

# **‘I Hate Physical Education’; an analysis of Girls' Experiences throughout their School Life**

## **Abstract**

The objectives of this study were two-fold: to analyse the perceptions of girls who have negative experiences of Physical Education (PE) and to compare this experience with their families' perspectives on the emotional implications of this in their daily lives. Seven girls in the final year of compulsory secondary education in Spain participated in the study. These participants were selected according to the criterion of having had negative experiences in PE classes. Their families also participated, specifically seven mothers and four fathers. A qualitative methodology was used, with interviews, personal diaries and discussion groups being the instruments used to collect data. There were three categories of results: a) the role that students assume in PE; b) motivation towards PE and c) frustrating experiences of PE. The girls expressed frustration at the impossibility of passing certain sports tests, referring to contempt, and underestimation, by both their peers and teachers. The subjects were clear that the fact that they were girls clearly undermined them in PE classes. The families told of how difficult it had been at times to live with this situation throughout the girls' school lives. This manuscript contributes to the existing literature on the subject, since, although gender has been addressed in terms of the experiences of girls in PE classes, this has not been complemented with the views of students' families.

**Keywords:** physical education; gender; motivation; fears and insecurities

## **Introduction**

One of the school subjects likely to incite contrasting points of views as to its purposes is undoubtedly physical education (PE). For decades, various approaches have generated, among professionals, a diversity of debates (Petrie, 2016). However, no general agreement has been reached on what the pedagogical use of the body should be in an educational context. There are approaches that are more focused on the dialogical,

affective and social experiences of the student, while others are structured around motor skills and sports performance (Özkara, 2018). Starting from the premise that body identity is closely linked to emotional identity, experiences of PE will have direct consequences on the psycho-evolutionary development of each student (Simonton and Garn, 2019). Students' development intersects with theories of gender; even today, the androcentric vision that surrounds sports culture may cause girls to feel compelled to play certain roles in the classroom (Oliver and Kirk 2016). A more élitist vision still prevails, where those who are skilled in particular ways stand out, getting the praise of both their teacher and their classmates (Williams and Weiss, 2018). Such students usually have a quite defined prototype: male, heterosexual and socially accepted (Authors, 2020). It is therefore worth reflecting on the inclusive role that PE classes can play in the formation of identity.

The focus here is on those students who do not achieve success, expressing experiences of frustration in their daily lives and in particular of PE. This is reflected in actions that are part of the hidden curriculum, and that go unnoticed in daily life (Authors, 2019). Certain daily activities including the actions of teachers, which are normalized by students and teachers alike, tend to discriminate against girls (Butler-Barnes and Inniss-Thompson, 2020). This can be seen in a variety of examples related to the implementation of exercise, teaching equipment or even the clothing itself. Associating strength with boys and flexibility with girls is only one example that suggests the hegemonic character of PE classes. Other examples can be seen in the association of lower weight medicine balls, lower height volleyball nets or smaller handballs for girls. The perceived physical power of boys can provoke an acceptance by girls that they have an in-built fragility; bodily, social and emotional, and this has repercussions on their identity and health (Clark, 2018). PE classes intensify the social actions and gestures characteristic of a given culture. It is essential to educate with, and for, the body with gender identity in mind, since girls' self-

esteem and self-concept can be adversely affected by poor experiences in educational contexts (Hill, 2015).

Although certain changes in attitude regarding gender can be observed in recent years in PE (Suzanne, Gray and Camacho-Miñano, 2020), there is still a long way to go to eradicate the micromachisms existent in society. There are many stereotypes inherent in the concept of corporeality, questioning and assuming sexualized attributes and creating biases according to the type of body that women have: muscular, thin, white, black... (Mennesson and Clément, 2003). In the face of this, PE professionals have to position themselves in a reflexive and critical way, using corporeal education, but also re-education. It is also essential that students themselves be committed to true inclusion, being aware of those pupils who may be having a hard time simply because they belong to a particular gender (Jaeger et al. 2019). Each motor approach proposed by the teacher should be a product of insightful reflection, in order to establish behaviours in the classroom that are unaffected by conscious or unconscious discrimination. Approaching PE from the perspective of corporeal re-education, starting from the basic premise of corporeal acceptance, regardless of gender or body type would seem to be a sound starting point for this. To this end, it is necessary to bridge the gap between theoretical sophistication and lived school experience (Scraton, 2018). The female body has been the object of widespread media scrutiny ((Puchner, Markowitz and Hedley, 2015; Steyer, 2014); subjecting women to a variety of social pressures. An example of this is the anxiety that some girls suffer during PE examinations (Danthony, Mascret and Cury, 2020). These exams, within the Spanish context, are usually based on physical tests, normally on an individual basis, where the student has to demonstrate his/her motor skills. The gender inequality present in physical education classes often means that girls are forced to demonstrate their

