competitiveness as you age
Limited number of teams and variety of sports	Information is not given to students who have not previously been involved because the teachers know who they want in their teams and do not offer others the opportunity. This is limiting for students who may want to try a new sport, or who may not have trained in the sport before but have potential to perform well (Wetton et al., 2013)
Lack of teaching of skills	PE doesn't offer variety or the teach skills so that participants can try new sports
Costs – money, time and physical exertion	Uniform, equipment, getting to sports, and money all barriers.
Fear of judgement	Fear of performing sports in front of males in their class.
Male teams get priority	Sports teams are not treated equally by teachers. Male teams receive more praise and attention

Social aspects of sport for females

        Hohepa et al. (2006) explored the opinions and experiences of 44 students attending low decile high schools in New Zealand about physical activity in their context and asked the students what should be done to promote physical activity to female high school students. When equipment is hard to access for casual usage and play, this limits the opportunities

students have to explore new sports and skills in a social environment. Social aspects of sport were identified as being important to the female participants in Hohepa et al. (2006). They expressed that to increase physical activity participation there should be social teams available both in school and outside of school time. Social play at break times in school and after school as well as social teams being offered is important to allow students to enjoy sport and try new sports without the pressure to perform.

Body image and uniform concerns

Body image was another barrier identified in relation to sports participation. Participants in Allender et al. (2006) identified Physical Education (PE) sports uniforms as a barrier for their participation in sports due to the way they fit. The participants had concerns about their image in relation to their relationships with their peers and chose to not participate in physical activity because they were afraid of being seen wearing the necessary clothing and how they looked in it. Body image, particularly at a young age is often extremely important to females. Allowing female students to wear their own sports clothes and separating male and female PE classes may encourage more females to take part and feel more confident.

Steinfeldt et al. (2013) discuss the sexualization of women in sport. 9 female college student athletes who played NCAA DI volleyball at a large public university in the Midwestern United States took part in semi structured interviews (Steinfeldt et al. (2013). This study suggests the relationship between female sports uniform and body image can be viewed through the lens of objectification theory. Objectification theory provides an understanding of the experiences of women within a sociocultural context that sexually objectives the female body. The female athletes in this study report feeling sexualized by male fans and uncomfortable in their sports uniforms. This suggests female sports uniforms were often created for the male gaze rather than for practicality as female participants do not enjoy them. These uniforms are suggested to be harmful to a female's body confidence and could potentially lead to eating disorders as females try to look 'good' in their uniforms by losing weight. Sports such as beach volleyball, cheerleading, and track for example all require females to wear minimal amounts of clothing that is form fitting. This is a potential barrier to females playing specific sports as not only do they need to perform well but they also feel pressure to look a certain way while doing so. From these studies we can see that females in sport are under pressure from expectations of femininity, performance, the male gaze, and body image. These conflicting pressures can all act as barriers for females participating in sport.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Participants in Cox and Thompson (2000) also suggested that being in a sporting environment made them very aware of their body image. It appears from this study that the female athletes may feel confident in their bodies and what their bodies can do within the sporting context, however societal discourses around standards of femininity are still largely at play, which may impact them in other areas of their lives. The participants were not concerned about being muscly because it contributes to their performance in sport, however, they reported insecurities about being fat both within the sporting context and in a social context. Fat was suggested to be something they should be able to control. They discussed accepting their body shape and build from years of being around other women, but they feared gaining weight and viewed any extra weight as being noticeable not only in their appearance but in their performance. Being "fat" was suggested to mean that the player had not put in enough hours of training and that weight could be used to explain why someone played badly and would be discussed by other team members and coaches (Cox and Thompson, 2000). The participants appear to be under more scrutiny for their weight than those not within a high-level sport as the study suggests coaches, teammates, opposing teams, and spectators judge their appearance, not only themselves.

This is supported by Steinfeldt et al. (2013) who suggests female athletes are under a greater amount of pressure because they are being viewed in multiple ways and contexts and therefore have multiple expectations put on them. Their bodies are being viewed as an athlete and a woman as well as in other contexts and roles within their lives, therefore their bodies are being judged on different standards. Cox and Thompson (2000) suggest the thin ideal is consistent with societal norms for attractiveness therefore the participants may be under double the pressure to be thin, for their appearance as well as performance. Contradictory to Evans (2006) the participants in this study were not worried about how muscular they looked and placed more importance on other signs of femininity such as clothing and hairstyles. Importance was placed on these factors due to sexuality; the participants suggested they were told in their younger years about lesbians playing soccer and that they might become on themselves (Cox and Thompson, 2000). The participants feared lesbian players making a move on them in the locker rooms and would avoid lesbian players. A negative narrative can be observed towards lesbian soccer players and these players stated they try to not look like the stereotype in order to be accepted by others. From this study we can see that many factors are occurring within sport and outside of sport that shape the way female sport players view themselves and others. Cox and Thompson (2000) suggest it is useful to understand that these

female participants have multiple body images, and they challenge and conform to these discourses depending on the context they are in.

Burrows and McCormack (2011) further explore the relationship between females in sport and body image. Burrows and McCormack (2011) conducted a questionnaire with 12- to 17-year-old females at Peabody high school to investigate how health imperatives are being recontextualized across schools. The school curriculum and policy resources information were gathered, teachers and administrators were interviewed, and observation of school life took place. Peabody places a great deal of stress on the need for sport for their health, weight and as a way out of their community, which is enforced by the staff. The students report that to be healthy and lose weight they need to play sports and eat healthy. When asked how to improve their health the students reported needing to do more sport to control their weight, even if they were already highly active highlighting a clear relationship between fatness and laziness in the narrative of these students. The authors found that teachers at Peabody re-emphasise the beliefs being discussed by the students that the need to lose and control weight. They report educating the students on obesity even though a minority of students are overweight. Monitoring of the female first 15 rugby teams' weight takes place by the local regional health team who also provide nutrition information. The head of Health and PE reports the students love of sport is a motivator for them to deal with weight issues and provides them with an obligation to their team to maintain a certain weight to be perform well and to prevent an escalation in "obese girls." She suggests that these young women are self-conscious about their weight, and this makes it hard for them to address that their weight is an issue and what can be done to help with this (Burrows and McCormack, 2011). Sports based initiatives were developed by the school to "stop girls growing fatter" and increase their participation in sports and PE by providing an all-girls recreational PE class to focus on non-traditional sports and an all-girls fitness class.

Evans (2006) also discusses the framing of the female body within the school system. Evans (2006) suggests that many policies are put in place to address childhood obesity and inactivity, and these are targeted at schools. Schools are viewed as a place to encourage students to participate in team sports. Evans (2006) suggests that policies for weight management being directed at schools' positions students' bodies as problematic and places schools in a position to discipline these bodies, this view may be harmful for both schools and students. Policies could be focused on improving enjoyment, inclusivity, socialisation and skill development to improve participation levels and consequently the health of New Zealand students rather than aiming to improve obesity levels.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Embodiment and fear of judgement from classmates

Social environments for sports appear to be important for the participants in Hohepa et al. (2006) who suggest that competitiveness of sports is a barrier that may limit them from competing. This barrier was also identified by Allender et al. (2006) and Evans (2006). Allender et al. (2006) conducted a review of 24 qualitative studies from the United Kingdom about people's experiences of sport and physical activity and their reasons for taking part and not taking part. The female participants reported that PE classes were a barrier for sports participation for them because the boys in their class were overly competitive and taking over the game. Not being included in games limits the exposure to sports for these students, taking away their opportunity to learn skills, gain confidence and enjoy sports. The study conducted by Evans (2006) found a similar result to Hohepa et al and Allender et al, pressure to perform in sport was seen as a barrier to participating.

Evans (2006) aimed to explore females' embodied experiences of sport to understand their decision to participate in sport. 516, 13–16-year-old students from four schools in Liverpool took part in a questionnaire and 45 students took part in an interview. The participants suggested that the presence of PE teachers as an authoritative, evaluative figure places pressure on them to perform and places them in an environment where they either succeed or fail at physical activity, which often takes fun away from the game. Of the females in this study, 70.8% reported that they take part in sport for fun, which further suggests the competitive, evaluative nature of PE may take away from enjoyment and explain why PE was disliked by many of the participants.

The last two barriers found by Hohepa et al. (2006) are PE based barriers. Students in Hohepa et al. (2006) suggest that fear of judgement from performing activities in front of classmates was a barrier for wanting to participate and stopped them from trialing for teams. The participants in this study attend a co-ed school which may be contributing to their fear of judgement. The female participants in Evans (2006) when asked about whether they would do a mixed PE class, stated they would not and they would feel ashamed, and fear being laughed at. This same fear was not found in Burrows and McCormack (2011) who conducted a study with female participants from an all-girls school, suggesting that co-ed schools, particularly with mixed gender classes should separate into single gendered PE classes to allow female students to feel more confident in taking part in sports. Similarly, to the female students in the study by Hohepa et al. (2006), interviewees in Wetton et al. (2013) suggested that being able to have a say in what sports they play in PE would increase enjoyment and may encourage them to take part out of school as well. Participants in Allender et al. (2006)

who do not exercise suggested that this is due to negative experiences in school. This barrier was shared by teenagers and young women who reported their biggest barrier was bad experiences during school PE, further suggesting a need for change in the school PE system to allow female students to feel more confident and enjoy participating in sports.

Lack of teaching of sports skills in PE and lack of competence in students to perform skills

The female students in Hohepa et al. (2006) also suggested that PE teachers should teach students how to do the skills in the game before they play all together as a class in order to increase their competence and enjoyment of a variety of sports. The survey results by Wetton et al. (2013) similarly showed that 55% of the participants reported they lack sporting ability leading to lack of enjoyment, embarrassment and pressure when participating in sports which stopped them from participating, this was mostly experienced in PE. This suggests that skills are not being taught as well as they could be to female students which stops them from having confidence and consequently not enjoying themselves. The interviews revealed that girls had felt embarrassed by their teachers in front of the class, and some feared messing up the game for better, competitive players. Forty-five percent of the participants responded that negative experiences were the cause of them not playing extracurricular team sports due to lack of confidence. PE teachers were also reported to only give their attention to better players and otherwise lacked motivation and enthusiasm towards other students. The interviews suggested that PE teachers criticize and tell off students and only praise the good players, which is damaging to students especially those with low confidence. These experiences are useful to understand as problems such as these could be relatively easy to address by altering teaching style and technique so that students feel supported and confident in their abilities. PE classes are a way to explore sports and skills and can be a useful gateway to students competing in those sports outside of PE class.

Gendered barriers

Barriers for females include the numbers of sports available to them as even now stereotypes exist about the sorts of sports females should play, limiting opportunities, both formally and informally. Hohepa et al. (2006) identified that there are fewer number of teams and places in teams for females in comparison to males. This barrier was also identified by Wetton et al. (2013) for 15–16-year-old girls in an English study. Participants suggested that information is not given to students who have not previously been involved because the teachers know who they want in their teams and do not offer others the opportunity. This is limiting for students who may want to try a new sport, or who may not have trained in the

sport before but have the potential to perform well. Framing sports for competitive purposes only takes away the other beneficial elements of participating in sports and results in only a fraction of potential participants playing due to skill level. Participants in Hohepa et al. (2006) also suggested having a greater variety of sports available for students to try in PE classes and to participate in for the school. This may increase participation as students have differing interests and skill sets and may find enjoyment in sports that are typically less popular. Students in Allender et al. (2006) support that there is a need for a greater variety of sports being offered as they stated they get bored of the sports they do in PE which suggests that those who do participate may lose interest.

Male teams get given priority and masculinity and femininity stereotyping

Of the participants in Wetton et al. (2013), 70% felt that girls' sports teams are not treated equally by their teachers, compared to the boys' sports teams as the boys' teams receive more praise and attention. This shows a disparity between how males and females are viewed in sport. The participants also commented that there are gender stereotypes within sport as boys are suggested to always be better than girls. These stereotypes were said to be largely created by the media who show sports as being manly. These views were said to be shared by the families of the participants who did not encourage them to take part in sports for these reasons which is potentially damaging and limiting to impose these beliefs on girls. Masculine and female stereotypes were also suggested in Allender et al. (2006), the participants suggested giving greater priority to wanting to impress their boyfriend and peers by being feminine and attractive than participate in sports and suggested women who do physical activity are viewed as sweaty and muscley. These beliefs from participants suggest a change in narrative around femininity is needed as they may be holding females back. A discussion of where these stereotypes originate from will be discussed later in the literature review to understand the origin of female stereotypes in sport in the New Zealand context. Evans (2006) also suggests that positioning femininity as passive and masculinity as active contributes to the belief that sport and physical activity may take away from the female identity as it enforces that females are meant to take on the weaker position. These stereotypes may be underlying in the decision of what sports females choose to participate in, or whether they choose to participate at all. For example, sports that may build upper body muscle and make females appear more 'masculine' or sports that are more physically demanding may not be seen as being typically female appropriate and deter females from taking part.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Cox and Thompson (2000) contribute to the discussion of femininity in the sporting context. This study explored the experiences of 16 women premier football players in Auckland between the ages of 18 to 33. This study is valuable due to the stigma that occurs around soccer as it is often viewed in society as a 'masculine' sport. Understanding the experiences of these women and how they navigate views of femininity and masculinity will further the understanding of the female experience in sports and how some are more commonly accepted than others. Participant observation first took place with the researcher being present for games, after games, practices, and in the changing room to observe interactions among team members and bodily practices. The researcher was also the team manager and a team member, and the interactions were reported to have remained natural for the most part as they were comfortable with her presence. Follow up interviews for one and a half hours then took place with the players at the end of the observation period in pairs.

Cox and Thompson (2000) use a feminist post-structuralist perspective which recognizes women are not powerless victims of oppressive discourses and are not free from structural constraints (Cox and Thompson, 2000). The authors interpret this theory as women will construct meaning about gender in varying ways due to some discourses being stronger than others and the contexts in which they are occurring. All the participants described themselves as tomboys growing up and doing typically male activities such as climbing trees, playing with the boys, having short hair, not doing typical female play such as dolls, being competitive, enjoying being physical and getting dirty, and feeling different from other girls. This positioning of being a tomboy again suggests being physically active as being an unfeminine trait. Being labelled as a tomboy was suggested to be complementary to many of the girls and was accepted by peers, however this lessened with age, and the participants were expected to grow out of it and start hobbies that were accepted as being for females such as netball. This is important as not only does there appear to be an issue of females taking part in sport, but they are expected to only take part in some sports and are not given the same acceptance as males. Participants in Wetton et al. (2013) study also suggested that females in sport are not as highly accepted and supported as males in sports. They state that female sports stars were not commonly shown by the media and the participants could not name any high achieving sports women. Women athletes not being shown in the media and sports being framed as masculine contribute to the narrative of sports being primarily for males. The participants suggested that to overcome the stereotype barriers, the media should show more women's sports to normalise and celebrate women in sport.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Physical exertion and time expenditure of sports

Other barriers to sports participation identified were physical exertion and time expenditure. Brown and Bowmer (2019) conducted a survey with 94 women between the ages of 18-35 and 77 women between the ages of 36-55 to identify barriers and motivators for physical activity and to compare these between young and middle-aged women. Both age groups rated physical exertion as the biggest barrier to physical activity. Brown and Bowmer (2019) suggest this could be due to a misconception that exercise must be vigorous and propose a strategy to overcome this could be to promote and educate women on the option and benefits of gentle physical activity. The authors also suggest the younger age group may rate physical exertion as a significant barrier due to this age group commonly having young children and having low energy levels. While this is likely true for some women, it may also be due to women this age being students as well as working, having children and working or working long hours. While this age group is not in the specific age range of interest to this study, exploring the barriers of women in the age group above the age group of interest may help us understand why the trend of sports participation in females continues to decrease, contributing to our knowledge of existing barriers for females. The research found that the second highest rated barrier to physical activity was time expenditure, the authors suggest that in the older age group this may be due to busy lifestyles with children, marriage and career. Brown and Bowmer (2019) suggest incorporating physical activity into women's daily routine may be useful for targeting middle aged women. The authors do not, however, suggest strategies to make this possible other than better time management and getting involved in pre-organized activities.

In order to understand the belief that females should not participate in sport and that sport is predominantly masculine it is important to understand the progression of females in sport over time. The next two studies will explore the evolution of females in sport in the New Zealand context to understand where discourses surrounding femininity and masculinity in sport were developed and how they may have evolved.

History of women in sport in New Zealand

Curtin (2016) explored the history and development of women in a typically male sport and the societal views towards women in sport. With the feminist movement in 1893 and women getting to vote came the first movement towards females playing a "male sport." While this movement did not result in women's teams playing each other, Curtin (2016) states it is important to note that there was a movement towards women breaking out of the social

norms occurring in this time period. The first world war was the first real movement towards women playing rugby. Games occurred in order to raise money for the war and continued on after this need had been met during this period of time for entertainment. In 1921 special events started to include a women's rugby game as a special attraction. Bloomers and skirts were voted by players to be swapped for jerseys, shorts, and boots (Curtin, 2016). There were members of society who openly opposed the idea of women playing rugby for example a Methodist minister addressed his listeners in the Ashburton Guardian stating that women playing rugby affected the moral and spiritual welfare of the community. He stated that although exercise is necessary for health, and that rugby was good for healthy, robust men, but not for young women because women have a maternal responsibility to protect themselves from weaknesses and disease that would likely occur through strenuous, masculine exercise (Curtin, 2016). He suggested it was not helpful to the development of the feminine body and mind and therefore was unethical Curtin (2016). Doctors were also asked for a medical perspective and some doctors opposed the idea. Rugby was seen as a male's game that was not fit for women by society and which is why the black ferns women's team was formed until 1990. From this study it is apparent that females taking part in male dominated sports was not overly supported by society and brought into question gender roles. Similarly, Nauright & Broomhall (1994) discuss the development of Netball in New Zealand between 1906-1970. Nauright and Broomhall (1994) support that women's sport participation was opposed by the medical field until the 20th century when British women changed the restrictions and started physical education for women. Middle-class women in New Zealand were suggested to be the first group to engage in women's sports, however this was not done so freely, there were different behaviours that were acceptable for men that were not for women. Masculine sports, as shown by Curtin (2016) were not accepted by society as appropriate for women, therefore sports such as tennis, netball and hockey were very popular and encouraged for women to take part in. Netball is suggested to have become popular due to its acceptance as being appropriate for women by politicians, doctors, media, reformers and middle-class women (Nauright and Broomhall, 1994) as well as because women took control of the sport for themselves. Netball became a space that men did not have control over so women could take part in a cultural activity dominated by women, challenging the norm of men having the power.

After the first world war there was an urgency to keep the 'Anglo-Saxon' race healthy, the health of the "mothers of the empire" were of great concern resulting in doctors and scientists to promote female exercise and health with urgency (Nauright and Broomhall,

1994). This urgency brought a rise in organized activities to "keep them healthy and on the right moral path until they fulfilled their ultimate destiny of marriage followed by motherhood" (Nauright and Broomhall, 1994, p.394), however most sports were still off limits to women. Nauright and Broomhall (1994) report that the media did not commonly give coverage to netball games and teams and when they did it was to discuss the home lives of the players, showing that women's sports were not taken seriously still at this time. In the 1960's coverage of players began to increase however only of players who had sex appeal to men, while these players attracted a wider audience to netball this was mostly the male gaze rather than male support, these themes can still be seen today in some media coverage (Nauright and Broomhall, 1994). Husbands of female players were also pitied during tournaments as they had to 'suffer' not having household duties done for them while their wives were away, suggesting while improvement was made towards women in sport, gender roles and stereotypes were still strongly occurring.

While both Nauright & Broomhall (1994) and Curtin (2016) are discussing events that occurred many years ago, some of the discourses and views of women in sport have continued into the 2000's. As was seen in Cox and Thompson (2000), female soccer players were discouraged from playing soccer due it being a 'masculine' sport, the participants reported having relatives and elders telling them their achievements were not as good as if they had occurred in Netball. Therefore, it appears that women are accepted for taking part in sport as long as it is the 'right' sport and is deemed appropriate for women by society. Participants in Cox and Thompson, (2000) suggested trying to appear feminine although taking part in a 'male' sport, suggesting that women were commonly being accepted into sport only if they appeal to the male gaze and show their femininity is still prevalent.

Cultural Barriers

It is also important to explore the experiences of minority groups of sports participation within New Zealand. New Zealand is a multicultural country with many different values and belief systems; therefore, it is important to understand and acknowledge the experiences of differing cultures and religions within the sporting environment. Ahmad et al. (2020) and Alamri (2013) discuss the experiences of females Muslims in sport. It is suggested there are multiple barriers for Muslim females regarding sport participation such as family influence, sociocultural expectations, patriarchy, ethnic identity, and religion (Ahmad et al., 2020). However, the researchers report other research has indicated that physical activity is viewed positively among young women and is in alignment with Islamic values and in order to fulfil their physical activity needs culturally specific, women only spaces have

been created. Ahmad et al. (2020) suggests that Muslim women and minority groups in New Zealand are encouraged to take part in sport and physical activity however this is done through an assimilationist approach. This means that while they are encouraged to take part this is done so under a broad agenda rather than through considering their needs specifically and understanding the experiences of this group to help include them in the sporting community (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Ahmad et al. (2020) interviewed 38 Muslim women between 16-63 and 14 sports managers about barriers and challenges of building more culturally inclusive sporting and active recreation opportunities for Muslim women in New Zealand. The participants had many positive comments about their participation regarding mental and physical health, the relationships participation brought them and the sense of achievement they experience through progressing their skills and reaching goals, however, barriers did occur for these participants. One of the barriers reported was lack of support from family members and partners who felt sport compromised modesty, honour and reputation, there were mixed experiences however with some participants having supportive family members. Lack of inclusive and accepting facilities were also reported with some participants experiencing hostility from staff, other participants and the public.

Alamri (2013) examined how Muslim female high school students interpret their participation in school sporting activities and how their background influences their views on their engagement within the school environment (Alamri, 2013). Participants in studies within Alamri (2013) suggested they received hostility from teachers and other students due to their hijab. Women-only facilities are also scarce, again limiting opportunity to take part. Facilities were reported by participants to state that everyone was welcome there, however no efforts were made to include minority group's needs, suggesting everyone is welcome but only if they fit in with western society standards (Ahmad et al., (2020). Alamri (2013) reported similar experiences for female Muslim high school students who were not able to participate due to mixed PE classes and groups, limited spaces for privacy in changing rooms and PE dress code, which are all factors that are easily changeable if there is support from the staff. Participants also experienced stereotyping suggesting a lack of education and effort in understanding that each person is different and holds different levels of religious practice.

From these experiences it is clear that New Zealand systems may not be purposefully excluding minority groups, awareness and efforts to be inclusive are scarce. Participants that were sports facilitators who put in the effort to be inclusive of minority groups such as Muslim women reported a lack of funding to be able to provide better and more

opportunities. Other barriers identified were language and transport. Efforts were made by one facilitator to ensure women wearing hijab were included in photos to encourage Muslim women to take part, this idea of representation of Muslim women in sports was positively received by participants, representation can be beneficial as a symbol of inclusivity to show a variety of people are welcome. Some sport facilitators however stated stereotypical understanding of Muslim practices as their reasoning for not putting in effort to be inclusive, again showing that inclusivity efforts are often not being made as it is seen as too difficult. These facilitators suggested Muslim women should be conforming to western ideals to be included. One sports facilitator who offers sports programs for minority groups stated that migrants and refugees do want to learn from western society but that this is not possible if they are not welcomed or exposed to western practices. These responses show that there is a mixed view of inclusivity within the New Zealand sporting community which may create apprehension for Muslim women wanting to participate.

A lack of education has been provided to sports facilitators which may be needed to promote and provide an understanding of why inclusivity is important. If an effort is not made by all to be educated and do better at being inclusive, minority groups will still be unsure where they are welcome and where they are not, causing hesitance in participation. One sports coach reported attempting to persuade the national sporting organization to allow his Muslim athletes to wear hijab or dress modestly to compete, he was turned down and told they must wear the standard uniform. Alamri (2013) supports this experience stating that female Muslim students want to take part in sports however the dress code and lack of privacy in changing rooms acts as a barrier. This wish for more modest uniforms is not only by the Muslim sporting community however, as stated in Steinfeldt et al. (2013), women of varying cultures also feel over exposed and uncomfortable wearing the uniform they are meant to wear, suggesting a greater range of sports uniforms that are chosen by the team wearing them should be allowed. This coach also reported resistance from sporting facilities in letting his Muslim athlete's practice. The head of a popular multicultural sports club also reported funding going to less popular, white dominated clubs over his larger club. He also suggests racial abuse on the side-lines gets ignored by national sporting bodies when he reports it (Ahmad et al. 2020).

From these experiences we can see that not only is the sporting community not being inclusive and making room for diverse participants, but these participants are also being actively oppressed as their concerns and experiences are being shut down. Inclusivity efforts are being made at the micro level however not at the macro level, this is where change needs

to take place as policies put in place promoting diversity and inclusivity is not enough to create change. To further this study, insight into the experiences of school aged participants would be useful to understand cultural diversity in the school setting and whether there are generational changes occurring or not. The study identified a lack of understanding between Muslim females and national sporting bodies and facilitators, a dialogue between the two could be useful for creating a beneficial relationship.

When discussing culture and ethnicity in New Zealand it is important to consider Māori and their involvement in sport. However, according to Active New Zealand's 2019 survey, young Māori spend more time participating in organised sports than New Zealand European youth, 5.2 compared to 4.6 hours per week (Sport New Zealand, 2019). This is also consistent for informal participation with Māori young people participating for 7.5 hours compared to 6.5 hours (Sport New Zealand, 2019). While these statistics are positive, little research has been done into the experiences of young female Māori participation in sports and statistics show that Māori and Pacifica have lower levels of weekly participation and spend less time being physically active than the rest of the population.

Motivators of sports participation

To understand why females do and do not participate in sport is important to investigate what motivates them the most and retains their participation. This section will discuss a variety of motivating factors for female sports participation from a range of sources for the purposes of identifying how the school environment motivates participation, how social elements motivate participation, and how factors that affect the individual specifically motivate participation.

Financial and emotional support of sporting activities from the school community

The study conducted by Burrows and McCormack (2011) found a variety of motivating factors that were important to their participants. Burrows and McCormack (2011) with 21 female students and staff at an elite girl's school. The study aimed to investigate the relation between participation in school sport and physical education and the discourses surrounding these areas. Burrows and McCormack (2011) discuss the need to understand that physical activity does not have the same meaning or experience for people, it is socially constructed by the contexts within which it is lived. Interviews took place with 21 females aged 16-17 in pairs, as well as with the head of the physical education department, a physical education teacher, the sport coordinator, and the deputy principal. Burrows and McCormack (2011) firstly discuss the socio-demographic of the school, suggesting Rowbury

to be a relatively wealthy school with many resources and facilities available. This information is important for recognizing the opportunities provided to the students and understanding the background and support they have access to. The school is reported to provide opportunities and support by having many sporting opportunities with both social and competitive options available. School staff, parents, and non-participating students are suggested to be included and present for these games and events, showing the participants have a great deal of support from their school community. One interview with a staff member revealed that if there is something the girls want to make their experience better, the parents provide funding to make that possible. The participant states that at other schools they've worked at the parents cannot do this and the child would not be able to play. These responses show that not only does the school community offer support but also financial support which encourages participants to want to take part and to be able to take part with ease.

Rewards for taking part in sports

Burrows and McCormack (2011) also conducted a similar study with 12-17 year old's from a low decile school called Rowbury high school. Interviews with students and staff from this school also reinforce the importance of support on participation levels. Rowbury highly encourages their students to participate in sport by providing the resources needed to sport representatives, for example the girls in the first 15 rugby team have a teacher aid to support them with their schoolwork to ensure they can go to training. Healthy meals were also provided by the home economics teacher to the sports teams before games and the nutritional value of the meal was explained to the students. These factors greatly encourage students to take part in sports as there are benefits provided on top of the benefits of sport itself. Participants at Peabody also receive rewards for participation. The participants discussed that their passion for participating is not particularly due to their love of sport but rather for the recognition of participating in sport by the school and the rewards this brings, such as a sports dinner at a nice hotel and badges to wear (Burrows and McCormack (2011). This again supports the importance of recognition, reward and support from the school for students participation in sports.

Variety of options offered and enjoyment of sporting success:

Another motivating factor discussed by participants in Burrows and McCormack (2011) was having a variety of sports and physical activity options to take part in. The deputy principal stated that providing the girls with a multitude of activities outside of team sport and competing such as Pilates would prepare them for life out of school and introduce them to activities that they may not have known were an option. As was shown in Wilson et al.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

(2021), many students take up individual physical activity after high school instead of team sports. Providing greater exposure to different forms of physical activity during high school may help to increase the number of young women participating in physical activity. A greater variety of activities including non-competitive activities may also help to engage students in PE classes who are not confident in their skill level. Participants in Hohepa et al. (2006) support the importance of having a variety of sports being taught in PE and to participate in. When asked how to improve participation, students suggested offering a greater variance of sports available to take part in could increase participation levels as students' areas of interests or skills differ, therefore a sport that is exciting to one person may not appeal to another.

In Allender et al. (2006) review of 24 studies, studies that involved young children found that participation was more enjoyable when emphasis was not put on winning but rather trying different activities. Providing a range of activities was found to be beneficial and increased enjoyment. This may be useful to implement for older age groups as well, allowing a range of sports to be participated in for fun rather than choosing one sport to pursue more seriously may help to keep interest and excitement levels high to retain more people in sports. Although it has been identified that many students' main motivation to participate in sports is not to win, this is not true of all female students. Students in Hohepa et al. (2006) listed winning as one of their top two motivators for participating in sports. This was also supported by participants in Goncalves et al. (2011) who stressed the importance of skill development to their enjoyment, however they suggested that competition was still highly valued as a way of evaluating these skills and goals set. From these results we can assume that there are a variety of factors that motivate students to participate in sports and these may vary in importance from person to person.

Social benefits and social teams

One of the most highly mentioned motivators for sports participation was due to the social benefits of sport. Students in Burrows and McCormack (2011) discussed having fun with friends was highly important to their participation. Some students suggested they would not do sport once they leave school because they are only participating to spend time with their friends. It was also suggested that many of the girls would not participate if there were not social teams to be a part of. This is particularly interesting as many schools do not have social teams, likely due to costs and limited resources in schools. Clubs can be difficult to get to as they are outside of schools so many students may not have access. Providing a social teams league within schools could increase participation in some schools. Participants in

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Hohepa et al. (2006) expressed that to increase physical activity participation there should be a greater number of teams for each sport and social teams available both in school and outside of school time. This suggests that students who miss out on teams or who want to play purely for fun may not be getting the opportunity to play. Students in this study also suggested that increasing the students' access to sporting equipment and facilities would increase their participation, again suggesting students are interested in taking part but cannot do so.

Goncalves et al. (2011) found similar results regarding the social elements of sports. The researchers conducted a study that aimed to understand the development of the female athletes' participation in sports to gage how their experiences lead to their long-term participation in sport. Six female athletes aged 20 to 21 from three sports took part in open ended interviews. The interviews took place in peers with two members from the same team at a time being interviewed. Three interviews took place with each peer and were 45 minutes long each. The participants were all university students that had been participating in sport for around 10 years and were competing in national competitions for their sport. The participants stayed in the same sports club for most of their sporting experience and reported that friendships within the team were important to the girls but suggested they only had close relationships with a few team members and that the rest were only teammates. The participants suggested enjoying the social element of their sports and the club atmosphere which is demonstrated through their long-term commitment to their club, which is fostered through the team and coach. However, they stated they only participate for themselves, not because of others or even for health benefits, suggesting that friendships are important but are not the most important aspect of sport for these participants. Allender et al. (2006) who conducted a review of qualitative studies also found forming new social networks were motivators for girls to participate, and that young females gave great importance to having people to be active with.

The results of a study by Rehrer et al. (2011) also supported social reasons and friends participating was motivation for participating in sports. The study by Rehrer et al. (2011) aimed to understand where young people were physically active and what factors influenced their choices to be active. 100 males and 73 females in year 9 PE and health classes took part in mapping exercises in two class sessions. Six outline maps of the school, the neighbourhood, and the wider city area were provided. The students used different coloured pens to show the routes they travel and the places they visited or places they disliked for physical activity. The students added comments about why they went to some places and why

they did not go to other places on the back of the maps with no predefined categories or examples provided. The study identified that the main reasons students identified a place as their favourite for physical activity were due to their ability to do sport there, fun, aspects of the environment, social reasons, and that their friends go there. Similarly, Utter et al. (2011) suggest that neighbourhoods can influence physical activity involvement due to interpersonal relationships, social inequalities and neighbourhood characteristics for example access to resources in the area. The aim of this study was to understand the influence of social and physical features of school and neighbourhood environments on 13–18-year-old New Zealand students' physical activity levels. The data collected was from the national survey of health and wellbeing of New Zealand youth in 2007. 9107 students from 96 schools took part in the survey, the participants were selected randomly from the school roll by the researchers. The results found that Neighborhoods with high cohesion and safety were positively associated with physical activity, suggesting that socially inclusive and safe neighbourhoods encourage physical activity.

Individual motivations
Health and lifestyle benefits

Participants in Burrows and McCormack (2011) also suggest that participating in sport is good for their health in a variety of ways. One suggested health benefit was achieving balance in their lives. Balance was a motivator to participate suggested by teachers and students due to the students having high academic drive. Sport is considered an outlet and a way to relax and be social for these students. The teachers interviewed suggested sport teaches the girls how to relax and improves their mental health which in turn improves their academic performance. Sports can be an effective way to destress, especially for highly driven students and can also help students to connect with one another outside of the classroom to form better friendships. Participants in Goncalves et al. (2011) similarly stressed that sporting commitment helped them with managing their time. One participant reported she stopped playing for a while to focus on school and her grades deteriorated because she had too much free time and so put off doing the tasks she needed to do. This is interesting because participants in other studies suggest that they do not have time to participate in sport, these responses suggest that motivation may be more of a factor for participation rather than limited time.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Weight management

Sports participation was also discussed as being beneficial for physical health. Participants in Hohepa et al. (2006) identified being skinny and winning as their main motivations for participating. While it may be concerning that being skinny (Hohepa et al., 2006) is one of the main motivators for young females to play sport, this is common among this demographic and is also identified within other studies. For example, students in Burrows and McCormack (2011) study at Peabody high school highly emphasised their need to manage their weight and be skinny through participating in sport. The student's narrative surrounding health was greatly centered around losing weight and weight management and this was supported by the staff. As previously discussed in the barriers to sport participation section, teachers at Peabody also emphasised the need for students to manage their weight and discussed practices being put in place by the school such as providing meals, monitoring of the female first 15 rugby teams weight. The initiatives were developed by the school to increase female participation in sports and PE by providing an all-girls recreational PE class to focus on non-traditional sports and an all-girls fitness class but problematically also said the initiatives were to "stop girls growing fatter" (Burrows and McCormack, 2011, p. 310). This example suggests that while sport is important for health and can be used as a tool for managing weight which encourages sports participation for young women, there may be a need for better information around how to engage in sports in a manner that will not be damaging to the participants mental health. Results from the study conducted by Allender et al. (2006) also support weight management and body image are important to young women. The studies being reviewed found that teenagers and young women's motivators were mainly based on body shape and weight management. Teenage girls felt the need to conform to beauty standards and this was their key motivator to being physically active. Again, while it is positive that young women are taking part in sports and improving their physical health, perhaps emphasizing other benefits of sports participation may be beneficial to ensure participation is not predominantly for weight management as this can lead to other health problems such as exercise addiction and eating disorders.

Enjoyment of competence and skill improvement

Another motivator for sports participation which is discussed by Hohepa et al. Goncalves et al. (2011), and Allender et al. (2006) is the enjoyment of learning new skills and feeling competent. The participants in the study by Hohepa et al were asked what would increase physical activity participation at their school. The female students suggested that PE teachers should teach them how to do the skills in the game before they play all together as a

class in order to increase their competence and enjoyment of a variety of sports. These participants suggest that being competent in the skills needed to perform the sport would increase their confidence and consequently their enjoyment of the sport. This suggestion appears to be a simple strategy which can be completed by PE teachers to ensure their students enjoy sports. The participants in Goncalves et al. (2011) suggest that winning is not of high importance for them as it had been when they were younger, enjoyment and motivation came from mastering and improving skills and was valued highly by these athletes and was stressed throughout each interview. Improvement and success in completing new skills appears to be important for ensuring enjoyment of their sport and is something that has encouraged these participants to have pursued sports for as long as they have. Skill improvement is important as winning is a temporary and often quick goal to be achieved, whereas mastering a skill can take time and may be more satisfying. A study that was reviewed by Allender et al. (2006) revealed that females enjoy learning new skills and sport participation helps them to increase their self-esteem. Again, suggesting that bettering oneself can improve confidence and self-esteem which is enjoyable and may help retain more females in sports.

Conclusion

Many barriers are occurring for young people in New Zealand which contribute to the lowering number of participants in sports. To conclude the literature review the main barriers and motivators will be summarised. The key barriers discussed were limited access to equipment, easy access to sedentary activities, seriousness of competing, limited number of teams to be in, no social teams, limited variety in sports to choose from, fear of judgement from classmates, skills not taught well enough in PE class, lack of competence in skills, boys teams receiving more attention and getting priority over female teams, masculinity and femininity stereotypes, female sports not being shown by the media, body image and uniform issues, sport being used for weight management in a negative way, sport being too physically exerting, time expenditure of sports, religious and cultural barriers such as exclusion. While these barriers may vary depending on the context and individuals due to individuals making sense of their experiences differently, it is very useful to identify these barriers in order to create change and contribute to improving participation levels.

When discussing what can be done to create change, it is also important to understand what young females do enjoy about sport and what makes them want to take part to emphasise and possibly improve on these factors. The key motivators discussed by the studies in this literature review were having support of participating in the sporting activity

by those around them, having funding available and being able to afford taking part, the school community supporting sports participation, rewards being gained from participating in sports, the social elements of sports such as friends taking part and having fun, health benefits, creating balance in participants lives, helping with weight management, helps gain confidence and enjoyment by learning new skills, having lots of sports to choose from, enjoyment of winning, and having easy access to sporting equipment and facilities.

From the barriers and motivators discussed as well as the differing methods used within the studies, it is evident that the participants have encountered a variety of positive and negative experiences. Each study offered insights into the sport environment surrounding young women and how these different factors impacted their personal experience of sport positively or negatively. The research that provided the most insight in relevance to this study were both studies by Burrows & McCormack (2011), Hohepa et al. (2006), Evans (2006), Cox and Thompson (2000), Wetton et al. (2013), Steinfeldt et al. (2013), and Ahmad et al. (2020) who used variations of interview techniques with their participants to understand the experiences being had in relation to the purpose of their research. These studies show that by engaging with the individuals who are directly involved with the focus topic, in depth understanding and knowledge of the phenomena can be gained. In saying this, the nature of this research is not only to understand participants' experiences for the benefit of the research, but to acknowledge the experiences and feelings of the participants by providing them with a platform to share their stories, and this is what I hope to provide with my study. As we have seen from the studies discussed in this literature review, and as we would expect when conducting research through a social constructionist lens, the experiences of sport for individuals in this age group vary between individuals, schools and regions. While some of the studies mentioned have conducted semi-structured interviews with female high school students in New Zealand, this type of research is still relatively untapped. In order to create change and improvement of retention and participation of young females in sport, this study will focus on understanding the experiences of 16–18-year-old female high school students in North Shore Auckland.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Chapter 2: Methods

Theoretical Framework

Previous studies have found that 16-18-year-old female high school students have the highest dropout rate for sports participation by age group and gender. To investigate why females of this age group drop out of sport and what could be done to improve the retention of females in sports, it is important to understand the context and varying factors that influence young women's lives and how they view the world. Very few other studies have conducted in depth discussions with female students about their participation in sports, from the few studies that have been conducted we can learn that experiences of sport vary greatly depending on the context of the school the students attend. This study is investigating the experiences of sporting participation for 16-18-year-old female students in Northshore, Auckland. The aim of this study is to identify the key barriers and motivators for participating in sports for this group in order to implement changes that could improve the sporting experience and result in higher rates of participation in sport for this group. The epistemology and methodology need to ensure the aim of the research can be met by allowing the voices of the participants to be recognised and acknowledged. To achieve this aim, the current study is informed by social constructionism and interpretivism using a qualitative method for data collection and analysis. These approaches and their relevance to the study will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Epistemology: Social constructionism

This research has been conducted using a social constructionist lens. Social constructionism "insists that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves" (Burr, 2015, p. 2). Burr (2015) suggests that social constructionism encourages us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world are 'correct' as there is not one right way to experience and view the world. Social constructionism challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world, suggesting that how we perceive things may not be how they really are (Burr, 2015). The way we interact with and interpret different phenomena is done through a shared construction of that thing within society because knowledge is constructed between people and through daily interactions. What we regard as truth, varies historically and cross-culturally and may be thought of as our current accepted ways of understanding the world (Burr, 2015).