'strength' (Cameron and Humbert, 2020). It is a priority that schools employ an open and reflective pedagogical perspective, democratizing bodies and guaranteeing the freedom of students, regardless of gender. For PE to be democratized, effective equity between men and women and developing codes of good practice for teachers to use are key (Aronson and Laughter, 2020). Childhood is an ideal time to generate a solid base of critical awareness of discriminatory practices as well as to develop the transferable skills required for the construction of a more just, critical and equitable society. Here, the concept of 'effective equity' refers to establishing educational processes that take the form of practices in which learning is the objective; regardless of gender identity (or any other social category).

The objectives of this study were (a) to analyse the perceptions of girls whose experience of PE had been frustrating and negative and (b) to contrast this with their families' experience of this in their daily lives. This manuscript makes a contribution to the existing literature on the subject, since, although gender has been addressed in terms of the experiences of girls in PE classes (Owen et al., 2019; Ropers-Huilman, Winters and Hakkola, 2016; Suzanne, Gray and Camacho-Miñano, 2020), this has not been complemented with the views of students' families on the impact on girls' lives.

### **The difficulties of being a girl in PE**

Being a girl in PE is not always straightforward, especially where there is a negative social climate among the students (Butler-Barnes and Inniss-Thompson, 2020) and it is important to recognise that many girls enjoy PE. While there are usually no group problems at the primary school stage, due in part to the recreational component of classes for young children, at the secondary school stage this situation changes substantially (Authors, 2019). Hormonal changes are significant affecting different areas of life such as the psychological, affective and social. These changes occur more quickly and more

intensely in girls, often generating a lack of confidence (Bukowski et al. 2019). These changes are acutely felt in the physical and sporting spheres (Devine, 2018). Although motor skills may seem to be an ideal tool for generating confidence and health, if these are not approached from a pedagogical perspective they can become an agent of discrimination (Corbin, Kulinna and Yu, 2020). This is directly related to the complexities of ensuring gender inclusion as well as the prevailing hierarchies related to gender (Shokrim and Moussa, 2015). School is an ideal place to raise awareness among young people of hierarchical gender barrier because students can then reproduce practices that are more egalitarian in their own futures. In the case of PE, classes are still mediated by patterns of masculinities, and it is essential that teachers work on processes based on co-education and joint reflection (Kastrup and Kleindienst-Cachay, 2016). With regard to competitive sport, considerable progress has been made in recent years, with greater visibility of women's sport (though this is still low), both in terms of global media coverage and in terms of equal pay (such as in tennis).

It is common for the last years of compulsory education to be characterized by a social hierarchy of acceptance among students. This hierarchy delimits who are the most and least popular students (Butler-Barnes and Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Their tastes, ways of dressing and level of rebelliousness towards adults clearly influence peer acceptance (Tamm, Kasearu, Tulviste and Trommsdorff, 2018). Among girls, research indicates that they seek the acceptance of their peers and that their self-concept and self-esteem are vulnerable (Batsiou, Bournoudi, Antoniou and Tokmakidis, 2020). Similarly there is peer pressure on boys who do not meet the masculine ideal within physical education contexts (Garrett and Wrench, 2018). Some of the causes cited for this are the particular social and media pressures that exist (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac and Rich, 2019). Many of these focus on obtaining the ideal body according to established beauty canons: a fit,

muscularly defined body, absent of fat and not pale. In addition, social networks exacerbate this situation, using famous celebrities who, with millions of teenage followers, are shown daily in videos with tight clothes and the desired body. This social desirability restricts freedoms about how individuals want to live in relation to their bodies (Clark, 2018).