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Social constructionism is applicable to this study, and I have chosen to use a qualitative method to conduct my research because I acknowledge that the experience of sport is different depending on where and who the research takes place with. As Burr (2105) suggests, there is no one truth or way to view things, the way we experience the world and interpret these experiences differs depending on social setting, context, those around us and our own reality. A phenomenon may be viewed differently depending on the social context. Limited studies similar to this study have been conducted in Auckland, New Zealand and each of the studies had varying results due to the different areas the studies took place in. As social constructionism suggests, the experience of one group may vary greatly from another group in a differing context. Therefore, to understand the sporting experiences of 16-18-year-old female high school students on the North Shore of Auckland, New Zealand we cannot use other data and assume it is generalisable.

Methodology: Interpretivism

An interpretivist methodology has been used for this study. Interpretivism acknowledges and engages with the way people participate in the social world. In line with social constructionism, interpretivists recognise that knowledge is socially constructed, and our understanding of reality may shape our interactions with others in society (Chowdhury, 2014). Interpretivism emphasizes the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and cultural life (Chowdhury, 2014). Interpretivists seek to find the significance and motives of people's actions and behavior within the interactions they have with others. This research paradigm is concerned with the uniqueness of a particular situation, contributing to the underlying pursuit of contextual depth which is why it is appropriate for this research. The aim of this research is to understand and explore the experiences of female students ages 16-18 who participate in sport within Auckland, North Shore. The information I aimed to gather investigated differing elements of experience in depth and how these variables interact to make up the views and interpretations of the experience of sport. In using this approach, I recognize that the experience of sport is not independent of the many other aspects of a 16-18-year-old's life and so this study included many questions that prompt answers explaining the lifestyle, relationships, and interests of the student to create a greater overall picture of their reality and why they may experience sport in the way they do.

Method

I have chosen to use thematic analysis for analysing my research. Thematic analysis is a method that interprets patterns of meaning or themes in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Reflexivity is important within thematic analysis as assumptions and positionings of

the researcher are a part of qualitative research. Reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the researchers role within the research and knowledge production process (Braun and Clarke, 2019). These assumptions and positions held by the researcher therefore need to be disclosed and acknowledged in how they may impact the research (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Themes are developed by the researcher who analyses and interprets the data in a reflexive manner by coding the data and continuously going back through the data to ensure the experiences and meanings of the participants' experiences have been communicated. I have chosen to use thematic analysis for my research because I believe this is the best method for communicating the young women in my studies experiences of sport while acknowledging my position within the research.

Participants

The 16 participants were all 16-18-year-old female students from one high school in Auckland, New Zealand. The name of the school is not provided to protect the participants, but it is a co-ed school ranked at decile 10. The participants take part in a variety of organised sports, including individual sports and team sports and have done so for several years. The sample size was based on guidelines for qualitative research which suggest that 10-20 participants is an appropriate number of participants for a master's research project (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

Recruiting participants

The participants I was interested in recruiting were 16-18-year-old female students currently in high school in Auckland, North Shore who participate in sports. This group was chosen based on the research done by studies such as the New Zealand Sports survey (2018) and Maddison et al. (2014) who found that participation in sports in New Zealand decreases between the ages of 15 and 17 (NZ Sport survey, 2018). The survey also found that young females participated in sports 1.5 hours less per week than males of the same age group (NZ Sport survey, 2018). Interviewing this group allowed insight into their lives outside of and inside of sport contributing to understanding why participation may drop for this age group and including them in the conversation of what they value in sport and what they feel needs to change.

To recruit the participants for my study, firstly I emailed the Principal of the high school. In the email I disclosed who I was, what my research was about, why I was doing the research, who I wanted to interview and what the interviews would be about. The Principal of the school forwarded my email on to two teachers, one of whom is a PE teacher with year 12 and 13 classes, and a geography teacher. These two teachers were extremely helpful and

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

asked their classes who would be interested in taking part in my research. The email addresses of the interested students were sent to me so I could contact them directly.

Data collection

Communication with the participants took place over email. The first email to the students provided an outline of my study, what the interviews would be about, the way the interviews could be conducted and the aim of my study, the information sheet, and a little bit about myself and my background. The students were assured that they would remain anonymous in the publishing of the study and their identity would only be known by my supervisor and myself. Once the students agreed they were interested in the study they were sent the consent form, once this was completed, they were sent the questions. The option of conducting the interview on Google chat was offered, however I stated I would use whatever platform was most convenient for the participant. The first participant did not have Google chat and suggested using email, I agreed to this option and sent them the word document with the questions. This method worked well and allowed the participant to answer in-depth in her own time, which was important due to the busy nature of these athletes' lives. Due to this success, both Google chat and emailing the document were offered as options to the rest of the participants and they all chose to answer the questions on the document. When I received their answers back on the document, I emailed them back any follow up questions I had and then added these responses to their document. Two students asked to complete the interview together, which I allowed. The students responded to each question with their name and response individually of each other on the same document. 16 participants were interviewed.

Interviews

In line with the epistemological and methodological positioning, the method used for this study was online semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were carefully constructed based on similar studies and data to identify the areas of young women's lives that may interact with and shape their views on their sporting experiences (interview questions found in Appendix). Gaps in the existing research and areas that stood out as important to investigate were included in the questions. Follow up questions were sent to participants on any questions that I felt they could expand on or that seemed particularly relevant to the research question. The interview questions were emailed to the participants on a Microsoft Word document, where they could then answer in their own time and send the document back to me when they were done. Most of the participants sent the document back the next day or by the end of the week they received it. This method was very useful for gathering detailed answers from the participants and allowed them the time to think over their

answers with no time pressure. If I had any follow up questions for the participant based on their answers, I emailed them back and they replied directly over email with their answer. I then added this question and answer to their original document. Roulston & Choi (2018) discuss that interviews are useful for investigating lived experiences, and how people interpret these experiences in their lives. I chose this method for my research because I wanted to gather information on the experiences had by this group and what these experiences meant to them. Roulston & Choi (2018) also discuss that interviews are often used as the sole method of data generation if the aim of the data is to understand people's beliefs and perspectives about experiences and how they make meaning about these experiences, which is in line with the aim of this study.

I chose to conduct the interview online rather than in person. According to O'Connor & Madge (2017) the use of online interviews for research has become more commonly used in the last decade, particularly interviews over email which allow access to a greater variety of participants. O'Connor & Madge (2017) also suggest email interviews are beneficial for participants as they can answer in their own time. Both of these advantages are relevant to the current study due to the current state of the world being in a pandemic as well as because the participants of interest are involved in sports teams and have studies and other activities. Therefore, providing a flexible interview option was best for engaging with this group. Bassett et al. (2008) also suggests that encouraging teenagers to take part in semi-structured interviews has many difficulties. One of the major difficulties they identified was that the teenage participants were quieter and less willing to speak when the tape recorder was on. The interviewers said their conversations before and after the interviews were easy and flowing, however when the tape recorder was on this seemed to formalize the interaction and the participants were aware of the role dynamic. This suggests that face to face interviews may be difficult for some participants. For the nature of my study, I wanted to ensure the participants felt comfortable as they were discussing potentially sensitive information. I also wanted to ensure they knew that they were speaking to someone who has been in their position before and that I am not much their elder to encourage them to speak freely to me to get in-depth responses. Conducting the interviews over email also may have taken away the nervousness they may have otherwise felt in a face-to-face interview.

Ethical considerations

Before conducting my research, I submitted my project to the Massey University ethics committee and was approved (NOR 21/26). The key ethical considerations for my research were around sensitive/harmful information being shared by the participants during

the interviews. To address this risk in my ethics proposal I stated I would provide resources to participants if any distressing information was shared and seek the advice of my supervisor. As previously mentioned, the method of interview changed as the participants all chose to complete the interview on a Word document in their own time. This meant my interviews with the participants did not take place in real time. However, I did read over the interviews immediately when I received them back and no distressing information was shared. I did take precautionary measures due to in one interview, a student mentioned a former Olympic athlete had committed suicide and this made her aware of how important looking after herself is. Although the response was not concerning in any way, due to the mention of suicide and the athlete being discussed across media outlets, I contacted my supervisor and we decided to send some resources out to all participants in case they felt they wanted someone to talk to at any time in their lives.

Another ethical consideration that changed from procedure to practice was the method of recruiting my participants, which changed anonymity circumstances. Initially I was going to go into the school myself to talk to the classes that had potential participants and hand out information forms without learning anyone's names. However, when I emailed the Principal to get permission, they forwarded my email to two teachers who then asked their classes who would be interested and then passed on the email addresses of these students to me. This means the teachers do know who may have taken part in the research and the students may have discussed between them who decided to take part; however, the students have every right to discuss their participation in the study so there was no coercion. Within the research no names were given and any information that could have potentially led to their identity being discovered was not disclosed. The name of the school involved and the students remain anonymous in the presentation of this research.

Reflexivity

Qualitative research is contextual as it occurs at a point in time and place between two or more people (Dodgson, 2019). It is the job of the researcher to communicate the context and intersecting relationships occurring between the researcher and the research participants in order for the reader to have a greater understanding of the research. Disclosing the context of the research also allows other researchers or readers to judge how relevant the study is to their context and whether the findings are transferable to other contexts (Dodgson, 2019). It is also important for researchers to disclose ways in which they themselves may influence the research. Therefore, I have provided a reflexive paragraph below.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

I acknowledge that in recruiting participants I may have had an advantage due to a parental connection to the school in this research. This may have helped my email to the principal be acknowledged more quickly and for them to be more willing to pass on my email to the teachers who helped to recruit participants for the study. I have also previously competed in many school sports, in teams and individually. I therefore have some of my own experiences in school sports which helped me create some of the questions for the participants as I have knowledge about factors surrounding participation that may influence their experiences. I am also relatively close in age to the participants which perhaps means I have a deeper understanding of the experiences they have as I can relate to the participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step thematic analysis guide.

Phase 1- familiarising with the data

To familiarise myself with my data I read over the interview documents of each individual in full and then read through the answers to question one of each interview and continued to do this process for each question to find patterns and comparisons in the answers to each question. During this process I began to highlight points in the interviews that were similar to each other in different colours and assigned a few key words to each colour to give myself a general idea of what was being said.

Phase 2- generating initial codes

Phase 2 involved grouping the same-coloured highlighted data together into sections. For my research project, this first meant identifying whether the answer given by a participant suggested the extract in question was a barrier to their sporting participation or a motivator. For example, to one student the competitiveness of their team may be overwhelming and therefore be seen as a barrier to their enjoyment of their sport, and to another student the competitiveness may be what they enjoy most about their sport. I decided to have barriers and motivators as my two main headings which all other codes would fall under to answer my research question. While going through the data set again to identify whether each item was a barrier or a motivator, I changed some of the previously highlighted areas to other colours and made a more specific brief description for that colour. For example, I had highlighted all text that discussed sport in relation to the participants health in one color, going through this time I grouped the data into "sport has a positive impact on their health" and "sport has a negative impact on their health". Some parts of the data were

relevant to a few "themes" in which case I highlighted the extract in a few colours to identify this.

Phase 3-searching for themes

I wrote the list of codes on a different document under their two headings, barriers, and motivators. I then considered each code in the barriers section with the other codes under this heading and examined whether two codes could fit together under one theme. For example, I had one code about sports being male dominated and another code about females in sport not receiving enough support and recognition in comparison to males, these two codes could both fall under one theme. I went through all the data again and highlighted extracts of the data with the appropriate colours to match the code. I then copy and pasted all of the data under each code into a word document to separate the codes from each other to ensure the data matched that code. Where I had combined codes to create an overarching theme, I read over the data again and made sure the theme was inclusive of the data and made changes where I thought they were needed. My main consideration for this process was the division of the data into the two main barriers and motivators subheadings. I decided this was important to do in order to be able to answer my research question and to compare my research to the existing literature. There were overlapping themes between the barriers section and motivators section where I could have discussed the theme together as a whole as a barrier and a motivator, however, to make the arguments clear for the reader, separating the data was the best option.

Phase 4- reviewing themes

Now that I had created my themes by combining two or more codes together, it was important to go through the data at a more in-depth level and consider how the evidence from each code would come together to create one succinct theme. In a few instances where there had appeared to be a theme from the initial coding of the data, when considering the data together as one argument, the data was not as related as I had initially thought. In this case the data was separated into two different themes or added into another theme to build a better argument. Another consideration was that a few codes did not fit as a barrier or a motivator to participate in sport, for example many of the participants did not mind their sports uniforms and did not have much else to say about them. I decided to remove this data because it did not add value to my argument as the responses were mostly neutral and therefore did not contribute strongly as a motivator or a barrier for participation. Any relevant extracts from this section were discussed under body image instead.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

In part two of phase 4, I went through the themes to ensure they accurately represented the data and helped answer the research question. To do this I went over the data again and re-read anything that I had not included and considered whether this data could now fit under a theme to support an argument. In a few instances the context of the text had been left out and only the specific relevant information was included, in this phase I went through and added any supporting context to the original piece of data that was selected. By reconsidering this data and adding information to the themes I am confident that the themes I have accurately represent the data.

Phase 5- defining and naming themes

The data was relatively straightforward to divide into two main overarching themes of barriers and motivators for sports participation. Within these themes there are multiple sub-themes. Under the barriers to sport participation theme there are: pressures in sport, time restraints due to sports participation, poor health due to over training, financial strain, and gender inequality in support and recognition. Within each of the sub-themes I have combined data extracts that discuss the same general idea and add to an overall argument for why that sub-theme is relevant for the research question. For example, unequal opportunities for females in sport, the view of male sports and female sports, and the experience of females in sports. All of these areas contribute to the discussion of females being disadvantaged in sports culture in comparison to males. For each sub-theme I wrote a few sentences describing what the sub-theme discusses. This process was also completed for the motivators for sports participation theme, the sub-themes under this theme are: sport is fun, friendships and socialising, sports related health benefits, support, and professional sports. Under a majority each these themes were subthemes that analyse an element of that theme.

Writing the descriptions of each sub-theme was useful for identifying where data was relatively lacking in depth and therefore was more useful being added into another sub-theme. For example, it was prevalent from the amount of data extracts that sport being fun was highly valuable for these participants, however when it came to reviewing the data extracts and trying to form an argument around these extracts, I realised that many of these answers did not provide enough depth for why they find sport fun. To create a more succinct argument I expanded this theme to all the areas of sport that were discussed as being enjoyable for example improvement, competition, and friendship. This process of engaging with the data in depth allowed me to identify where sub-themes differed or related to other sub-themes to create a coherent flow from sub-theme to sub-theme which tells a story about

the data. There are multiple sub-themes within both the barriers and motivators to sport participation themes. This is due to the nature of exploring the overall experiences of sport participation rather than a single element of sport participation. Although there are many sub-themes, this process allowed me to identify why each sub-theme is important and relevant to the research.

Phase 6 – Writing the report

Phase six of thematic analysis involved discussing the findings of my study and analysing each theme in turn.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Chapter 3: Findings

I will now discuss the themes of the data. It was apparent when analysing the data that the participants discussed aspects of their experiences of sport negatively, as something that made their sporting experience difficult, or positively, as something that contributed to their enjoyment and motivation to play sport. To answer the research question the data is divided into two overarching themes, barriers to sports participation and motivators for sports participation. I will firstly discuss the themes of barrier and secondly the motivating themes.

Table 2: theme summary

Core concept	Theme	subtheme
Barriers	Too much pressure	
	Time constraints	
	Health concerns	
	Finances	
	Gender inequality	Female experience, unequal opportunities, female view of sport
Motivation	Fun	
	Friendship and socializing	
	Health benefits	Positive relationship with food and body image
	Support	Family and coaches support
	Professionalism	

Barriers to sport participation
Theme 1: Too much pressure in sport

Experiencing too much pressure in sport was expressed as hindering enjoyment and willingness to participate in sports. This pressure can come from multiple sources, one being coaches. Research suggests that the coach–athlete relationship is commonly influential in the decision to withdraw from youth sports. Contributing factors may include coach conflict, a controlling coaching style, lack of encouragement, and an overemphasis on winning (Gardner, 2016). Pressure from coaches was expressed by one participant regarding coaching

techniques, she says "*with a few coaches I find that they can be a bit too serious, and this affects my racing because I feel like I have a lot of pressure on me.*" This pressure is in line with the research of Gardner (2016), coaches who emphasise winning may take enjoyment away from the athlete as they do not get to enjoy the experience of the competition or celebrate their skills and training paying off.

Participants discussed feeling that there was not only pressure in competitions but in choice of training assigned by coaches as well, a participant confided *"I think that even as you get more mature you still need to have time in between serious training to have fun. I have found that my coach has stopped doing fun things with us because it has become too serious for us at a young age."* The participants feel as though the training they are being given is too serious for their age as they are only between the ages of 16-18-years-old and for most, sport is an activity that they are pursuing for enjoyment. Another athlete discussed that their relationship with their coach is strained because he is too serious, she says *"I also feel that he is too serious for how old we are. I think that he is too serious about trying to make Olympians or future international athletes, that he has forgotten that we are still young and growing and need to have fun and variety in our training."* This extract shows that young athletes are still wanting fun and enjoyment out of their training but instead coaches are putting too much pressure on them to shape their futures which may ultimately lead to them quitting instead. Bergeron (2010) suggests that coaches and parents influence the enjoyment of young athletes by determining a young athlete's potential and putting emphasis on a sports career and success. Bergeron (2010) suggests the adult stakeholders dampen the youth's natural enthusiasm by progressively distancing these more elite young athletes from their friends, and consequently divert adult attention away from other athletes. The athletes who are not being pressured to perform continue to participate enthusiastically for fun and the love of the game while this diminishes for the more 'talented' athletes. This can be witnessed as occurring for the athletes in this study who want to enjoy their training and their sport but are being forced to take it more seriously by their coach. One participant stated that sports becoming too serious is the reason why many athletes drop out at this age, *" ...needs to make it more enjoyable for teens so after high school they don't stop and they keep swimming, as once many swimmers leave school, they also quit swimming as it was only a hobby."* As sport becomes less accessible after high school, those who burnt out from high school sport or who lost enjoyment for it are likely to drop out of sport at this time.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

This age range is also when students start to experience more academic pressure and may have to choose to focus on school if their sport becomes too much for them, for example one participant states

"especially for big tournaments, I felt I had the need to perform to a certain standard and therefore, I became overwhelmed and stressed which resulted in losing enjoyment of playing…sometimes even feeling demotivated…During my later years of playing, specifically school, along with increased pressure, I was spending much more time training. Although motivated, another barrier I came across was trying to balance both schoolwork and performing at a tournament. This was detrimental to either my performance or schoolwork as it was difficult to 100% put full effort into both."

This student is a high achiever in her sport and suggests that sometimes she must choose to do well in either her sport or her schooling and can sometimes not achieve both. For those athletes who are just as committed to their sport but do not perform as highly, the motivation to continue in sport is likely lower when faced with their academic performance being hindered and may therefore lead to students dropping out. Athletes lacking parental support during this time or who experience any other hurdles to take part such as financial strain are also likely to drop out if the pressure is too much and impact other areas of their lives. An example of sport impacting other areas of participants' lives was expressed by one student who stated *"the rules around being in a high-level team is quite strict. I can't go to parties or anything otherwise I risk being taken off the team,"* meaning that even when this student does have free time to spend with friends outside of sport, she is told she is not allowed to do so. This pressure to be highly committed to a sport and sacrifice social events at the ages of 16-18 during a highly social period of life may be too much for some students and contribute to dropout rates at this age.

Pressure does not only come from coaches however, parental pressure may also be a barrier to female sports participation. Pressure from parents is linked to negative outcomes related to sport performance as it can cause participants to perceive a threatening environment, discontent, and anxiety (Bonavolonta et al., 2021). An example of parental pressure is shown by one participant who reports *"some kids are forced into their sports, and I feel bad for them when their parents are mean and put them on diets and shout at them."* When I asked her if she knew many parents like this she replied *"oh so common it's kinda sad I think it is a reason why so many kids quit. The parents can be quite harsh when trying to be supportive. I think sometimes they want to live through their children, and they push their kids into sports at a young age and when they start to lose interest they push them*

harder." Sport at this age is meant to be a fun way to learn new skills, socialise, stay fit and healthy and possibly lead to a future in sport, however this combination of pressure from parents, coaches, and consequently the athletes themselves takes the enjoyment away and is contributing as a barrier for females to play sport. Parents may not be aware that their behavior is making their child want to quit. Bonavolonta et al. (2021) suggests that parents should be aware and told that their behaviors may be resulting in negative outcomes as they can contribute to lower levels of motivation for young athletes, causing a loss of enthusiasm towards sport participation. Bonavolonta et al. (2021) states that young athletes feeling too much pressure from their parents may experience stress and conflicts with their parents, until they burnout or dropout of their sport all together.

Theme 2: Time restraints due to sports participation

Young athletes spend most of their time in school and at home physically exhausted and this impacts on their school, social and sporting life (O'Neill et al., 2013). One of the most commonly mentioned barriers in this study was having very little time for anything other than sport. The students expressed concern about the lack of time they have to study, one student commented

> *"It makes it difficult (study). This is due to the time restraints because I spend a lot of the time out of the house. Another aspect that makes it hard is when I do come home, I am tired and so it makes it difficult to find motivation to study. Also when I am out doing competitions and tournaments during school time, I can miss a lot of the topics that we are learning especially as I am in Year 12 and therefore have a lot of stress from school anyways."*

This student shows that sport is not just a small aspect of her life, it impacts the time she has both outside of school and inside of school and consequently impacts her chance to learn and study.

Year 12 is also the first-year students' grades in exams and assessments are serious in most schools and count towards their future entrance for university. This is a barrier for students to participate in sports as their school grades are important to not only them but their parents and their school as well. Another student suggests that their commitment to sport impacts their willingness to complete their schoolwork, she says

> *"with the amount of late night training and games, it makes it hard to find the motivation or time to study or complete homework/school work. I do manage to find time to complete everything but at times it can get stressful as I am in year 12 and my internals and*

externals are very important for my further studies. As training and games can go till late, I can sometimes find the time to fit everything in with my other extra-curricular activities that I also need to do, but I will often be tired and unmotivated to get everything I need done."

Even those athletes who enjoy their sport and are committed to it find it hard to manage the amount of training and competitions they have with their studies and other areas of their lives. These experiences are also reported in O'Neill et al. (2013). O'Neill et al. (2013) found that athletes reported having difficulties learning, a lot of missed class time which caused issues for catching up with missed school work, an increased need for one-on-one tutoring, mentors playing an important role and a need for empathy. These results are found in this study, students miss out on time outside of school hours to do their homework, as well as in class time where the content is being taught. This creates a lot of pressure to not only do the homework but to learn how to do it on their own. For students whose academic future is very important to them this may cause them a great deal of stress and cause them to drop their sport. Those who may struggle academically are also likely to not be able to handle both their academic pressures and sports pressures and so may also drop out of sport.

Another student states that due to her other commitments she no longer enjoys her sport as much and therefore is deciding to stop *"this might be because I take three portfolio subjects. Over the past year I have slowly lost the enthusiasm for racing and now I am just not enjoying the sport as I used to."* This is important to acknowledge, students who have other interests or prioritise their schooling may want to participate in sport but due to the amount of time training and competing, this is not possible or they are forced to choose between their priorities. Sport needs to be made accessible to all by making the training and competing expectations more realistic. This is supported by another student who says, *"I feel like sports can sometimes get in the way of me and my schoolwork, I swim and train in the mornings and therefore can sometimes find myself super tired at the desk and throughout the school day. It can also get in the way with my homework, so I just have to adapt and do it in school."* As we can see from this extract, athletes are spending their time between classes to catch up on their homework and schoolwork that they have missed due to their sporting commitments or because they are too tired when they get home. This suggests that less training or less competitions for this age group may benefit these students and may help to retain more young female athletes in sport.

Participants also explained that due to their level of commitment to their sports they experience a lack of down time to spend with their friends, one participant states *"there is a*

saying that you have to choose 2 out of the 3, a social life, swimming or an education. And everyone chooses swimming and education. I find that I just don't have time for it (social life) because I am always at the pool or at school and if I do have free time, I am too tired to do anything else." Again, due to the amount of training these students have, they are too tired for anything else afterwards and therefore give up other areas of their lives. This age is a highly important time in teenagers' lives for experiencing new things, gaining their independence, and learning about who they are. However, they are having to choose between the areas of their lives that are important to them as this participant suggests. Young athletes choosing sports over social events was also found by O'Neill et al. (2013), the athletes suggested that sacrificing their social life benefits their lives more than it takes away from them. The athletes in O'Neill et al. (2013) stated they never went to social events like other young people their age and that they believe they had to sacrifice their social life to achieve a high level in their sport.

Another student in the current study states that she has lost friendships because of her commitment to sport, she says *"I don't have much time for my boyfriend or friends sadly, so I have lost a few friends over that just because it's too hard to visit all my friends and so only my close friends have stayed."* The students being interviewed are all highly involved in sport and have been doing sports for a long time. We can assume that sport has had a large role in their lives for many years and they do not know life without it. Students who have not had this past with sport or who do not show this same passion for sports but want to play sport for fun or for their health may be discouraged by the amount of time they would have to give to be a part of a team. I cannot generalise the amount of commitment needed to all sports as this would change seasonally and depending on the competition level, however, from these participants it is clear that overcommitment to sport is acting as a significant barrier to other areas in their lives.

Theme 3: Poor health due to over training

As we have witnessed in previous themes, too much sport and too much pressure in sport can take away enjoyment and can take away from other areas of athletes' lives, forcing them to choose what is most important to them. Too much sport can also impact these students' health and well-being. One student commented that *"over-training made me feel restless and unmotivated which led to a decline in mental, spiritual and emotional well-being. As a result of this, I had to learn how to mentally prepare better for upcoming competitions and physically manage my time in order to avoid emotional and mental wellbeing issues."* While sport provides many benefits in people's lives, too much sport can have negative

impacts, more so than just being tired, students can be impacted physically and mentally as well. An example of this is shown by this student, she states

"I think for myself the biggest barrier for sports is my mental side. I feel overwhelmed with school or training, and I just go downhill and get sick. something I do to cope with that is just take a few days off to reset my mentality to get back into things instead of pushing all the time mentally damaging myself. with seeing what I saw a few days ago on with an Olympian committing suicide because of her sport and it being so mental challenging makes me really understand that I need those little resets to make sure I'm alright."

At a very young age these students are experiencing and learning about big emotions. Too much stress and pressure on young people, as can be seen from the participants' responses, can cause negative health effects such as being run down, getting sick, poor mental health or even injury. Sport is an activity many use for enjoyment and as a hobby, having poor mental health from participating is concerning and is a large barrier for participation. This experience is also shared by another participant who says *"I became overwhelmed and stressed which resulted in losing enjoyment of playing at these moments, sometimes even feeling demotivated. This had a negative impact on my mental and spiritual hauora as it brought me to a negative headspace during these times."* This student expresses that sport can have an impact on her overall well-being because it is something she deeply cares about, therefore when they feel run down and overwhelmed and cannot perform at their best this has a negative impact on them and this carries over into other areas of their lives.

Other students reported that over training impacted them physically as well as mentally and has caused them injury. One participant reported about her training, *"this involved 6 hard days of training a week and this caused me to get many injuries including tearing my laberium [hip labral tear] and almost wanting to quit because of this. I am just finally recovering from this. I had two coaches at the time and my coach who has been coaching me for 4 years noticed that I was so worn down and helped me leave my other coach."* Athletes of this age group should be able to trust their coaches to know what is best for them and to not make them train harder than they can manage. Whatman et al. (2018) suggests that when it comes to injury that some responsibility lies with the athlete, however younger athletes may not have the cognitive development to take responsibility for their own safety therefore the role of the coach is important for protecting young athletes. As we can see from this extract some coaches are not aware of what is suitable for their athletes and may cause them more harm than good and consequently cause athletes to stop.

Another student explained that because of her commitment to her team she played on an already very badly swollen rolled ankle to not let her team down, she said *"...by night it was very swollen and turning black. A lot of players were getting injured at the tournament and I didn't want to let people down, so I strapped it tightly and played the next two games the next day - in retrospect, this was a bad idea. After the tournament, it was a long way back for recovery. My range of motion in my right ankle was dramatically decreased, it's strength and flexibility was very poor which meant I was prone to rerolling it."* It is not uncommon for athletes to hide their injuries or continue playing after an injury has occurred. Whatman et al. (2018) found that 87% of athletes in their study reported hiding an injury to continue playing, as well as 87% of coaches and 91% of players having witnessed injured players play on. The study found 50% of players and coaches had seen players put under pressure to play when injured. These athletes are young, coaches should be able to put the health of their athletes above their desire to win. Whatman et al. (2018) states that a "lack of knowledge, the desire to win, and not letting the team down were key reasons given for the behaviour reported." Being allowed to play after injuring yourself badly should not be an option and should be prevented by the coach. This participant shows that success in sport is being put above the health of the individual, which can potentially have long-term consequences. Injury at any age should be taken seriously, however this age is when a lot of growth and physical changes occur, therefore injuries should be looked after to prevent long term damage.

Theme 4: Financial strain

Financial support for students in high school is commonly discussed as a parental responsibility as is the case of many of the participants in this study. While the burden of costs does not fall directly onto many of the students, it was discussed as an issue and a barrier to taking part in sports by most participants. Not only do the students feel financial pressure, but parents and other family members do too. O'Neill et al. (2013) states that financial pressures faced by parents and felt by high performance school-age athletes are due to the costs associated with registration fees, equipment, competing and training. Research has linked these financial pressures to the secondary issue of being 'time-poor' which is a large problem for parents with low incomes. These parents have to work more hours to be able to afford their children's sports. More hours working consequently means they have less time to support their child including dropping off and picking up and watching trainings and competitions. Parents are expected to support their children in many ways, and some cannot afford it or manage to get the time to. It is also important to acknowledge that the participants in this study all attend a decile 10 school and live in a relatively affluent area, so what may be

considered financial strain may differ from other areas. This is acknowledged in this extract from a participant: *"Sailing is a very costly sport, but I am very lucky to have parents that are able to pay for my boat and sailing gear. The thing about sailing is that you travel a lot at a high level and so there are also costs for travel."* The participant is aware that the sport they have chosen has a high cost, however this is not a particular issue for them and their family. For another participant in the same sport, costs are an issue,

> *"yes, sailing is a very expensive sport to participate in as you need to keep upgrading your gear and all that. If you don't have very good gear this can have a big effect on the performance in your sport. For me, my parents do not have as much money as some of the other people's parents at sailing, this can make it harder for me to do well in regattas because others may have better gear than me making their boat just a little bit quicker, however from the way I see it most of the speed comes from the sailor and not from the gear. I have also had opportunities to travel overseas, but I have not taken them because it is so expensive."*

This suggests that students who are highly committed to their sports and want to pursue it further may not have the opportunity to reach their potential due to the costs that come with the gear and competitions.

It was not just sailing that was costly. For this participant

> *"the cost of my sports is very expensive. This is because in surfing you usually need a new surfboard once a year and this can cost between 500-1000 and then I also need the equipment such as a wetsuit. A 4/3mm wetsuit can cost between 300-600 dollars, however, we have tried to solve this problem by getting secondhand wetsuits online for around 100-200 dollars. I also need other equipment such as fins to go in my surfboard which cost around 200 dollars and many more accessories. However, the main cost is the travel, for gas."*

This student again demonstrates that the gear they can afford to purchase may impact their participation and whether their parents allow them to take part as many families would not be able to afford these costs. O'Neill et al. (2013) states that this creates anxiety for athletes or forces them to rely on others if their parents cannot afford to pay for their sport or if they cannot physically be there to help transport their children. This is suggested to create greater stress as those who help the athlete may not understand their timetables and commitments. It is concerning that the success of one student may be limited due to the gear they can afford to buy, the tournaments they can afford to go to, or whether they can get transport or not. This could cause potentially high achieving athletes to drop the sport completely. This financial

pressure is also likely to increase as students transition from high school to university and leave home, creating even less likelihood of students being able to continue competing.

The financial commitments to sport may also separate those who are participating to pursue sport in their future and those who are participating mostly for enjoyment. Parents of young athletes may decide not to fund their daughters' sports unless they are very serious about competing and show a lot of commitment or high achieving results. This may again limit the number of female participants in sports as only those who are achieving highly or who can afford to take part will continue. This also adds a lot of pressure to these athletes perform well due to the expenses their parents are paying. Financial pressure is expressed by this participant *"my parents are divorced and my mum struggles to fork out the money to pay for tournaments, uniforms, fees etc. This can be hard to see, and my dad does nothing to help. For example, the tournament coming up is costing nearly $1000 which is ridiculous as my school decided to do no fundraising. I think some of the expenses are overly high and can limit some people's participation in sports."* Asking students and parents to pay $1000 and not offering any financial support to those who cannot afford to do so is a barrier for many and will separate those who cannot afford it from the other competitors. Even those who are the best in their sport are not receiving any financial support and therefore missing out on opportunities and achieving at important events, for example this participant states

> *"my sport is totally self-funded and for me, this definitely has impacted me hugely. For example, I chose not to go to world juniors which is large for my development back in 2019 in Russia which would have cost $6000. This is the biggest junior tournament and was extremely important for me but was far too expensive. Other than that, things like Olympic qualification require me to pay for my own trips overseas in order to gain 'points' which eventually lead to qualification. Without money, I cannot take the next step within my sport."*

This is a student who has the potential to go very far in their sport and is achieving at a very high level and they are not receiving any help to get them to the competitions they need to do. Students in this study are from upper-middle class families and are at a decile 10 school so it would suggest that students from lower decile schools and families who are less financially stable are likely to not be able to consider participating in these sports at all due to costs and minimal financial support. Sport participation may therefore be a privilege for many.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Theme 5: Gender inequality in support and recognition

This theme has three sub-themes: the female experience of sports, unequal opportunities, and the view of male sports versus female sports. All point out the gender inequalities in sport at high school level.

Subtheme: The female experience of sports

The female experience of sports participation is discussed by many of the participants as being distinct from a male experience largely due to safety concerns, male domination in the sport, and sexual harassment. For example, this participant discusses her experience of training individually, *"I struggle training by myself because I get cat called if I run near roads or beeped at or if I'm in a gym all these old men look at you if you're alone."* This participant is between 16-18-years old and is concerned about her safety when doing her training. This may have a multitude of implications for this participant, for example anxiety towards training, only being able to train at certain times, parental concerns, and risk to her safety. This may make it hard for training to occur and is a reality for young females running on their own. This may deter some young athletes from training and taking part.

This participant also expresses that in her sport there are not many options of people to train with, she says *"I often try and train with a buddy but this is hard because there aren't many girls and you can't really train with boys who are at your competitive level because they are so much faster/stronger,"* this is the reality of low participation rates for females in individual sports, the females who do participate do so mostly alone. Another participant discusses female safety in her mixed gendered sport, *"there is an undertone of 'machoness' in surf lifesaving...this machoness doesn't have a direct effect on me but might deter other women. I've seen people go out in hugely unsafe conditions to appear tougher. I think this may stem from the fact that people care too much about what others think of them, but this might cause some people to feel intimidated."* This suggests that some female athletes may be putting themselves at risk by going into unsafe conditions to prove to male athletes that they are as strong and capable. This may also separate athletes from each other if some female athletes choose to not go out in unsafe conditions, consequently making females look weaker than their male peers. This speaks to the inherent attitudes that sport at certain levels requires a 'male level of toughness' which is a sexist attitude that is influencing behaviour of young females.

The belief that females and males should not be competing against each other is suggested in this extract, *"females don't perform like males and males don't perform like females. Therefore, there is a difference in performance however females and males should*

not be compared in participation in sports as each gender is built different and have different qualities.'' This view of males and females in sport is insightful and is in line with Chalabaev (2013), who states that males outperform females. Chalabaev (2013) found that comparing male and females in sporting ability can be possible when performance is measured using objective units such as time and distance. In these cases, males perform generally better than women. Sports that require strength, speed, or endurance portray that male world records are systematically higher than females (Chalabaev, 2013). While there should be equal opportunities and recognition for females and males in sports, competitions that are mixed gendered may create unfair advantages for males and cause females to appear lesser than their male rivals due to natural advantages. Sports that have male and female athletes competing against each other should consider the implications this may have on female participants and consider separating the competition.

Males and females competing against each other discouraging female athletes is suggested by this participant, she says

> *"overall I think that a lot more males continue with participation in sports throughout their lifetime. In sailing a lot more people who quit before they get up to the youth classes (15 - 18-year old's mainly) are girls. A lot of the reason for this is probably because it is a very hard sport and females compete with the males which sometimes scares them. This is because some guys are very aggressive on the racecourse, and some are not very nice to the girls around the racecourse."*

As this participant suggests, it is likely that some female athletes would find this behavior intimidating and not want to compete against males, therefore dropping out of the sport. Another participant says, *"in sailing girls compete with the boys which puts some girls off as boys are typically bigger and stronger which gives a bit of an advantage over the girls."* Training just as hard and having the same gear and yet not achieving the same results would be very discouraging to female athletes. Female athletes feel disheartened as their accomplishments are not acknowledged by their male peers, *"I think that men are not being informed about women's capabilities and biophysical differences well enough. I have been in many situations where I have been training my whole life and done weightlifting for a year now and gotten personal bests that are amazing for my age and gender, but my male swimming friend can come and almost reach it without any training. However, they find it hard to understand the hard work that you have put into it."* Female athletes do not have the same physical advantage as males and therefore their accomplishments are being overlooked because some males can naturally achieve better. There should not be a comparison between

male and female athletes, both genders' accomplishments should be celebrated in their own context.

Subtheme: Unequal opportunities for females in sport

The participants discussed that males are often prioritised over females, one participant says, *"I think that the culture within the genders needs improvement, also the amount of support and coaching each gender gets. I feel as though the coaching and the opportunity to gain more training time and access is a bit unfair, unequal between the genders. The boys always get new gear and more training times and a wider variety of training (gym sessions, more swimming sessions, more pool time)."* The girls' teams can work just as hard and be just as good by female comparison and not receive the same opportunities as males. This is discouraging for females who are working hard and spending a lot of time and energy on training and competing.