Another difficulty that girls encounter in PE is the “deportivization” that still prevails in the classroom today. This term refers to the treatment of *competitive* sport as the most ‘taught’ content of physical education classes. In respect of sports, normally it is the most conventional ones that are taught in schools, with football being one of the most recurrent (Pill, Penney, Dawn and Karen, 2012). The social vision of football is still too androcentric, something that is usually reflected in PE, with boys leading the activity, while girls play much more isolated and passive roles (McSharry, 2017; Martínez-García and Rodríguez-Menéndez, 2020). Playing more passive roles can lead to girls to feel dispensable within PE, remaining in the background, subordinated to the success of boys. The types of content taught in PE are clearly biased according to gender, with expressive and rhythmic activities being those associated with females (Oliver and Kirk 2016). In fact, when a girl practices a sport that is considered "male" it is common for her sexual orientation to be questioned (Suzanne, Gray and Camacho-Miñano, 2020). This links directly to the types of derogatory comments that girls in PE may experience, relating to poor sporting skill, their physical characteristics or their level of emotional involvement. It is common for the most voracious criticism to come from girls themselves, creating internal, ego-based tensions about who is most accepted within the group, especially in relation to their acceptability to boys (Mishna et al. 2020).

The methodological approach employed by the teacher is fundamental for the equity of gender in PE to become a reality. Teachers still perpetuate, often in a

subconscious way, the military and highly masculinized legacy that has characterized the subject since its origins (Webb and Macdonald, 2007). This often results in the assessment of physiological and sporting parameters above others, which too often results in girls being left in the background. If motor skills, approached from an inclusive and pedagogical perspective, are the most relevant tool for learning, we must bear in mind the need for both girls and boys to have positive experiences in PE (Owen et al., 2019).

In recent years, there have been a number of developments in relation to gender and sports practice. Girls have experienced higher levels of engagement with sports, which can increase their well-being and their physical condition (Wallace, Buchan and Sculthorpe, 2020). In the professional field, they have become much more visible, enjoying greater recognition (still far from that of men) (Ashbolt, O'Flynn and Wright, 2018). This has made the complexities of gender imbalances more transparent and schools can provide the resources and practical tools to challenge this (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Regardless of the need for the school curriculum to be fully inclusive, PE has to be approached with intentional gender pedagogy. The reflection of PE teachers on their subject and how to deliver it should be associated with principles derived from consolidated gender theory; applying feminist protocols based on social justice (Davis and Nicaise, 2011). For PE classes the goal of equity might be met through, equality of opportunities to success (regardless of gender identity); for example, in the way in which groups or teams are constituted, the typology of curriculum content, the organisation of spaces and the balance of competitive and non-competitive activities.

In the case of the Spanish context, PE is compulsory throughout the education system (ages 6 to 16). From the ages of 3 to 6, it is optional and referred to as psychomotor skills. PE is divided into a variety of content blocks: games and sports activities, motor skills, physical condition and health, body expression and physical activities in the natural

environment. At primary level, the content is more related to play and body discovery, while at the secondary level, physical condition and sports have a greater curricular currency. The main objectives of the subject are to promote physical activity and sport, as well as on the acquisition of healthy habits. Although the curriculum mentions gender within its general educational principles, educational policies lack inclusive methodologies and practices for the classroom. These principles are based only on general statements related to equality in the classroom; affection between children and inclusion, but no specific actions and practices are currently in place.

## **Material and Methods**

### ***Participants***

Seven girls who were in the last year of compulsory education participated in this project. All of them belonged to five schools in a Spanish city. None of the participants knew each other. They were between 15 and 16 years old. These girls were selected according to the criteria of having had continuous negative experiences of PE throughout their school life. The participants were chosen based on advice from PE teachers who had taught the participants in other school years. This was done to ensure that the effect of the girls' experience of a particular teacher would be limited in respect of their current experiences of the subject. The participants then indicated their availability to take part in all the stages of the research. Their families also participated, specifically seven mothers and four fathers. They wanted to be part of the research, on a voluntary basis, in order to give voice to the frustrations experienced by their daughters, and how these directly affected the family. The five schools in which the participants had studied were public schools (funded by the state), where PE was a compulsory subject. All the families were Spanish with both parents employed; although no specific further demographic data was sought. All of



the girls were white and heterosexual. The research tried to take into account the experiences that the girls had had in physical education throughout their schooling (ten years). They had been taught by a variety of teachers during those years, so they had received a mixed experience of PE based on each teachers' preference.