Not providing females with specialised training catered to them and their needs also shows that female athletes are not being taken as seriously as males due to their coaches not engaging with the athlete to help them individually. One athlete discusses her injury due to her coaches miss training

> *"I think one problem I have had is coaches. I think coaches need more teaching in how to help women athletes differently to men's. I had a coach for three years who coached me almost the same as his son. His thinking of training was all or nothing. This involved 6 hard days of training a week and this caused me to get many injuries including tearing my laberium and almost wanting to quit because of this."*

Female bodies are different to males and may not be able to handle the same amount of impact as their male peers. Coaches need to understand their athletes' personal health and capabilities, for example female athletes can lose their period if they train too hard or do not fuel their body well enough, an outcome that is serious and cannot occur for males. Communication between male coaches and young female athletes may need some intervention by a third party to ensure the needs of the athlete are expressed without them feeling embarrassed. For example, this athlete expresses

> *"I believe a large barrier is the lack of communication between male coaches and female athletes. I know that personally, when it reaches my time of the cycle, I can have very bad cramps that even with prescribed drugs do not take away the pain. However, I have never felt comfortable talking to coaches about this. I believe that this has a huge impact on the performance of athletes and can even make them more prone to injury - but how are coaches to know that they are in this situation? Even family situations are not discussed*

>*with coaches because they never ask, and often with younger athletes, you never feel*
>*inclined to tell anyone or you have a fear of telling anyone as this could potentially result*
>*in docked game time or you being looked at from a different perspective."*

Young female athletes are unlikely to open this line of communication with their male coach if they are not asked and male coaches may not consider these factors because they are unique to women and different from their other athletes.

When asked what could be improved for females in sports, a participant responded *"They could actually hire people to look after these athletes and help them with club events and everything. I had to book all my events as a year 9 and I would miss events and not know of events because my parents didn't know about it. Having someone to help enter events would be very helpful."* Not only are females not receiving the coaching they need, but the support and organisation from the school are not actively helping females to take part in individual sports. This again adds another layer of pressure and stress to these participants' experience of sport as they must seek out events and organise everything for themselves.

Subtheme: The view of male sports and female sports

The view of female sports in comparison to male sports differs from each other. This is expressed through the experiences of the participants and the actions of those around them. Males in sport are suggested to be receiving more support. Females in sailing for example are competing against males in competition and have physical disadvantages compared to their male peers. Fink (2015) found that women are sport in the media are still supposed to be feminine, weaker than men but athletic. Thus when a female athlete shows physical excellence this has the potential to fracture gender roles in sport however, sport is still largely patriarchal. Unfortunately, gender roles are still prevalent in the minds of many. Females are capable of great achievements, however views such as these are likely stopping many from reaching their potential as they are told they cannot achieve their goals and are not meant to do these sports. Based on these beliefs about gender roles which are still commonly held within society, it is interesting that some sports which are typically aimed at male athletes are still placing females and males up against each other in the same event. While females are capable of competing against males, with a lot of society telling females they are not as capable and then expecting them to be confident in competitions against males, this is likely to have negative impacts. One participant says

>*"what needs to be improved about the sport of sailing is the support given to women.*
>*Sailing is dominated by guys and so it could be improved by lifting women up and*

> *supporting them a lot more…So it would be good if there was more recognition with women in the sports."*

This participant is expressing that within her sport males and females race each other which places females at a disadvantage and may cause many to drop out. Support is not being given to these female athletes to encourage them to continue. These factors together may therefore discourage female sailors from competing.

Another participant suggests that female sports are not as recognised within their school, *"I feel like boys just have quite a tight net group. It's all fun and games and girls don't really have that tight net community because it's not pushed as much in schools. We always hear about the boys' rugby team and soccer but hardly about the girls' teams. I think people think it's a lot easier to win the girls soccer than the boys which is untrue."* It is discouraging to put in just as much work and time into something and to be overlooked or disregarded by others. It is disheartening for females who are serious and highly committed to their sport to not be taken seriously or recognised for their accomplishments. This may cause them to feel like their efforts are not worthwhile.

Male sports are also expressed by the participants as being more highly regarded by viewers and media. Sport media focuses on portraying female athletes' femininity and sexualises them consequently degrading their athletic accomplishments and athleticism. Evidence shows that historically and currently, the media provides more coverage to female athletes competing in sports that meet feminine ideals (Fink, 2015). Studies also show that female participation in sport has increased, however, coverage of female sports competitions has declined (Fink, 2015). This reinforces that gender roles and stereotypes are prevalent and are likely impacting young women in sports participation whether consciously or unconsciously.

Female sports are also given limited coverage and limited support from the public. This is suggested to not be any different at school level, one participant states that not only does the school offer more support and recognition for male teams, but so do the students, a student reports *"I think that students in general are more willing to attend boys' basketball games /rugby games rather than females - but I do not think it's anything to do with the school but more the students. The rugby and basketball male teams at school definitely have a bigger reputation which makes people want to go and watch more. So the quick answer is no, the female sports do not receive as much recognition and attention - not only by the school but students also."* Female athletes' peers prioritize watching male teams compete as there is a greater culture around supporting male teams in their competitions. This point of

view is also suggested to be relevant to larger sports teams outside of school, a participant states *"I feel that female sports are less highlighted compared to male sports. For example, a game of rugby, you are going to want to watch the All Blacks instead of the female team."* Male sports have been given precedence historically as in the past females were not meant to play sports as this was seen as a masculine and unfeminine thing to do (Curtin, 2016).

Unequal media representation of male sports versus female sports is noticed by young women in sports, this participant says

"I think more ways to get females involved in sport is by maybe if there was more coverage in the media about it and also factors that wanted people to watch female sports rather than to watch male sport. This is because on Sky there are many sports channels, only some of these broadcast females' sports and I believe that if all of the sport on all of the sports channels were female sports for a period of time each day then it would be more likely that people would watch females' sports."

Sports being labelled and broadcasted as masculine has consequently carried over throughout history and may be impacting the current females in sport as can be witnessed by this participant, "Sport is often categorized as being a boyish thing to do and girls don't think they can do that." These masculine and feminine discourses are still underlying in the assumptions concerning females in sport. Fink (2015,) states that "sexism as a norm is so entrenched within the institution of sport that it is rarely even perceived at a conscious level, and if detected, most consider change impossible because, ''that's just the way things are" (p.337). Fink is suggesting that sport favoring male athletes has been the norm for so many years that it is not considered to be an issue and therefore no one questions or tries to change the way sport culture is. This is further explained by McCarthy (2008) who says that cultural influence has positioned sport as being connected to the male identity and meanings masculinity. Boys are rewarded for their ability in sport because it is viewed as reinforcing their gender roles. McCarthy is suggesting that it is natural and accepted for males to participate in sport as this is in line with the male identity of being competitive and strong. McCarthy is therefore suggesting that females participating in sport is not a naturally occurring activity for gender roles and may explain why less people show interest in female sports and less females take part. These gender roles and norms, while going largely unrecognized and contested, may be a large contributor to less females taking part in sports. According to social learning theory, people learn by observing the behaviours of others, and can be impacted by environmental and cognitive factors as well (Kretchmar, 2021). Young women being exposed to males being favoured in sport and being told they perform better

than females may convince them this is true and deter them from participating or for striving for success in sports. To resist this pattern females need to achieve highly in sport, however as has been discussed, they come up against many barriers in doing so. It is less encouraged and supported for females to compete and females face more barriers within their sports experience, therefore it is easy to see why more females drop out.

The result of these feminine and masculine beliefs in combination with the previously discussed barriers is lower participation rates among females in sports. Low participation rates have an impact on the females that do participate in sports still and are noticed by those taking part. One participant observes, *"I think that female sport participation is very low, in my sport there are a very low amount of females continuing to come up in the age groups compared to the males. At trials the pool is full when males trial, but at the females trials and only half of the pool is full."* Another participant supports this by saying, *"but at competitions I have noticed that the number of females is a lot less than the number of males as you get further in the age groups. When you look at the junior swimmers there are a lot more girls than boys. but as you get further up the age groups there are a lot more boys than girls."* One participant even states that she has no one to train with, she says *"I don't have any teammates which is a bit sad."* As will be discussed later in the motivator's themes, socialization and friendships play a big role in keeping females in sports and contributes to their enjoyment of sports. Having no one to train with and only having competitions to see other athletes your age takes away a lot of the enjoyment of sport. Lack of team mates and less competitors to train with and compete against may not only take away from enjoyment, but also take away the opportunity for these athletes to improve, one participant states *"I watch my sister line up on the start line with many other girls of her age (she's 14), and then I look around when I'm lining up (I'm 16), only an age group above, I see far fewer fellow female competitors. When the times are looked at, the younger age group of girls are posting faster times than the age group above. While in the boys' races there's more competitors and they're getting faster and faster."* Disparities in participation rates and improvement in results are suggested to be linked due to females not having others to challenge them and push them to do better.

Motivating factors for sports participation
Theme 1: Sport is fun
When asked what the main reasons the students participate in sport are, the majority reported it is because they find sport fun. There were different elements for each participant that contributed to why they found sport fun, however this response of *"my main motivation*

is having fun" was very common among all participants. The enjoyment of sport is crucial to acknowledge due to one of the key barriers identified being that there is too much pressure and over commitment in sport causing participants to lose their enthusiasm and enjoyment for participating. Therefore, understanding the reasons for why sport is fun and how this could potentially be increased is useful for future changes to sport. Participants expressed picking up new sports when their season for another sport finishes because of their love of sport, one student says, *"at the end of this year, I will be competing in the national weightlifting competition which I am going to for fun and to compete and to enjoy the experience."* This student shows that the result of the competition is not necessarily important to some athletes, they enjoy the overall experience that comes with competing. Other participants expressed they find sport fun for the release that it gives them, this participant states, *"I dance because I enjoy it and I've been dancing since I was little. Personally, for me it's a place to escape and let go and mostly have some fun with no background pressure."* While others enjoy the atmosphere of sports, *"I really enjoy the environment around the sports that I compete in."* For some the love of sport is the game itself, a participant states, "the main motivation is that I enjoy playing so much and it's so fun to me!" and this is their main reason for participating. *"I just love the feeling after a good session and the way running makes me feel so powerful and strong especially when I'm listening to music."* These examples show that for some female sports participants, they are not competing just to win, or to create a career out of it, for some the pure enjoyment of sport is why they participate. This does not mean that they do not enjoy winning, or learning new skills, for many that that is included in the "fun." These factors that contribute to the enjoyment of sport are discussed below.

Subtheme: Enjoy the improvement of skills and competence and competing

A key motivator expressed by most of the participants was improving their skills and competence in sports and seeing the results of their improvement. Research has consistently reported perceived competence as a key factor for enjoying sport participation and remaining committed to sport involvement (McCarthy, 2008) which is supported by the experiences told by the participants. For example, one participant explains *"it gives me satisfaction when my hard work has paid off...learning new skills and mastering them gives me motivation to learn and grow more within the sport."* Learning new skills acts as a motivator for participants as it keeps them engaged in their sports and develops them into a better player or athlete. Self-improvement is important for self-confidence which is particularly important for this age group of young women. Competence levels are supported as being highly important for youth enjoyment of sports. As shown in McCarthy (2008) the Sources of Enjoyment in Youth Sport

56

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Questionnaire found that self-derived perceptions of competence and the excitement of competition emerged as the most important sources of enjoyment among the sample. Increasing different ways to develop new skills may therefore help to keep young women engaged in sports.

For some athletes, seeing how hard they can push themselves and what their limits are is exciting, one participant says *"I enjoy the thrill of pushing my body to my limits"* because these athletes spend so much of their time and energy training and competing, being able to see measurable improvement is rewarding. This participant states that she enjoys seeking out new ways to improve herself, *"if I gain anything from sport, it is the freedom of movement and ability to manipulate my body in different ways. For example, outside of organised sport, I practice handstands and juggling because it makes me feel good and as if I'm constantly improving myself."* Athletes are often people with a lot of drive who want to achieve highly. As we can see from this example, this young athlete feels powerful and in control because sport gives her a positive outlet to try new things and upskill herself. This is similarly expressed by another participant, she says *"I love movement and improving how I can use my body to perform in different sports."* These athletes view their bodies as a tool they can use to achieve the things they want to.

Many of the participants express that they train outside of their sport to aid their performance and to keep up their skills and fitness, one athlete says, *"I try to keep my physical activity levels high so that I can perform well within my sport as I will have confidence in myself and my capabilities to be the best that I can be in a situation."* This shows the dedication these young athletes have to their sports and how much work they are willing to put into it because of how much they enjoy improving. These athletes also measure their improvement through their performance in their competitions, for example this participant says, *"the sense of accomplishment as well that I get through playing sport as that training hard and then seeing it pay off in games."* Testing the new skills they have learnt and seeing them have successful results is beneficial for ensuring the longevity of females in sport as it creates a sense of accomplishment and encourages them to keep practicing and improving. These experiences are in line with McCarthy (2008) who states that in achievement goal theory, individuals strive to demonstrate success through competent actions. Goal orientation theory includes two basic dispositions individuals have to varying degrees in achievement situations: task and ego goal orientation. Task orientation defines success in terms of getting better and trying hard whereas ego orientation defines success in terms of winning and outperforming others. Both of these orientations are expressed as being

important to the participants, however improvement was more highly reported as a priority in this study.

Competing and winning was, however, discussed as contributing to these participants' enjoyment of sports. The enjoyment of competing and winning is shown by this participant, she says, *"to be honest I like to win. My main sport is badminton and for that, I really enjoy the competitive element and kind of competing for myself but winning really motivates me in sport and life."* These young women have comparable competitiveness to their male peers and winning and succeeding is of high importance to them. While it was discussed that pressure and seriousness was a barrier for many females in their sports participation, it is very possible to have purposeful training that is enjoyable. For example, this participant discusses that her trainings are competitive but that she enjoys them, she says, *"I love the rush of adrenaline after swimming. I love the competition and rivalry that happens in training and racing."* This is a good example of training that pushes the athletes without putting them under too much pressure. While winning was suggested to be important to some, it was not as prevalent as improvement was in regard to motivating them to participate.

Theme 2: Friendships and socialising

Among the top factors that contribute to 16-18-year-old females participating in sport is the social aspects. The participants emphasised that a key element to their enjoyment of sports is the friendships they have made and the team culture. Allender et al. (2006) found forming new social networks were motivators for girls to participate, and that young females gave great importance to having people to be active with. This is supported by the participants in this study, one participant states *"I participate in sports because I think that it is a good way to make new friends through competitions and training."* Some students do sports in order to meet people and make new friendships. Team environments provide a good opportunity for close bonds to be made due to the codependence on each other, the trust you need in one another and the support you get from other team members. Teams also see each other multiple times a week and participate in a shared, enjoyable interest. Participants in individual sports can also experience the social benefits of sports, for example one participant says *"this is because of the supportive and celebratory culture there is both in surfing and skateboarding. This is because there is a vibe that is carried through the sport to make people feel welcome and involved."* Sport can provide a sense of community and belonging for many young athletes as they have similar goals and enjoy the same activity.

Some teams provide support for their athletes outside of sports as well. One participant discusses her relationship with her team through Covid-19 lockdown, she says,

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

> *"I believe that my football team is very close-knit, and our team foundations are built on trust and good culture. Everyone knows each other and there aren't separate groups of people within the team itself. We stay connected over the off-season. We were all very well supported through lockdown as well, some of the older players running stretch and recover zoom meetings for anyone to join, the coach did weekly zoom sessions for catch ups and information and he created so many 'cards' with workouts he made for us all to keep us busy and healthy over the lockdown period. There was a lot of communication between the players, and we made football related and not football related challenges for each other to complete. It definitely made it easier to get through the lockdown, I don't know how I would have done it without them all."*

Team environments can provide a lot more than just other people to play sports with. As is shown in this example, teammates can provide a lot of understanding and support for one another as they have many shared experiences.

As discussed earlier in the barriers to participation, many athletes do not have time outside of their sport to socialize and see other friends. However, many of the participants discussed that they consider their sport their social life in many ways as it is a way for them to see their friends. A participant states *"I mostly love the friends that I get out of it, it is always so fun showing up and getting to spend time with them. I also get to meet lots of new people."* This is in line with a study by Howie et al. (2018) who states that the most common reasons children gave for participating in youth sports were because of friends or family. Other evidence suggests gender differences may account for some differences in participation and factors related to it with girls having greater social influences suggesting that social aspects of sport are even more important for females in sport than it is for males. It is important that these young athletes get to see their friends as this is a particularly challenging age, therefore many of these athletes viewing their sport as a way to socialise and spend time with their friends is beneficial. One participant discusses that at her school she has been put in a class with other young athletes who are high performing in their sport, she says *"I'm in a special form class where sports people are together, and we get special lateness and all that stuff for training and competitions and it's really cool being around others who are so dedicated to sport."* She discusses enjoying being around other athletes even from other sports because of their similar interests and priorities. This again shows that young athletes enjoy being around other athletes and socialising with each other as they can understand each other's lifestyles and common goals.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Theme 3: Sports related health benefits

Aside from the enjoyment of improvement, competition and friendships made through sports, the participants discuss the mental and physical health benefits of sports and how this contributes to their motivation to participate in sports. Guddal et al. (2019) states that physically active adolescents and participants in team sports had higher self-esteem and life satisfaction. High levels of physical activity in students compared with a low physical activity level was associated with reduced odds of psychological distress among senior high school students. High physical activity levels are favorably associated with various dimensions of mental health, especially for adolescents in senior high school. The findings of this study are in line with the experiences of the participants in this study who suggest that sport aids their health, for example one participant reports,

> *"my main motivations for participating in sport include the intrinsic motivation of becoming stronger and being healthy. This has always been a motivation for me because to become stronger and healthier in my mind is seen as being powerful and not having to rely on other people. Therefore, I try to keep my physical activity levels high so that I can perform well within my sport as I will have confidence in myself and my capabilities to be the best that I can be in a situation. Therefore, to maintain this healthy lifestyle I like to balance out my sport with just general physical activity and to do a variety of different sports and activities to keep myself entertained and to keep on finding sport and physical activity enjoyable."*

This participant discusses how the physical activity of sport impacts her mental health positively as it makes her stronger mentally and helps her feel more capable, which in turn increases self-esteem.

Gardner et al. (2016) states that sports participation has been linked with a range of positive physical and psychosocial health outcomes. These include reduced rates of overweight and obese individuals, improved social skills and resilience, greater self-esteem, improved emotional regulation, fewer mental health problems, and less problem behaviors. Emotion regulation and improved mental health is important to this participant, she expresses that her physical activity helps to bring her clarity and calmness as she uses her sport as a way to release stress, she says

> *"when I am participating in a sport, I feel that I am able to release some of the previous tension that I may have experienced in the week or in the past few days. This is because it helps me to connect with my own mind and understand the emotions that I am feeling. This is because I feel like I have a connection with the water as I love being in it. If I have had*

> *a bad test at school or have been stressed, the emotions that I feel when I am sitting out in the water or catching an awesome wave make me feel happy and very grateful to be able to experience this feeling."*

The mental health benefits for this participant are expressed as being more important to her than the physical benefits. The mental benefits of sports are particularly interesting to acknowledge in a society where mental illnesses are prevalent, young women using their sports participation as a way to improve mental health could be a beneficial tool for improving the health of young people in New Zealand. Research also shows that sports participants experience less psychological difficulties and greater health-related quality of life (Gardner et al. 2016) which is suggested by another participant who discusses the impacts of sport on her overall well-being, she says, *"personally I find that sport has a major impact on my hauora in a positive way. Whenever I am feeling down, frustrated, angry or upset, participating in my sport takes my mind off things that may negatively affect my hauora and always helps me overcome those barriers."* This again shows that sport is beneficial for mental well-being and can aid in creating a greater quality of life overall because of the varying benefits of sport on health. Another participant discusses that her sports allow her to release tension from her body she says *"I often get very stressed about schoolwork and social situations where I don't feel confident or extroverted which can build up tension in me unknowingly. Being able to participate in sport - both football and strength training - has helped a lot. I hold a lot of tension in my body and I find I am able to release this through participation in sport."*

Sport, however, is not only suggested to improve mental health, but these participants also discuss their relationship with sport and how it impacts their physical health. For example, this participant discusses how sports help her body to become stronger, she says *"I feel a lot better when I'm training. I struggled with weight and muscle gain from 5 till 11 before I started running competitively and that made me feel weak and I had a bit of body insecurity."* It is common to hear about young women using exercise to lose weight, however this participant shows that sport and exercise can contribute to creating a healthy body in other ways such as gaining strength and muscle. This is also discussed by another participant, she states *"I do some running while I'm off swimming or need to get more in shape. I also do weight training in the gym with an Olympic weightlifting coach to build muscle, so I become stronger and fitter to become better at my sport."* It is positive to learn that young female athletes are wanting to become stronger. This is a good example of how the view of women's bodies is changing for the better, in the past, as discussed by Burrows and McCormack

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

(2011) female students emphasised their need to manage their weight and be skinny through participating in sport. This need for being skinny can lead to disordered eating or injury, especially in those who are highly active (Burrows and McCormack, 2011). It is promising that the participants in this study were encouraging strength rather than skinniness in young women. Particularly for athletes, is important for their mental and physical health. Another student states *"by playing sports I have allowed myself to keep fit and strong. Therefore, I am not wanting to be skinny but healthy and strong instead."* This view of the body may be specific to the sports these athletes take part in or could perhaps be common in this socio-economic area due to the food and resources these participants have access to. For example, Burrows and McCormack (2011) study took place at a low decile school with the majority of students being Māori and Pasifika students. In this setting there was high importance placed on weight loss, being skinny, and using sports to control their body image. Many policies are put in place to address childhood obesity and inactivity (Evans, 2006). Policies for weight management being directed at school's positions students' bodies as problematic and places schools in a position to discipline these bodies (Evans, 2006). This is likely what has occurred for participants in Burrows and McCormack and could explain why this group is focused on weight loss.

Subtheme: Positive relationship with food

Continuing from discussing the positive relationship participants in this study have with gaining muscle and strength, the participants' relationship with food and their body image will now be discussed. Lunde and Gattario (2017) found that athletes know the importance of "food as fuel" to help their performance. This was also suggested to be of great importance for many of the athletes in this study. Many of the participants discussed fueling their bodies with a lot of nutritious foods to help their performance in their sports and that they cater the amount they eat to their level of exertion, for example *"I always make sure that I am eating enough foods and nutritious foods. I make sure that I balance what I eat with what exercise or sport I am doing that day."* Fueling their bodies with enough food was important to many of the participants. Another participant explains *"I am not following any diets however I do eat to fuel my body particularly at tournaments or before games."* These athletes are aware that their bodies perform best when they have given themselves the food they need for energy. Some of the participants felt that their sporting participation helped them learn what their bodies need and how much, *"I do find during the season I am eating more but try my best to manage that I am eating the right foods to refuel my body and give me lots of energy. Throughout the years I have been playing sports I have also been educated*

about what foods I should be eating." This suggests that these young athletes have been informed through being in sports environments what is best to be eating. This is consistent with findings by Lunde and Gattario (2017) who state that the sporting environment was described as a context that may be protective against eating restraint, due to the idea of food as being related to performance. They suggest that attitudes within the sporting context, such as eating large amounts of the right food to maximize performance, may permeate into the non-sporting context and influence how the young women dealt with the appearance and dieting culture at school. The athletes in the current study portray how food can be used to benefit performance and that food should not be viewed as something to be feared, but a tool to enhance performance.

Other participants felt that their sporting participation had helped them learn about their bodies more and what it does and does not want, one participant says *"personally, I believe that participation in sport has made me more aware of the foods I eat and what makes me feel good or bad. For example, I have just recently started listening to my body to find out about what different foods do to my body and have figured out that dairy foods - such as yogurt - have been what's causing my acid reflux which has been a problem for a while now."* By using their bodies in different ways and experimenting with foods, these athletes have learnt valuable information about themselves, their bodies, and nutrition. These views of food are, however, coming from a relatively privileged position, these students have access to the food they want and need to perform at their best. Views of food and nutrition may differ for those in other areas. However, not all the participants discussed that sport motivated them to eat more nutritious food, for example one participant says *"I can eat almost anything I want that is unhealthy without thinking about the consequences, and also larger portion sizes. I do believe that when I stop being so physically active that I will view food in a different way and need to think more on if I should eat differently."* While this athlete discusses that they eat whatever they want due to their participation in sport, this is not necessarily a negative thing. For this age group where body image is of such high importance and eating disorders are prevalent, athletes not fixating on what foods they are eating and not restricting their eating is less concerning.

Subtheme: Positive body image

Another benefit of sport participation discussed by the participants is their relationship with their body image. One participant discusses how her relationship with her body has changed, she says *"I think sport influences my view of my body image positively. When I was younger, I wasn't very confident with what I looked like even though I had, and*

still do have, a lovely functioning body that supports me in all my endeavors. But as I've gotten older, I've thankfully grown out of that, and I've realised there's much more prevalent issues out there. Having a healthy functioning body and happy mind is what's actually important. Loving it no matter what it looks like." Through sports this participant has realised that how her body looks is not as important as how her body functions and all it allows her to do. The female body being viewed as functional is suggested to be beneficial for improving body image (Lunde and Gattario, 2017). It is suggested that young women in Western cultures are socialized into viewing their bodies as objects. The sport environment may contribute to creating a more positive body image through encouraging young women to appreciate their bodies for their functionality and what they can do, rather than for their appearance (Lunde and Gattario, 2017). This view is also shared by another participant who through her journey through sport has learnt that more fuel may equate to more muscle and strength, she says,

"I try to be very aware of my body image and ensure I don't have a negative view of myself. I have learnt through sport that there will be some days where I feel great and as if I run the world, however, I try to judge my body image on how good I feel, not what I see in the mirror. Since taking up weightlifting, I have had to change my mindset from 'keeping light is always good for sport' to 'putting on weight will actually make me more successful and aid the manipulation of my body in space' and since this change in mindset I have found a rapid improvement in not only my strength in weightlifting, but my power, explosiveness and speed."

Appreciating her body for what it can do and how it can change instead of trying to be 'skinny' has aided her performance and in turn brought her a new sense of confidence in her body. Lunde and Gattario (2017) state that "one reason it is beneficial for young women to use their bodies within the context of sport is that sport facilitates the development of an identity that integrates both aesthetic and functional views of the body…focusing on body functionality may promote body appreciation" (p.81). Sport and exercise allow athletes to appreciate their bodies for how they function and perform instead of just how they look, a process of which many females may not experience until much later in life or sometimes not at all. One participant expresses that her sport has made her appreciate herself and those around her, she realises that what may be seen as a masculine trait may be a benefit for her sport, she says *"I think that I have a very healthy body image view, I truly do believe that myself and all the girls around me have very beautiful bodies. I believe that if you have more muscly/ masculine arms, that is a part of the benefits of the sport, it makes you more muscly*

in the areas and you may not fit into all of the beauty standards." Many athletes may experience their bodies appearing differently to others due to their training. They may learn that performing well is aided by these features and learn to appreciate what more muscle allows them to do in their sport.

Van Amsterdam et al. (2017) suggests that sports professionals view their physical body as important due to it being an embodiment of their perceived identity. Bodies are a site to show cultural values, and social norms as well as a way to present the self through appearance such as gender, body size, ethnicity, health and ability (Van Amsterdam et al., 2017). The bodies of the participants present these young women as athletes to the outside world, it shows how hard they work, their dedication to their sport, and their strength. Accepting their body for what it can do and what it shows may b Nauright and Broomhall (1994) e contributing to the positive body image of these young women. Support for the functional body being valued is shown by a study by Walseth and Tidslevold (2020) who interviewed 16-18-year old females who were all current or previous athletes. The young women value bodies due to their sport skills and performances. The participants identified elite female athletes' bodies as being a valued body because they could identify with these athletes and appreciated their dedication to training, their discipline and their focus on performance. The participants valued bodies that could perform, suggesting there is a sport discourse in relation to body image which contributes to body's being valued (Walseth and Tidslevold, 2020).

Theme 4: Support
Subtheme: Family support

This theme discusses a factor that is important for retaining young women in sport, family support. McCarthy (2008) suggests that parental involvement is most important among younger males and females and older females. Parental support is shown to be highly important to the participants in this study. As discussed previously, sport can take up a lot of time and involve a lot of travel between different venues and even different cities for tournaments. For many this would not be possible without the support of their parents, for example *"my mum is the most supportive of my surfing because she takes me to many of my competitions and takes me surfing to get in good practice to be able to compete nationally. She waits at the beach for hours and drives many miles."* At this age many of the participants cannot drive and so depend on others to get them to their training and competitions. Therefore, for these athletes to be able to do their sport, they not only need to be committed but their parents need to be too.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

      Gardner (2016) states that parental support can come in many different forms, for example parental support can include tangible support such as financial costs and transport, socio-emotional support such as encouragement and aiding understanding, informational support such as explaining the rules and companionship such as watching sports events. For many families this may mean sacrificing time away from work and other children to allow their child to do their sport. Sport takes up a lot of time and many students are not able to work to earn money, which means their parents need to support them financially in their sport. A participant discusses their parents, she says, *"they help me in many ways with fees and getting me to and from the turfs."* This type of support can require a lot of sacrifice from parents, especially those with other children or who struggle financially. Sports participation for many of these athletes would not be possible without their parents' support but it is important to note this level of support may be specific to these athletes as they live in a moderately high socio-economic area. Participation in sport may be especially difficult for those in large families, who live further away, who do not have parents who are able to transport them, or those in less wealthy areas. In this case, sport becomes a privilege not something that is open to everyone.

      The participants also have parents who are very involved in their sports. One participant reports, *"my parents are a big part of my sailing. They manage many things around my boat, and they help out at the club a lot. This is because sailing requires quite a bit of involvement from parents because of the expenses of boats and the clubs are run by the parents. My parents usually have to help at any regatta being run by our club and they have to help at most club racings."* Involvement to this extent is suggested by this participant to be common and necessary in her sport. This involvement again may not be possible for many families and likely stops many from continuing in the sport. However, for this participant, and others in this study, their family's support encourages them to continue pursuing their love for their sport. Another participant also suggests her parents' support is important, she says, *"my Mum is very involved with my sport. She comes to watch every game I play and even takes time off work to come to my tournaments I go to."* This type of support is not rare to the participants in this study as another athlete states *"they are always wanting to be involved in my sport whether that's just supporting, being a part of management or just asking about my sport."* However, parental support can come in many forms and does not need to be to an extreme extent to encourage participants, one participant says, *"my whole family is always keen to watch my games and competitions which is awesome to have. My mum has always been into gyming and sport and throughout lockdown we worked out*

together and did football tasks assigned to me together." This shows that support from parents can come in many forms. What is needed for support differs between the participants. One participant enjoys that her mum is there to support her but is not overly invested, she says *"my parents support me, but they aren't as intense as other parents which I prefer…My mum takes photos of me and reads her book and buys me treats which is what I want"* this participant suggests that some parents may take their support of their child too far and create more pressure for them. As we can see from these examples, different athletes and different sports require differing amounts of support. These participants' experiences help us to understand why parents being involved in their children's sports at this age is crucial in a lot of circumstances. This may be more so in individual sports (such as surfing, swimming, sailing… compared to hockey, football, netball…) as there is likely less support from the school for these athletes such as coaches, teacher supports, and teammates.

Support for athletes sporting commitments is also encouraged through their families creating a sports focused lifestyle. McCarthy (2008) suggests that parents play a significant role in the socialization and motivation of their children in sport. They have an important role in providing a positive sports experience for their children, especially the child's enjoyment and long-term involvement in sport. Many of the participants discuss growing up in a sporty family where being active and trying new things was encouraged and fostered within the family. Gardner (2016) suggests that "parents represent a key component of the social climate as they play a vital role in early sports participation where they are responsible for introducing children to their chosen sport and providing ongoing support." This athlete for example discusses that sport is an activity that her family often takes part in together, she says

> *"my sister and I are definitely like my mum and dad when it comes to sports. They have always been big into activities and are always on for a good adventure. When we were young, they would organize something and drag us along, and now we're dragging them along. My sister (14 years old) is often than not training with me. My mum sometimes comes to training as well as she is also into surf ski and running. I often wake my dad up at 5:30am to drag him along to swim with me, and he brings us surfing with him."*

This family dynamic makes it easier for athletes to pursue their sports as this lifestyle is what they have been brought up with. Having family members to train and practice with makes staying committed to sport and enjoying it much easier because they have someone who understands their experiences and can train with them. This is supported by Gardner (2016) who states that "parental support has been linked with a range of important psychological and

behavioral outcomes in youth sports. Children who perceive their parents to be more supportive tend to experience greater enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and are more likely to continue participating in sport." This is shown by another participant who says *"my family is really supportive of my participation in my sports. This is because in surfing both my brother and sister are really supportive as my brother loves surfing for fun and my sister is getting into it slowly. This is good as when I am not with my friends I can still surf with my brother."* Whether this involvement is from parents or siblings, having someone to train with, especially in individual sports improves the experience and makes a sport that does not typically have team members, more social and therefore, more enjoyable, encouraging retention of athletes in sport.

Subtheme 2: Coaches support

I have analyzed the importance of social support through friendships and familial support. I will now discuss another important part of the sports experience, coaches. The relationship young females have with their coach can highly influence their experience of their sport. Gardner (2016) states that *"positive coach–athlete relationships represent a key component of the social climate because they have been linked with a number of motivational outcomes including increased motivation and greater persistence in youth sports,"* an example of this is shown by this athlete who discusses that she can confide in her coach, she says *"my relationship with my coach is good because I can tell him things and he will understand. My coach is fairly new, but he can understand me and helps me become a better person/sports person."* Young women have many things going on in their lives that can impact their sporting performance, being able to discuss these factors so the coach knows when to push the athlete or when they are not feeling their best and may not be able to train as hard is crucial. As discussed in the barriers to participation section, too much pressure to perform in sport can impact athletes' enjoyment and willingness to participate. Having a positive relationship with the coach and being able to talk to them if there are any problems occurring is important for ensuring that if athletes are having a hard time, they feel supported rather than pressured to carry on.

Coaches who take the time to understand their athletes, so they feel comfortable with them, are suggested to help the athletes perform better. Gardner (2016) states that high quality coach–athlete relationships are characterized by high perceptions of closeness which includes feelings such as respect, trust, and appreciation, commitment to maintain the relationship, complementarity, and co-orientation on perceptions about shared views and common ground. This participant shows how her closeness with her coach allows her to be a

better athlete, she says *"all of my coaches I have had have always been focused on forming a bond with their team and caring for us all. Because of this I have been really lucky to have coaches that care about me not just as a player but as a person. I find that having a good relationship with my coaches I can feel more comfortable in the team environment, so I am able to perform at my best."* Understanding the athletes and creating training that is specific for them can also help to make sure burnout does not occur. Burnout can occur when young athletes are forced to take on too much at once and often results in injury, sickness or quitting. This is particularly important for young women going through a lot of bodily changes. Acknowledging that young women and men may have different needs and require different training is suggested to be important to these athletes, for example one participant shares, *"my relationship with my coach is great…he cares about women athletes and really cares about young athletes making sure not to push them to hard and let them focus on the school events as well. My coach cares about my wellbeing and lets me take time off when I need to and we have weekly sessions of planning my events and training."* This coach involves the athlete in planning their training and competitions to make sure it is suited to them specifically and that they enjoy what they are doing. This may be more difficult to do within a team sport environment, however keeping lines of communication open with athletes and creating a bond with them can help them to feel comfortable and may allow them to keep participating in their sport around other areas in their lives.

Theme 5: Professional Sport

A number of the participants discussed wanting to continue with their sport to compete at a professional level. Some of the athletes had big goals such as going to the Olympics or playing in the country's top teams. For example, *"I will carry on sailing and hockey for hopefully a long time. I am thinking about doing an Olympic campaign in the future for sailing."* This goal is also shared by another athlete who says *"I just want to feel like my hard work has paid off I want to get to a professional level with sponsors. That just feels so out of reach right now. I'm hoping uni will make it easier to train since I will live close to the track and not in the country where I am now where it's harder to train."* This shows that with the right resources and opportunities available, these young athletes would continue to compete for as long as they can and create a career out of their sport. One athlete discussed that she does not think continuing to compete in New Zealand is her best option due to the limited support for athletes who are also studying, she says "*I aim to swim at the Olympics and medal there along with other international competitions. Once I leave school, I am planning on going to swim for a college/university in the USA as there are far more*

opportunities and they make it much easier to swim alongside studying" this athlete discusses her determination for continuing on in her sport however suggests that improvements need to be made to the New Zealand sports system in order to make it easier for athletes to achieve their goals in sport as well as their academic goals. This same path is also expressed to be of interest to another athlete, she says *" I'm deciding whether I want to try and go for a US scholarship as well when I leave school"* and another athlete who states *"my aim is to hopefully gain a scholarship overseas for my sport, so yes I do see myself continuing after school"* these athletes seek a balance between their sports and studies which universities in America offer. The American school system offers scholarships and financial opportunities for young athletes who perform at a high standard to represent their university in their sport. As discussed in the financial strain theme, many athletes who are competing and studying do not have time to work and their parents must support them financially, scholarships and financial support from the university greatly helps these students to be able to keep pursuing their sport as well as receiving an education and takes the pressure off them and their families. This is an opportunity New Zealand's universities do not commonly offer. The sporting culture at American universities are also highly supportive as money is put into both male and female sports and teams are often housed together to allow athletes to study and train together. Individual sports athletes are also often a part of a team and train together with other athletes in their sport. As discussed previously in the family support section, having others that share your lifestyle and understand your goals helps to motivate athletes to stay with their sport and keep competing.

The access these young athletes have to viewing professional sports teams and individuals on social media is a motivator for them to want to continue to professional level sport. This athlete states for example *"following the silver ferns page and some ANZ teams is really cool to get a little bit of an insight into that level of netball has a positive influence on my view of netball and gives me a bit of motivation to work towards being in a team or just that environment as it's portrayed as hard-working but fun."* Being able to see what their lives could be like if they continue to play through their role models is important for young women. Seeing the daily activities, friendships, training, and lifestyle of these athletes makes young athletes' goals seem more reachable. Being able to view successful athletes training can also help to motivate young athletes in their training. Young athletes often commit a lot of time and effort to their sports can create a sense of community for them. This participant states *"social media has a positive effect on my sport. I see people I idolize post on social media and want to do the same as them. I follow some of the national teams and their*

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

photos/videos inspire me to be better." As is shown from these extracts, witnessing professional athletes' lives and training can help inspire upcoming athletes to continue with their sports.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This section will firstly summarise the findings, discuss how these findings relate to and build on previous literature on experiences of 16-18-year old female high school students sports participation in New Zealand, and then move to limitations and future directions. The main themes identified were separated into barriers to sports participation and motivators for sports participation. The barriers identified from the data were; 1. too much pressure in sport 2. time restraints due to sports participation 3. poor health due to overtraining 4. financial strain and 5. gender inequality in support and recognition. The key motivators found for sports participation include; 1. sport is fun, 2. enjoy the improvement of skills and competence and competing, 3. friendships and socialising 4. sports related health benefits 5. support, and 6. professional sport.

There is little research that has focused on this age group of young females in Aotearoa, New Zealand so this study contributes to the literature by offering new perspectives of young women in regard to health, body image, and weight and sports role. This study highlights the difficulty students face in balancing their academic commitments with their sports and other activities, the important role parents play in their child's sport, and coaching techniques as being highly influential on participants enjoyment of their sport. This study adds to the existing literature by considering both barriers and facilitators for young women playing sport from their perspectives. Often research only focuses on barriers or is quantitative so misses the complexities of issues including the intersections in all areas. Not sure of what you are saying in this research. That further research is needed in these areas? If so just leave it out and address later in future research.