### ***Instruments***

Three different instruments were used for the collection of information. The questions that make up each of the instruments used have been structured on the basis of the three sections of the study, obtaining greater specificity of data (Johnson, Bergren and Westbrook, 2012).

*Interviews with the girls:* a semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the girls (Table 1). Questions related to their relationships with tclassmates in PE, their predisposition and motivation towards the subject and their frustrating experiences of PE were also covered. These interviews are intended to deepen the scope of the study, analyzing the girls' lived experiences of PE classes. In addition, its open and personal character, allows an approach to the subjects from a wide and reflexive perspective (Nowak and Haynes, 2018).

*Reflective personal journals:* This instrument was used by each of the girls during the third school term of the 2018-2019 academic year. Their main objective was to record their experiences in PE on a weekly basis. The diary had a semi-structured character, with three sections to be filled in (table 2): a) acceptance by, and relationships with, classmates; b) level of motivation to attend the class; c) frustrating experiences in class. These sections are directly related to the categories of analysis that structure the results of the study. The use of journals is ideal for qualitative studies, in order to guarantee the involvement of the participants from an introspective perspective (Gut, Wan, Beam and

Burgess, 2016).

*Family discussion groups:* This was developed with seven mothers and four fathers at the end of the school year, using a semi-structured script to collect the information (table 3). The technique used invited participatory debate, with the researcher taking on the role of moderator (Theadore, Laurent, Kovarsky and Weiss, 2011). This allowed the information on each of the issues to be collected and then submitted to triangulation, purification and saturation techniques, along with the rest of the data obtained through the other instruments (Tortorella, Viana and Fettermann, 2015).

### ***Design and procedure***

The study employs a phenomenological retrospective design, based on the understanding of educational phenomena from the analysis of the participants' discourses (Mertens, 2010). Prior to the project's commencement, permission for a project involving human, non-adult, participants was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the principal researcher. The participants were clearly informed about the purposes of the research in order to give informed consent. They were encouraged to answer the questions as truthfully as possible and were assured of the confidentiality of the data.

The research was structured into five distinct phases:

*Phase 1. Structuring of the study and planning the intervention schedule:* The usefulness and contribution of the research in relation to existing literature on the subject was assessed. The participating girls and their families were contacted through their PE teachers. The intervention protocol was planned, between the months of April and June 2020. This intervention protocol refers to the planning and timing of the investigation.

*Phase 2. Elaboration and follow up of the personal reflective journals:* The scripts

for the reflective journals were prepared and the participating girls were told in detail how and in what way to complete them. The approach taken was to guide the girls as to what type of material they might want to include in their diaries and how to structure the diary rather than to give information which might create bias or alter their stories. Both parents and their PE teachers were informed of their use. One of the researchers remained in contact with the girls throughout the process through regular video calls. These were used for counselling in filling out the diaries effectively.

*Phase 3. Elaboration of the interviews with the students:* At the end of the third school term, the individual interviews with the students were carried out. These interviews were telematic, through video calls via Skype. They lasted approximately 30 minutes each, being recorded for later viewing. The longest interview lasted 38 minutes and the shortest 26 minutes. All of them were carried out within a week of one another. Each of the questions was posed in an open way, allowing each participant to respond in a climate of trust and confidentiality (Windsong, 2018).

*Phase 4. Elaboration of the discussion group with the families:* This was carried out as a seminar of the faculty of one of the researchers. It lasted 90 minutes and from the beginning parents were told of the importance of their answers for the research. They were reminded of the importance of responding honestly. The session was recorded on video for a better recapitulation of the data after viewing. The anonymity of their answers was guaranteed. We sought to deepen the theme of the study in order to reach a reflexive conversation in a relaxed atmosphere (Anyan, 2013).