Contributions

Limited research has been conducted on teenage female high school students' participation in sports. This is important to investigate due to the rapid decline in sports participation for females in this age group; Sport New Zealand reported that female sport participation decreases between the ages 15 and 17, and young females participate 1.5 hours less per week than males of the same age group. My study builds on that of Burrows and McCormack (2011), Hohepa et al. (2006) and Burrows and McCormack (2011) who have done research using this age group in New Zealand. These studies are not direct comparisons to the current study due to the differing participants included and the methods used to conduct their studies, however these studies are the most similar available in the literature surrounding female sport participation in teenagers. I will start by comparing my study to the

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

methods and findings of these three studies to show where my study builds on and adds to the existing literature in New Zealand.

Burrows and McCormack (2011) investigated the views of 12–17-year-old females within a low decile school about health and sports participation and drew on ethnographic work in a secondary school to explore some of the ways in which both teachers and students are linking sport and health imperatives in their talk and practice. The results of this study showed that students viewed health and sport as losing weight. Discussion around obesity and diet were highly important in this study. This is one of the few qualitative studies in New Zealand that engaged in conversation with young women about their views of sport, therefore I will compare my findings around body image and health to this study to show the different narratives and ways they contribute to the literature. In my study, discussions surrounding diet were not about weight loss but were based around sports participation having helped the participants in navigating a diet that fuels their performance. Participants stated they eat larger quantities and more nutritious food to aid them in the amount of activity they do. Any discussion about weight was based on being strong, healthy, and capable within their sports. These differences in views were also found regarding health.

Participants in Burrows and McCormack (2011) reported that to improve their health they needed to do more sport to control their weight even if they were already very active. Participants in my study, when asked if sport impacts their health, stated that it helps them regulate their emotions, release stress, improves their mental health, and makes them feel strong and capable within themselves. This again shows that there are different interpretations of health throughout the country and emphasizes how highly important qualitative research is in this area to understand the uniqueness of each group. These differing narratives could be due to changes in the ideal female body type from 2011 to 2021. For example, McComb and Mills (2022) found that while the thin-ideal is still the most commonly shown body type by the media, the fit-ideal has also become more popular in recent years. This body type is part of the "fit-spo" social media movement and presents a relatively thin and toned figure as being the new ideal body. The participants in McComb and Mills (2022) found the thin-muscular body type more attractive than the thin-ideal body type. This shows that acceptance and encouragement of differing body types, including sporty, fit body types is now more common than in previous years. Burrows and McCormack's study was also conducted on a low decile school, which could also explain the disparity in views. The differences in the studies show why it is important to be aware of the context the study is taking place in to understand what is shaping the views of participants and how this may

impact them. When creating policies and programs targeted at young women's sport participation, I recommend understanding the target group in current time and context as this clearly changes the drivers of participation in sport.

The next study also by Burrows and McCormack (2011) drew on ethnographic work with 21 students and staff members at an elite girls' high school in New Zealand. The study investigated the relationship between school culture, teaching methods and the discourses held surrounding physical education and school sport (Burrows and McCormack, 2011). It investigated what impacts the participation of students in sport within and outside of school. This study is most directly related to my study as interviews were conducted with female high school students about their experience of sport. However, they differ in a few ways, for example my study was conducted individually through online interviews. Burrows and McCormack (2011) conducted their interviews in person with pairs of students. The motivators identified in Burrows and McCormack (2011) differ in many accounts to the results of my study. Students and teachers reported participating in sports as a way to contribute to and receive recognition from their school, have fun, and find balance in their lives with their academic endeavors (Burrows and McCormack, 2011). Whilst having fun and using sports to create an outlet to feel more balanced was of high importance to my participants, results differ with regards to academics and contributing to school life. Students in my study expressed feeling a lack of recognition from their school in regard to their sporting success suggesting they were not playing sport to contribute to their school but for other reasons

My study also revealed that students feel balancing sports and academics is difficult and sport in most cases hinders their academics as it takes up too much of their time. These variances in results could be due to a number of differences for example the year in which the studies took place, the levels of the sports and the type of sports being participated in and of course, due to the nature of qualitative studies, the contexts and the individuals involved. The contexts of these studies do differ in that the school involved in Burrows and McCormack's (2011) study is an all-girls school, whereas my study was conducted in a co-ed school. The single sex school may place greater emphasis on involving the females at their school in sports as the success of female sports is the key reflection of their school in sport. The students at this school were also suggested to be highly supportive of the teams at their school by watching each other's competitions. In my study, the participants reported that male teams receive greater support from their peers and the school. Thus the school environment and culture will have an impact on sports participation. . Future studies could investigate whether

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

the sporting experiences of females differ between co-ed schools and all girls schools, and in different types of schools such as private, public, urban and rural settings. This could help identify where male sports are favored over female sports in co-ed schools.

The third study of similarity to my own was that of Hohepa et al. (2006), which explored the views of high school students on various physical activity areas and their ideas to promote physical activity. The method of this study differs from my own as forty-four students from New Zealand high schools with a low decile rating participated in one of nine focus groups divided by gender and ethnicity to complete semi-structured interviews. The benefits of sport found by this study were fun, achievement, and physical related factors. These results are in line with the results of my current study. Lack of peer social support was discussed in both studies as a barrier to sports participation. Other barriers to participation in this study however differ from that of my own. Students in this study identified low accessibility and availability of physical activity opportunities as a barrier as well as distance to their school as a barrier for commuting actively to school. These barriers were not discussed by the participants in my study suggesting that students in different socioeconomic areas may face different barriers to participating in sports. Conducting similar studies in different contexts may produce different results which are useful for creating specific changes to the sports context within these areas.

These three studies, while the most similar to the current study, differ from each other in their methods and results and show that every study that takes place furthers our understanding of the experiences and views of female high school students. These studies add to the literature and the awareness we have for different issues in New Zealand sport in different ways, allowing our knowledge and consequently actions towards creating change to be more effective. While this research has highlighted many barriers to sports participation and problems that need to be changed to enhance sport experiences, equally as many motivators were identified. The present study explored the experiences of one group of female participants in depth, allowing a deeper understanding of the varying factors that make up not only their experiences of their sports, but their lives outside of sport. Very little information has been gathered within the New Zealand context about the surrounding factors of sports participation such as the social, familial, academic and extracurricular elements of 16-18-year old females lives. This study adds to the existing literature and provides a greater depth of knowledge surrounding the issue of lowering participation rates of female high school students in New Zealand. I recommend that to make changes to other areas within

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Auckland or New Zealand, this study is replicated or similarly conducted in these places specifically due to the variances in lifestyles and contexts.

I will now discuss other key contributions of this study to the literature in New Zealand surrounding female high school students' participation in sports. I will mostly focus on the contributions this study provides to the New Zealand literature due to the differences in sporting culture around the world and the focus of this study being to improve sport in New Zealand. These include body image, parental support, importance of coaches, balance between sport and academics, cost of sport, and lastly gendered elements of sport at school such as lack of peer support and a sense of inequality in comparison to male sport One important way this study builds on the existing literature is in regard to females' views of their body image, health, and weight. As already discussed, participants in Burrows and McCormack (2011) placed emphasis on playing sport to lose or maintain a healthy weight. A similar narrative regarding weight was also shared by 16 participants between the ages 18-33 in a study by Cox and Thompson (2000) who, while discussed feeling confident in their bodies in a sporting context, placed high importance on being skinny. Cox and Thompson suggested the thin ideal as being consistent with societal norms for attractiveness and were under pressure to be skinny for both their appearance and their performance. My study offers a differing perspective of how young women view their bodies and body ideals within society. One possible explanation is that because these young females are active and playing sport to a high level (based on hours of training and level of competition). They inhabit a 'good healthy body' already as suggested by Crawford (1980) who places "health" as being the responsibility of the individual and those who maintain a 'healthy' lifestyle (Crawford, 1980). Another possible explanation is that sport is counterbalancing the messaging from other sources of media which are hugely influential for young women. However, as discussed previously, McComb and Mills (2022) found that the fit-ideal body type has become more popular in recent years and more young women are finding a more toned, muscular body type appealing as well as a "thick" body type which is described as including larger things, hips and butts (McComb & Mills, 2022). While this does not explain Why these participants are not concerned with losing weight, it may show that a wider range of body types are now more accepted rather than just a thin body type.

Parental support was also found to be highly important within my study. Students depended on their parents for introduction to sports, transport, guidance, management roles, sideline support and financial support. These factors were regarded as crucial for their participation in their sport in many cases. Little research has been done regarding the role of

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

parents in sport within the New Zealand context. Hohepa et al. (2007) found that low parental support was correlated with low participation rates in sport after school. This study was quantitative and conducted with participants from seven low decile schools in South Auckland. Investigation into the importance of parental support and the reasons why parents are so important for teenagers in sport in New Zealand from a qualitative perspective has limited research. The results from this study are useful therefore for creating a basis of knowledge of the role parents play for female senior sports participants in high school in New Zealand. I recommend future studies investigate parents' importance for a greater range of sports with differing costs and compare parental roles for team sports with individual sports. Strategies to get parents more involved could be useful for increasing participation rates among young females.

Another contribution of this study is that it provides a basis of information for future studies in regard to the role of coaches for teenage female sports participants in New Zealand. Again little qualitative research has been conducted to understand what coaches provide and what is lacking within the athlete-coach relationship for young female athletes. The participants in this study had mixed reviews regarding their coaches and their techniques. Coaches who are seen as having a more personal relationship with their athletes and take their differences into consideration when planning training and competitions are highly regarded. Other athletes reported their coaches are too serious for their age range and they cannot speak to them openly. Being able to speak to coaches openly, especially about female hormones and cycles was suggested to be of importance to elite female athletes in Hook et al. (2021) who reported their hormonal cycles impact their training, competitions, performance and well-being. These participants suggested having a good relationship with their coach and being able to have open communication was of high importance and their coach having a lack of knowledge regarding the female hormonal cycle hinders communication. From this example it is clear that female athletes may have different needs to male athletes, and coaches' relationships with female athletes may therefore need to differ from their relationship with male athletes. What female athletes require and appreciate in a coach may be unique depending on the area, the age group in question, the gender of interest and the sport of interest. However, Gano-Overway (2021) found similar results to that of Hook et al. (2021) and my own study, that female athletes need interpersonal relationships with their coaches. Gano-Overway (2021) conducted a study with 8 female athletes on their experience with their high school coaches and found four coaching techniques that were valued by the athletes, these were; supporting and encouraging athletes, creating community and

connection, balancing care with other aspects of team culture, and providing tough love (Gano-Overway (2021). These results cannot be generalised to represent all female athletes' needs however, these results are in line with the positive attributes of the coaches discussed by participants in my study suggesting females may respond well to these approaches from their coaches. Little qualitative research has been done in New Zealand about coaches and techniques. I recommend future studies focus on the coaching techniques used by coaches to investigate in depth what makes a good coach in the eyes of young female athletes and what they need for success. While the information in my study provides a basis of knowledge on female athletes' views of coaches, reviews of specific coaches is likely not as beneficial for creating a better coaching strategy overall and coaching circumstances may differ greatly from each other.

Another area this study contributes to is the impact of sports participation on schoolwork and other activities. Wilson et al. (2012) identified that during the time period of high school to university in New Zealand, team sports were said to be too time consuming. Prioritising social life and studies over sport was a key barrier for these participants as well as being stressed due to studies. This study builds on the survey information provided by Wilson et al. (2012) by adding qualitative accounts of the pressures of sport participation. The participants in this research made it clear that not only did they not have time for anything other than their sports, their sports also often interfered with their class time, their lunch breaks, their time to do homework, and their concentration levels. This level of detail on how sports impacts students' lives was not collected in Wilson et al. (2012). Understanding that sport does not just take up a lot of time, but how this specifically interacts with individuals' lives allows us to have a better understanding of why this may be such a barrier for so many students and what it is like on a day-to-day basis. Again it is important to acknowledge that the experiences may differ from each other at different schools and in different sports such as Burrows and McCormack's (2011) participants who found sport helps them balance their studies. I recommend future studies investigate specific sports, the level of the player and the number of hours spent participating in sports. I also recommend that club sports and school competitions schedule their events around each other and around times in the school year that are busy to allow students to focus on their school work.

Another recommendation I have for future studies is to investigate the costs of sports in comparison to each other within Auckland and greater New Zealand to understand the financial pressures of sport on families and young people. There is limited research on the costs of sports in New Zealand for this age group and students identified the costs of their

sports as a barrier to their participation in certain events, their performance due to gear costs and the opportunities they have access to. Participants from my study depended on their parents for financial support and mentioned the burden of this as there was little support from the school either in funds or opportunities for fundraising. Families with many children, or who are under financial strain may not be able to keep up with the costs of their children's sports. I believe this barrier is highly significant because the group in this study are of a higher socioeconomic status, suggesting families in other areas may have even more difficulty with these costs. This then positions some sports out of reach of certain schools or socioeconomic groups making school sport (and inadvertently, being active and healthy) a privilege rather than a right for all. For example, Post et al. (2018) found that children from parents of higher income and education reported higher volumes of sport participation and parents with a child participating in club sports had an income of over $100,000 USD per year, suggesting those of lower income may not be able to afford having their children participate in sport. Wilson et al. (2012) identified in their study that costs of sports is a barrier for their participants however investigation into the specific details of the sports was not conducted. The current study provides an insight into specific sports and the financial expectations these have within North shore, Auckland at a decile 10 school. This information however may not be transferable to other regions. Therefore, I recommend future studies investigate the costs of sports in different areas and the participation rates of these sports to determine whether this may be a key contributing factor to low participation rates for females in sports.

Experiences of sport that are specific to being female is another area of sport that may be unique depending on the area, the school, or the sport. There are two aspects associated with this; peer support and a sense of inequality in comparison to male sport. As identified by Hohepa et al. (2007), lack of peer support can lessen the likelihood of individuals participating in sports outside of school hours. Peer support for female athletes and sports was reported to favor males in my study with less females to train with, training that is not adapted to work with female physicality, and social views about the value of sport for females versus males. While a lack of peer support was expressed, this does not appear to have stopped the students in my study from participating. However, participants did suggest that unequal support for female sports compared to male sports was disheartening and this may still act as a barrier to females participating in sports as they are not as greatly celebrated. My study contributes to the literature by building on what lack of peer support means to these participants. Sport NZ (2013) suggests schools play an important role in

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

providing sporting opportunities for young people. "The way a school values, organises and resources sport, and encourages and supports students, are important influences on young women's experiences of sport." (Sport NZ, 2013). The participants in my study expressed concern that male sports receive more attention, support, and benefits than female sports from their school. Considering the statement of Sport NZ on the importance of the school to creating female experiences in sports, the findings in this study could be useful for schools to understand their role and how they can create a greater culture around female sports and events. For example, holding important games or competitions on school grounds could encourage peers to go watch and support their female teams.

A finding from this study that I perceive to be a significant barrier with limited research is the lack of support surrounding individual sports for young women. In 2020 the most popular high school sports were netball, basketball, rugby, volleyball, hockey, touch rugby, athletics, and cricket (NZSSSC, 2020). Of these sports only one is an individual sport and more males took part than females, with 5499 males taking part in athletics in comparison to 4405 females (NZSSSC, 2020). These statistics show that young athletes may be less inclined to take part in individual sports and even less so for females in comparison to males. The participants in this study that participate in individual sports such as swimming, sailing, surf lifesaving and athletics expressed that there are very low participation rates of females within their sports. This impacts the competitors who are left due to having less competition, less people to train with and limited support from their school. Ultimately these athletes are often, according to the participants in this study, left to find their own competitions, and train on their own. The participants in this study from individual sports also suggested they train for a club rather than for the school as the school does not offer coaching in their sport. When it comes to school competitions in the sport there is suggested to be no teacher assigned to looking after the athletes and little communication from the school to these athletes about when their competitions are. This may be disheartening for some sports to receive no attention or recognition from the school while other sports have the whole school's support. This will likely impact the number of participants who are willing to take part in these sports as they have to seek out the sport themselves outside of school which comes with even more barriers such as finding transport. These students also commit a lot of their time to their sport without having the social rewards that team sports provide or without recognition from their school.

Another unique experience of sport from a female perspective was the risk of training individually. Training individually was identified as a problem for one participant who stated

she gets cat-called, beeped at, and stared at when training by herself. Objectification theory provides an understanding of the experiences of women within a sociocultural context that sexually objectives the female body (Steinfeldt et al., 2013). A young woman going for a run on her own and experiencing male harassment due to her appearance shows that objectification is occurring for young women in sports. While this experience was only reported by one participant, I believe this is important to discuss. This participant is the only athlete whose sport specifically requires her to run as her training. This experience would likely be reported more frequently if more participants were from this sport. I make this assumption based on my own personal experiences. This experience contributes to the understanding of what female sports participants may experience uniquely from males and be part of the explanation of why there are less females participating in individual sports. This occurrence would likely still happen if athletes had someone to train with, however there would likely be less fear if they were not on their own. I recommend schools investigate their strategies in promoting individual sports and provide teachers and coaches to support those who are involved in individual sports.

Limitations

While this study offers many beneficial insights into the experiences of 16-18-year-old female high school students in sports, there are some limitations. Firstly, the sample of participants were recruited based on their current participation in sports. While this is useful for investigating the motivating factors for these athletes to participate, due to the high level of commitment shown from these athletes to their sports, the barriers discussed have not impacted their participation to the extent that they have stopped participating. Therefore, as the aim of this study is to investigate the factors that cause participation rates to drop at the age of 16 for females, interviewing female students who have stopped playing sports may be more beneficial for understanding why females drop out of sport. When choosing what group of students to recruit I had to keep in mind that it may be difficult to recruit students who have stopped participating in sports as they may have lost interest in sports and not be willing to be a part of a study about this topic. With the timeframe I had to complete my study I could not spend a lot of time recruiting, however if I were to complete this study again or for future researchers, I would recommend that including past participants of sports in the study could be useful for a different perspective. I would also recommend future studies recruit from a wider group of students. My participants were recruited from two classes within one school, advertising more widely to all classes with 16-18-year old females may provide a greater range of participants participating at varying levels. Three participants were also

recruited from a class for high achieving female athletes in the school, limiting my study to athletes performing at similar levels.

Another limitation of this study is that I included students who participate both for their school and in club sports. This means that the study is discussing sports in both contexts, and I cannot as easily make recommendations for school sports or club sports specifically, but I can make recommendations for sports in Auckland Northshore overall. For future studies it may be useful to interview participants about school sports or about club sports depending on the target audience of the study in order to be able to recommend specific changes they can make to improve female sports experiences to keep them participating. A possible limitation of the method of interviewing participants online is that emotion may have been missed from the discussion as I was unable to see their faces or hear them speaking due to the answers being written. While I believe interviewing this age group online was beneficial to allow them to provide detailed answers with no risk of embarrassment, I may have missed some of the context of the answers by not being able to interpret their emotions in their answers or removing the spontaneous nature of responses that occurs from in person interviews as suggested by Cassell (2015).

The final limitations of the study are in regard to the transferability of the data. The data generated by the participants in this study are very useful for providing information of the context within which the study took place. However, it is important to note that the school this study took place in is a decile 10 school in Auckland, North Shore. The area the school is in is a high socio-economic area and therefore this data may not be transferable to other contexts. For example, the sports included in this study such as sailing may not be offered or attainable for other areas due to sailing typically being known for being a wealthy sport. Other aspects such as the accessibility to some of the sports such as surfing may also differ due to the location of the school compared to more rural areas. The participants in this study are likely not representative of the population as there was little variation in ethnicities and culture, therefore if this study took place in other areas there may have been different results.

Strengths

Despite these limitations this study contributes to the limited existing research on females' participation in sports. This study is useful for building on similar studies in New Zealand such as that of Burrows and McCormack (2011), Burrows and McCormack (2011) and Hohepa et al. (2006). These studies provided a basis of information to create my interview questions off of as I was able to identify where key elements of research could be expanded on or were missing from these studies. These studies were also conducted on

differing groups within New Zealand, these groups differed by socioeconomic status, school decile, cultures and genders that were included. By identifying the key elements within these studies results and comparing these findings to each other, I was able to create questions that built on these areas and would allow my study to be compared and contribute to understanding females' sports experiences.

Finding the areas of these studies that had different results to investigate in my own research allowed comparison of how participants in different contexts experience phenomena within their own reality. Therefore, my study added to the literature to create a deeper understanding of these factors surrounding sports. I also identified gaps in the research of these studies that I felt were relevant and necessary for my research to fill. The main gap that I identified in the past research was that there was little context provided about the participants' lives. I wanted my study to be more personal to understand the participants at a greater level rather than just be focused on their sport because the students' experiences of sport do not exist independently to the other areas of their lives. To understand the answers of the participants better as well as the participants themselves, it was important to ask questions that gave me an insight into their lives and the way they think about them. Using my own age as an advantage, I was able to formulate questions that I felt would capture the key factors that contribute to young women's lives that may impact their sporting experiences. Upon reflection, I would recommend that future research is undertaken by a researcher who shares a similar life experience to the participants in question or consult with someone who does when forming questions to ask. This was a strength of my study and I believe will be a strength to other studies who want to understand the lives of their participants. This is not achieved by simply speaking to the participants, you may need to know what questions to ask that are relevant.

Another strength of this study is that it was conducted online. For the age and schedule of the participants I believe this was a very beneficial method to use to collect the data. While this method is relatively new, O'Connor and Madge (2017) suggest the use of online interviews for research has become more commonly used in the last decade. O'Connor and Madge (2017) suggest email interviews are particularly popular because they allow access to a greater variety of participants and allow participants to answer in their own time. Due to the pandemic that was occurring at the time of the interviews taking place, the participants being able to answer online was very beneficial as well as allowing them to answer around their other commitments and put time and thought into their responses. I believe because the participants were able to take their time with their answers which is less

likely with in person interviews, more detail was added. Bassett et al. (2008) found that teenage participants are quieter and less willing to speak when a tape recorder is present as it formalizes and makes the participants aware of the role dynamic in the situation. Due to asking relatively personal questions regarding body image, friends, eating and family, I wanted to minimize the risk of participants feeling uneasy and holding back information that could be relevant. In spoken interviews some details may also be missed or interpreted differently due to tone for example. The written response of these participants provided great detail and allowed personal information to be shared without embarrassment.

Reflections

Throughout the course of this study some of my opinions on what I thought would be the key barriers and key motivators for participation in sports changed. Based on my own experiences I expected more participants to discuss favoritism within teams from coaches and more politics around game time and team selection. While a few participants mentioned coaches giving unfair game time this was not suggested to be due to parental influence. From my own experiences, parents of players were often put in a managerial role or coaching position of team sports and the majority of these teams had issues occur around favoritism and bias. These issues did appear to be occurring for the participants in this study which suggests parents being put in these roles may have changed. It would be interesting in future studies to investigate the experience of whole teams in high school level team sports to identify if team and coach dynamics are positive for all players. A few participants also mentioned that other participants segregate from other athletes, however this did not seem to cause a problem for them. An area of the research I was pleasantly surprised by was the relationship the participants had with their body image. Body ideals for females appear to have changed over the past five or so years as strength and muscle was highly regarded by the participants as well as eating nutritious foods to fuel their bodies. Nutrition was not highly spoken about when I was participating in school sport, these participants having this knowledge may show a positive step in knowledge about nutrition. An area in the research I was surprised by was the emphasis of participants on the costs of their sports. This appears to be a significant barrier and one that I was not expecting students to speak about as I assumed it was discussed more highly by parents. I was also surprised with the lack of research available in this area.

Conclusion

Female participation rates in sport declines between the ages 15-17 years in New Zealand (Sport NZ, 2020). The aim of this study was to provide insight into why this may be

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

and what can be done to prevent or reduce this participation decrease in the future. To investigate this area, the aim of the study was to further understand the experiences of 16-18-year-old females in sport. I aimed to find out what motivated the participants to participate in sport and what they do not enjoy about their experience of sport. To understand the experience of these participants, it was important to acknowledge the other areas of their lives and what may be important to this group outside of sport as well. From interviewing the participants and analyzing the data, the barriers and motivators for sports participation for these participants were identified. The barriers to sports participation include; too much pressure in sport, time restraints due to sports participation, poor health due to over training, financial strain, and gender inequality in support and recognition. The key motivators for sports participation are; sport is fun, enjoy the improvement of skills and competence and competing, friendships and socialising, sports related health benefits, support, and professional sport. This study added to the limited existing qualitative literature on the experiences and opinion of young women in sports. It offered a differing perspective on many of the concepts surrounding sport and provided a rich account of the lives of 16-18-year-old females. This study allowed comparison of between these contexts results, showing that young women's experiences and views differ depending on their place in the world. This study also contributed to filling in some of the gaps in the existing literature.

In summary, the following are the key contributions this study made to the literature. Firstly, the differing perspectives of young women regarding health, body image, and weight and the role of sport in these areas. Based on this information I recommend development of policies surrounding health for young women that are unique to the target group. Another contribution of this study is the difficulty students face in balancing their academic commitments with the time required for their sports and other activities. Another key factor found by this study was the important role parents play in their child's sport. My study also identified coaching techniques as being highly influential on participants' enjoyment of their sport.Financial strain was identified as a key barrier to participation and development to a higher level in the sport. Lack of peer support for female sports was also identified as a barrier for females as male sports are taken more seriously and regarded more highly. The culture surrounding individual sports is another area of concern. There is only one individual sport in the top seven most popular high school sports in New Zealand and students in the individual sports in this study report having a lack of friends and competitors in their sport which takes away from their enjoyment as well as their improvement. Females report socialization through sport as a main motivator, therefore increasing socialization may help

retain and recruit more athletes to these sports. In conclusion, I recommend more studies take place investigating the areas identified within this study to keep engaging in conversation with young women to provide them with the sporting environment they need.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

References

Ahmad, N., Thorpe, H., Richards, J., & Marfell, A. (2020). Building cultural diversity in sport: A critical dialogue with Muslim women and sports facilitators. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 12*(4), 637-653.

Alamri, A. A. (2013). Participation of Muslim female students in sporting activities in Australian public high schools: The impact of religion. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 33*(3), 418-429.

Allender, S., Cowburn, G., & Foster, C. (2006). Understanding participation in sport and physical activity among children and adults: A review of qualitative studies. *Health Education Research, 21*(6), 826-835.

Bassett, R., Beagan, B. L., Ristovski-Slijepcevic, S., & Chapman, G. W. (2008). Tough Teens: The methodological challenges of interviewing teenagers as research participants. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 23*(2), 119-131.

Bergeron, M. F. (2010). The Young Athlete: Challenges of growth, development, and society. *Current Sports Medicine Reports (American College of Sports Medicine), 9.*

Bonavolanta, V., Cataldi, S., Latino, F., Carvutto, R., De Candia, M., Mastrorilli, G., Messina, G., Patti, A., & Fischetti, F. (2021). The role of parental involvement in youth sport experience: Perceived and desired behavior by male soccer players. *Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(16).* 86-98.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589-597.

Brown, N. & Bowmer, Y. (2019). A comparison of perceived barriers and motivators to physical activity in young and middle-aged women. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal, 27*, 52-59.

Burr, V. (2015). Social Constructionism. In Taylor and Francis Group (Eds.), *Social Constructionism 3rd Edition* (pp. 1-31). Routledge.

Burrows, L. & McCormack, J. (2011). School culture meets sport: A case study in New Zealand. *European Physical Education Review, 17*(3), 301-312.

Burrows, L., & McCormack, J. (2011). Sporting fat: youth sport and the 'obesity epidemic.' *Inclusion and Exclusion Through Youth Sport,*(1).

Canadian Women and Sport.(2020). *The Rally Report: Encouraging action to improve sport for women and girls*. Canadian Women and Sport.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Cassell, C. (2015). *Conducting research interviews for business and management students.* Sage.

Chalabaev, A., Sarrazin, P., Fontayne, P., Boiche, J., & Clement-Guillotin, C. (2013). The influence of sex stereotypes and gender roles on participation and performance in sport and exercise: Review and future directions. *Psychology of sport and exercise, 14*(2). 136-144.

Chowdhury, M. (2014). Interpretivism in Aiding Our Understanding of the Contemporary Social World. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, *4.* 432-438

Australian Sports Commission. (2019). *Aus Play Survey: Participation statistics and trends* https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/kb/sport-participation-in-australia

Cohn, P. J. (1990). An exploratory study on sources of stress and athlete burnout in youth golf. *The Sport Psychologist, 4,* 95-106.

Crawford, R. (1980). Healthism and the medicalisation of everyday life. *International Journal of Health Services, 10*(3), 365-388.

Curtin, J. (2016). Before the 'Black Ferns': Tracing the beginnings of women's rugby in New Zealand. *The International Journal of the History of Sport, 33*(17), 2071-2085.

Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation, 35*(2), 220-222.

Evans, B. (2006). 'I'd Feel Ashamed': Girls bodies and sports participation. Gender, place and culture. *A journal of Feminist Geography, 13*(5), 547-561.

Fink, J. S. (2015). Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: Have we really "come a long way, baby?" *Sport Management Review, 18*(3). 331-342.

Gano-Overway, L. A. (2021). Athletes' narratives of caring coaches who made a difference. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1-21.

Gardner, L. A., Magee, C. A., & Vella, S. A. (2016). Social climate profiles in adolescent sports: Associations with enjoyment and intention to continue. *Journal of Adolescence. 52.* 112-123.

Goncalves, C. E., Carvalho, H., & Light, R. (2011). Keeping women in sport: Positive experiences of six women's experiences growing up and staying with sport in Portugal. *Asian Journal of Exercise and Sports Science, 8*(1), 39- 52.

Guddal, M., Stensland, S., Cvancarova-Smastuen, M., & Johnsen, B. M. (2019). Physical activity and sport participation among adolescents: associations with mental health in

different age groups. Results from the Young-HUNT study: a cross-sectional survey. *Norsk Epidemiologi, 28*(1).

Hohepa, M. M.Sc., Schoefield, G. Ph. D., & Kolt, G. S. Ph. D. (2006). Physical activity: What do high school students think? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 39*, 328-336.

Hohepa, M., Scragg, R., Schofield, G., Kolt, G. S., & Schaaf, D. (2007). Social support for youth physical activity: importance of siblings, parents, friends and school support across a segmented school day. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition, 4*(54).

Höök, M., Bergström, M., Sæther, S. A., & McGawley, K. (2021). "Do elite sport first, get your period back later." Are barriers to communication hindering female athletes?. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(22), 12075.

Howie, E. K., Daniels, B. T., Guagliano, J. M. (2018). Promoting physical activity through youth sports programs: It's social. *American Journal of Lifestyle medicine, 14*(1).

Kantanista, A., Glapa, A., Banio, A., Firek, W., Ingarden, A., Malchrowicz-Mośko, E., Markiewicz, P., Płoszaj, K., Ingarden, M., & MaćKowiak, Z. (2018). Body image of highly trained female athletes engaged in different types of sport. *BioMed Research International*,(4), 1-8.

Kretchmar, J. (2021). Social Learning Theory. *Salem Press Encyclopedia.*

Lunde, C. & Gattario, K. H. (2017). Performance or appearance? Young female sports participants body negotiations. *Body Image, 21*, 81-89.

Maddison. R., Pfaeffli Dale. L., Marsh, S. LeBlanc, G. A., & Oliver, M. (2014). Results from New Zealand's 2014 report card on physical activity for children and youth. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health, 11*(1), 83-87.

Mahadevan, S., & Ali, I. (2016). Is body mass index a good indicator of obesity? *International Journal of Diabetes in Developing Countries, 36,*140-142.

McCarthy, P. J., Jones, M. V., & Clark-Carter, D. (2008). Understanding enjoyment in youth sport: A developmental perspective. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 9*(2), 142-156.

McComb, S. E., & Mills, J. S. (2022). The effect of physical appearance, perfectionism, and social comparison to the thin-, slim-thick, and fit-ideal Instagram imagery on young women's body image. *Body Image, 40.* 165-175.

Nauright, J., & Broomhall, J. (1994). A Woman's Game: The development of Netball and a female sporting culture in New Zealand, 1906-70. *The International Journal of the History of Sport, 11*(3), 387-407.

New Zealand Secondary Schools Sports Council. (2013). *The school sport environment*.
https://sportnz.org.nz/media/2107/rsss-section-one.pdf

O'Connor, H., & Madge, C. (2017). Online interviewing. *The SAGE handbook of online research methods, 2,* 416- 435.

O'Grady, P. (2002). *Relativism.* Routledge.

O'Neill, M., Allen, B., & Calder, A. M. (2013). Pressure to perform: An interview study of Australian high performance school-age athletes perceptions of balancing their school and sporting lives. *Performance enhancement and health, 2*(3), 87-93.

ParticipACTION. (2020). The 2020 ParticipACTION report card on physical activity for children and youth. https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/resources/children-and-youth-report-card

Post, E. G., Green, N. E., Schaefer, D. A., Trigsted, S. M., Brooks, A., McGuine, T. A., Watson, A. M., & Bell, D. R. (2018). Socioeconomic status of parents with children participating on youth club sports teams. *Physical Therapy in Sport, 32,* 126-132.

Rehrer, N. J., Freeman, C., Cassidy, T., Waters, D. L., Barclay, G., & Wilson, N. (2011). Through the eyes of young people: Favorite places for physical activity. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 39*, 492-500.

Roulston, K. & Choi, M. (2018). Qualitative Interviews. In U. Flick (Eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection (pp. 233-249).* SAGE Publication Inc.

School Sport New Zealand NZSSSC (2020). NZSSSC Census - Participation Trends by Sport 2000-2020. Nzsssc.org.nz/home?em=0

School Sport New Zealand. (2020) *NZSSSC Census: Participation Trends by Sport 2000-2020*. https://www.nzsssc.org.nz/Education/School-Sport-NZ-Census-ReportsSiegel, H. (2004). Relativism. In I. Niiniluoto, M. Sintonen and J. Wolenski (Eds.), *Handbook of Epistemology*, (pp.747-780). Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Sport England. (2020). Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2018/19. Sport England. https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-01/active-lives-children-survey-academic-year-18-19.pdf?VersionId=cVMsdnpBoqROViY61iUjpQY6WcRyhtGs

Sport New Zealand. (2019). Active NZ 2018 Participation Report. Wellington: Sport New Zealand. https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1440/published-final-active-nz-main-report-the-new-zealand-participation-survey-2018-12-august-2019.pdf

Steinfeldt, J. A., Zakrajsek, R. A., Bodey, K. J., Middendorf, K. G., & Martin, S. B. (2013). Role of Uniforms in the Body Image of Female College Volleyball Players. *The Counseling Psychologist, 41*(5), 791-819.

Utter, J., Denny, S., Robinson, E., Ameratunga, S. & Milfont, T. L. (2011). Social and Physical Contexts of Schools and Neighborhoods: Associations with Physical Activity Among Young People in New Zealand. *American Journal of Public Health, 101*(9), 1690-1695.

Van Amsterdam, N., Claringbould, I., & Knoppers, A. (2017). Bodies matter: Professional bodies and embodiment in institutional sport contexts. Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 41(4), 335-353.

Walseth, k., & Tidslevold, T. (2020). Young Women's Constructions of Valued Bodies: Healthy, Athletic, Beautiful, and Dieting Bodies. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 55*(6), 703-725.

Wetton, A. R., Radley, R., Jones, A. R., & Pearce, M. S. (2013). What are the Barrier Which Discourage 15-16 Year Old Girls from Participating in Team Sports and How Can We Overcome Them? *Biomed Research International.*

Whatman, C., Walters, S., & Schluter, P. (2018). Coach and Player Attitudes to Injury in Youth Sport. *Physical Therapy in Sport, 32,* 1-6.

Wilson, O. W. A., Walters, S. R., Naylor, M. E., & Clarke, J. C. (2021). Physical Activity and Associated Constraints Following the Transition from Highschool to University. *Recreational Sports Journal, 45*(1), 52-60.

Wong, H., Maddison, R., Olds, T., & Foley, L. (2016). A Great Sporting Nation? Sport Participation in New Zealand Youth. *New Zealand Medical Student Journal,* (23), 18-23.

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview questions

Please answer the questions below in as much detail as possible. Your grammar, spelling and formal writing is not of concern, you can answer as if we are having a conversation. If there are any questions you need clarification on, please feel free to ask me. If there are any questions you are not comfortable answering, please skip it or come back to it. If at any point you would like to change your answers or withdraw from the study, please let me know. Your answers will remain anonymous and only myself and my supervisor will see your answers so please answer as openly as possible. Thank you again for taking part in this study.

1. What are your main motivations for participating in sport?
2. What do you enjoy most about participating in sport?
3. What do you not enjoy or think needs improvement within your sport?
4. What are your relationships like with other athletes/teammates?
5. What is your relationship like with your coach?
6. How does sport interact with and affect your studies?
7. How does sport interact/affect your other extracurricular activities?
8. How does sport interact with your social life and relationships?
9. What does your whanau/family think about your sporting participation and are they involved?
10. Is your culture or religion a factor in your participation in sports, and if so, how?
11. Does your sport participation impact your health and wellbeing and if so, how?
12. Does sport participation have an impact on your diet and relationship with food and if so, how?
13. Do you exercise outside of sport and, if so, how, and why?
14. Does sport participation influence your view of body image, and if so, how?
15. What do you think about the sports uniforms you wear?
16. Does social media influence your view of sport, and if so, how?
17. Do the costs of sport impact your participation, and if so, how?
18. Have you had a sports-related injury and if so, what was this experience like?

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

19. What do you think about female sports participation in comparison to male sports participation?

20. Is there anything else that could become a barrier to your participation in sport?

21. What is your aim for the future within sport? Do you see yourself continuing once you leave school?

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Appendix B: Student information form

My name is Katrina Pfitzinger, I am 23 years old and am an ex (school name removed) student. I am currently doing my master's thesis at Massey University in Psychology. As part of my degree, I am conducting a study with 16–18-year-old female students who participate in sport due to the declining rates of sports participation for females in this age group. My aim is to understand the experiences of females in sport in order to create a more positive experience and environment and retain more females in sport.

The interview is made up of 21 questions around your experience of participating in sport and should take around an hour to complete. We can either chat on google chat, (or another platform you prefer) on an evening of your choice or alternatively, I can send you the questions on a word document for you to answer in your own time and send back to me. I may send you some follow-up questions if there are any answers that are of particular interest or that I would like to clarify what you mean. You can also send me any questions you may have before taking part or if you would like me to clarify a question during the interview. I understand you are very busy students, and I am very grateful to you for offering to take part, so I am more than happy to work around your schedule to make this possible. If there are any questions you would like to skip that is fine and if at any point you decide you do not want to take part that is also fine. Your answers and name will remain completely anonymous when being published and any names given as well as the school will also remain anonymous. Only myself and my supervisor will see your name. You are also allowed to change or expand on your answers for two weeks after you take part.

To take part you will need to fill in a consent form that I will email to you and then we can arrange when you would like to take part. To thank you for your time I will be giving your teacher a $20 Westfield voucher to pass on to you.

Thank you very much for considering taking part in my research, I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

Katrina Pfitzinger

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

School of Psychology

Massey University

Private Bag 102-904

North Shore

Auckland 0745

Tel +64 9 414 0800 ext 43116

Fax +64 9 441 8157

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

> 22. I agree/do not agree to take part in a Google teams/classroom chat interview about my sport participation experience.
>
> 23. I wish/do not wish to have my Google teams/classroom chat interview returned to me.
>
> 24. I agree/do not agree to have data placed in an official archive.
>
> 25. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

Experiences surrounding sports participation for 16–18-year-old female students

I _____ [print full name] hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics
Committee: Northern, Application NOR 21/26. If you have any concerns about the conduct
of this research, please contact Dr Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics
Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800, x 43347, email
humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.