*Phase 5. Analysis of the totality of data by the researchers:* in this phase all the data obtained were transcribed into the text analysis computer program (WeftQDA). In addition, an in-depth reflection was made in relation to the aims of the study, the

procedure carried out and its suitability for the objectives of the study. With this further reflection, the researchers wanted to cross-check, and be satisfied, that the results obtained related to the objectives of the research.

### ***Analysis used***

A qualitative approach was used to discover what the girls' experiences of PE were and to see how these affected their day-to-day and family life. In order to do so, it was essential that the researchers examined the participants' own reality, understanding first-hand their particular contexts (Halquist and Musanti, 2010). The main source of data was the assessments and experiences of those involved in the process, which allows for reflection on the study phenomenon from an interpretative approach (Carrión-Martínez and De la Rosa, 2013). The information obtained was triangulated between the data collection instruments, which allows all the variables of the study to be addressed in a multidimensional way (Oliver-Hoyo and Allen, 2006). The saturation of data was achieved through the reiteration of recurrent ideas obtained through the various data collection instruments.

In order to guarantee the reliability, transferability and credibility of the results, the most significant text extracts were coded in each of the instruments, using cross-matching patterns (Saldaña, 2009). This takes into account the most reiterative and coinciding features; valuing their relevance and contribution to the objectives of the research. The information was grouped by thematic axes in the categories generated by means of a selective, open and axial coding.

### ***Generation of categories and their categorization***

Once the data from each instrument used was transcribed, it was transferred into the Weft

QDA computer and analysis program. Through the saturation of matching texts and ideas and the treatment of thematic axes, the information was grouped into the three initial categories: a) social acceptability in PE classes, b) types of motivation towards PE classes; c) frustrating experiences in PE. These categories are common to all three data collection instruments and are used to structure the analysis of the results. They are related to the object of study according to the contexts studied, thus respecting the criteria of specificity and coherence that any qualitative research must have (Trainor and Graue, 2014). Within each category, different thematic axes are established, linked to the information collected in the data collection instruments.

- *Social acceptability in PE classes*: Aspects related to socialization within the classroom are addressed, such as the level of interaction with peers, the degree of perceived acceptance, and the level of trust and friendship generated with others.
- *Type of motivation towards PE classes*: The study analyzes information related to the predisposition that the girls have towards PE, focusing on variables such as boredom, fun, perception of achievement and satisfaction with what they have learned.
- *Frustrating experiences in PE*: The different experiences of frustration that the girls participating in PE have had are analyzed. The focus is on emotional, social, motor and affective areas.

### ***Coding of data collection instruments***

Different acronyms are used to identify the text extracts with the data collection instrument from which they come. In relation to the interviews with the girls, (EC1) is used for girl one, (EC2) for girl two... and so on. The same criterion is followed for the

personal reflective journals, using the acronym (DR1) (DR2...). Finally, for text extracts relating to discussion groups with families, the acronym (GDF) is used.

## **Results**

All the information extracted from the three data collection instruments is grouped into the three categories of the study. Through the analysis of crossed patterns, the number of resulting literal text extracts is presented, showing the most significant and coinciding ones.

### ***Social acceptability in PE classes: (224 text extracts)***

You can see how the girls reflect in their interviews how little they feel accepted by their classmates in PE. They admit to taking refuge in those classmates who also show a lack of social leadership:

"For me, PE is a nightmare. I feel stuck, with many fears and insecurities [...] I try to keep a low profile so that my classmates don't notice me". (EC2). "I have always been afraid that I will be made an example of in front of others, because I know that I will not be able to do it and they will laugh at me" (EC6). "Many times I have felt totally excluded from classes, and I have taken refuge in friends who are also bad at PE" (EC1).

Reflective journals indicate how their lack of social acceptance is predetermined by their low perception of their own motor competence:

"PE has always shown me that I am not capable of doing what is proposed to us" (DR7). "I've always been a fat girl, and that has certainly hurt me in PE" (DR4). "The most athletic girls are the most successful among the others, because they can do the sport tests more easily" (DR2). "Why should I try to do something I'm not going to be able to do? It's frustrating, and it hurts to see how others always look at you as different" (DR1).

Families reflect that their daughters' lack of competence in PE affects them directly in

their daily lives, both at home and among their friends:

"It is very frustrating for us to see how our daughter always comes home from PE frustrated". "She comes home sad, down, and it directly affects her relationship with us". "It is a situation that also affects her socially with her groups of friends [...]. Sometimes she says she doesn't feel like talking or going for a walk with her friends" (GDF).

Families recognize that this is a very complicated situation for them and one they do not know how to deal with:

"We don't know what to do, we've tried everything. We have tried talking to her after class, but she says she would rather be alone". "We've also talked to physical education teachers a few times, but it hasn't had much effect either". "Perhaps the best thing for her is for physical education to end as soon as possible" (GDF).

### ***Type of motivation towards PE classes: (257 text extracts)***

In their interviews, the girls expressed how little motivation they have for PE, expressing their level of anxiety and discomfort from the beginning of the day on which PE occurs:

"Some nights I sleep badly thinking that I have PE the next day" (EC3). "Sometimes I feel anxiety, knowing that PE is coming" (EC7). "Honestly, I often make excuses to the teacher not to do the class, saying that my stomach hurts, my head hurts [...]" (EC5).

They claim that the fact of being a girl is detrimental to them when they are compared with boys, something that makes them even less motivated towards classes:

"When you are a child, even if you are not good at PE, you always have a better chance of success, your mistakes are less penalized" (EC1). "I sometimes feel more disadvantaged because I am a girl. Your body sometimes changes and you are not able to control it as you would like to [...] This is demotivating, since neither the teacher nor your classmates understand it" (EC4).

The reflective journals indicate how little fun PE are for the participants since the girls are more concerned with not making mistakes rather than with doing the activities themselves:

"PE bores me, because what is done does not amuse me or make me feel good" (DR2). "Sometimes the pressure is so great that I get blocked and I get paralyzed". "When I'm doing something or being part of a team, I try to make as few mistakes as possible ... [since] Many times I've heard negative comments when I make a mistake" (DR6). "Some games can be fun, but when I fail ... I fall apart, I think, [oh no, not] again". "I feel like I'm damaging the group's performance" (DR7).

For their part, the families explain that their daughters' lack of motivation relates to the dissatisfaction they have with their own bodies. This makes them think they are less skilled than they really are. They suggest that PE teachers should pay much more attention to these emotional aspects, stressing that men are less sensitive:

"Our daughter has many complexes about her body [...]. We tell her that they are not true, that she should not talk nonsense, but it is complicated [...]" "She feels clumsy and incapable when faced with any kind of sport, and that's why PE discourages her". "Some PE teachers have been more tactful and sensitive to our daughter's situation, others, however, have not [...]. Female teachers tend to be more concerned about this type of situation" (GDF).

The unmotivated feelings of their daughters provokes a critical view of the families on the subject of physical education:

"Teachers should be more concerned that everyone is integrated into their classes". "It's not fair that girls have the experiences that our daughters have had". "This discriminatory approach needs to be changed" (GDF).

### ***Frustrating experiences in PE: (279 text extracts).***

In their interviews, the girls remark on how they have suffered a variety of frustrating experiences of PE throughout their school lives. These focus on derogatory comments



and acts of contempt, even from their own friends:

"It has happened to me on several occasions that I have been chosen last in the groups [...] It is a very negative feeling ... to see clearly that you do not matter to them" (EC2). "It is not that I have been insulted directly to my face, but I have heard more than one rejection comment calling me fat [...] I know that my body is not perfect, but at least I deserve some respect" (EC6). "The worst thing for me is that even my friends sometimes preferred to put themselves in other groups than the one I was in" (EC1).

Reflective journals indicate the pressure that girls suffer on a daily basis because of the shame they feel towards their bodies:

"Sometimes I have trained like crazy at home to try to pass some physical or sporting test [...]. It generates a lot of anxiety because you know it's still going to be impossible to get through it" (DR5). "Many times I've blocked myself from comments made in class. Sometimes at home I've even prepared responses to possible attacks" (DR2). "That pressure I've felt many times has made me different from the way I really am" (DR4).

In line with this, families reflect how these bad experiences in PE have changed their daughters' behaviors in a variety of situations:

"When she has bad moments in PE she gets more irascible, she answers back more [...] It hurts me because I know she's having a bad time and we don't know how to act". "In our case, it's different [...]. She becomes more introverted and doesn't want to share what's going on with her" (GDF).

Families fear that these negative experiences their daughters have had will have enduring effects throughout their lives:

"Sometimes I'm afraid that the frustration my daughter feels is going to have a negative impact on her throughout her life". "There are many negative experiences that I do not know if she will be able to forget over time [...]. Maybe she will be affected forever" (GDF).

## **Discussion**

The objectives of this study were two-fold: to analyse the perceptions of girls who have negative experiences of Physical Education (PE) and to compare these with their families' perspectives on the emotional implications of these experiences in their daily lives. The results have shown how their experiences in PE directly affect the social, motivational and behavioral levels of their lives. The families suggest the direct impact of negative experiences of PE in their daily life at home; affecting both their way of being and their way of relating to others.

In relation to the first category of analysis regarding the role that students might assume during PE, the girls have clearly stated how little they feel accepted by others, as well as the need to feel the support of peers who also lack confidence. Authors such as Devine (2016) highlight how often women feel pressure mechanisms in cultural systems where androcentrism is present. In fact, in adolescence, girls' self-concept tends to be lower than that of boys, especially in variables such as the perception of body image (Bukowski et al. 2019). The results of the present study suggest that the girls' lack of skill in PE is one of the main conditions of rejection by others. This social desirability towards the "ideal" body must be regulated and worked on through positive body experiences that derive from collective achievements. Kerner, Kirk, De Meester and Haerens (2019) indicate that students who are more satisfied with their bodies perceive PE as more stimulating. The families participating in this study have highlighted how the social rejection experienced in PE transcends into girls' daily lives, negatively impacting both at home and in their usual circle of friends. They also recognize that this situation is beyond their control since their daughters frequently prefer not to share their feelings. Low levels of self-esteem and perceptions of incompetence have been directly correlated with variables such as frustration and depressive tendencies, especially in girls (Isomaa et al., 2013). In addition, adolescence is characterized by the search for personality

reinforcement, seeking the approval of peers and expressing disagreement with parents and adults (Cicognani and Zani, 2010). This connects with the idea of the need for education curricula to be structured through theories of gender, articulating education strategies that avoid gender discrimination (Aronson and Laughter, 2020). For any individual school the fundamental principles of social justice might be promoted from a transversal perspective, starting with the difficulties in breaking down the traditional and complex binary gender system. One of the goals of this research is to encourage further investigation into what inclusive PE teaching looks like.

With regard to the second category concerning the type of motivation manifested by the girls towards PE, one of the main results found here relates to the anxiety that the classes generated. Additionally, the girls recognised that being a girl is much more negative for them in the context of PE. Carr-Hill (2018) reflects how actions that come from boys are frequently more socially accepted than those of girls, since they are not based on the same performance paradigms. Women tend to be questioned more when practicing physical activity and sports, because of the discipline they practice, the clothes that they wear or the results they obtain (Bastug, Yilmaz, Bingol and Gunel, 2019). This may also contribute to the outcomes seen here; girls having low confidence in, and failing to enjoy, PE. This constant questioning limits and considerably reduces their spectrum of action; being relegated to the background when their performances do not meet the expectations generated (Rosewall, Gleaves and Latner, 2020). In this study, the girls stress that for them PE is not at all motivating, and they are more concerned with not making mistakes than with learning and having fun. These concerns about what others think of them limits the girls' ability to engage in PE (López, 2019). The results obtained from the families reinforce the idea that the lack of motivation their daughters have towards PE is caused by the dissatisfaction they have with their bodies. They say that

their daughters believe that they are less skilled than they really are. This concept is referred to in the literature as perceived competence (or lack of it) which is one of the most determining variables in obtaining optimal levels of self-esteem (Kerner, Haerens and Kirk, 2018). Hormonal, cultural and social factors mean that girls in poorer physical condition have lower perceived competence, which requires skilled teaching to counter-balance (Lleixà and Nieva, 2020). As a result, the families in this study take a critical view of PE. PE teaching must be focused on body re-education, incorporating practices that break down gender stereotypes and give students freedom of action (Spittle, Petering, Kremer and Spittle, 2012) as well as the freedom to enjoy physical activities available to all gender identities. We hope that this research will encourage other researchers to explore and test such models (we recognize here that we have focused on the experience of female students and that work remains to be done on wider gender categories).

The results obtained in the third category of analysis reflect the diversity of the frustrating experiences that the girls have had of PE throughout their lives. Some of them revolve around the derogatory comments they have suffered while performing certain physical and sporting activities. Although in relation to the male there is usually a greater understanding of body typologies as varied, this is not the case with respect to the female, for whom there are fewer ideal body types. School experiences have a significant influence over girls' perceptions of their bodies, extending into their lives at university (Ropers-Huilman, Winters and Hakkola, 2016). This is further exacerbated by the use of social networks, in which a large number of influential women display their bodies day after day (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac and Rich, 2019). As reflected in the results obtained here, the feelings of frustration about their bodies experienced by the girls limits their potential enjoyment of physical activity and produces anxiety when they are compelled to perform in this context. Rich (2018) indicates that society is mediatized and

conditioned with respect to the parameters of health and the body. This makes us mutable and unthinking individuals, at the mercy of neo-liberal influences based on consumption and marketing (Authors, 2019). The families participating in this study indicate that the poor experiences their daughters have had of PE directly affect their behavior in a negative way. They also express fears about whether, and how, these frustrations might play out throughout their lives. Parker et al. (2018) reflect on the importance of generating good experiences of PE, so that these can be transferred to daily life and healthier futures. Corporeal activities in school must be approached from a pedagogical perspective, always through a gendered lens and attending to the critical conscience of the student, in order to break with the effects of prevailing social stereotypes. Addressing the educational curriculum with a gendered perspective is the best way for students to transfer positive attitudes into their daily lives. To this end, it is necessary that educational policy and administration make a firm commitment to establishing cultural programmes based on gender ideologies that embrace equity (Elias and D'Agostino, 2019). To this end, physical education programmes might be, for example, structured under principles that do not always encourage competition, while continuing the inclusion of competitive practice for those who aspire to athletic excellence. It is also necessary to generate communities that eliminate hegemonic male sports practices (Atencio and Koca, 2011).

## **Conclusions**

In relation to the first objective of the study, it has been shown that these girls' negative experiences of PE relate to a negative body image, impaired physical performance and problems with social relationships with peers. Regarding the second objective, the families have indicated how their daughters' negative experiences of PE directly affect their personality, changing their attitudes and the ways they interact with others. The main contribution of this study has been to analyze in-depth the experiences of girls with poor

experiences of PE throughout their schooling. The vision of their families has been included, something that previous literature had not done. This inclusion of families has made it possible to understand how the experiences of their daughters in PE have direct consequence more widely in their daily lives. This demonstrates the need for pedagogic perspectives on PE to be reconsidered to find ways of devising more inclusive curricula. Nevertheless, this article has its limitations. No interventions or observations have been made in the classroom and the study does not address the specific content of the PE curriculum. It will be beneficial for future lines of research to make interventions of a longitudinal nature that would assess how all students (including those who do not identify with a particular gender) engage with PE over time, during schooling and throughout their lives, as well as the effect of gender on their experiences. Additionally, the sample size is small and does not compare these girls' experiences with those of girls' who have positive experiences of PE, nor the experiences of boys who do not enjoy PE. We consider this manuscript of special interest to PE teachers and professionals who teach physical education or train athletes, to encourage the promotion of gender inclusivity. PE classes, as well as success in these classes, are still mediated by performances based on androcentrism, so it is essential to continue research to achieve positive experiences for all students (regardless of their gender identities).

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Table 1. Basic script used for the semi-structured interview of the participating girls

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1- How is your relationship with your fellow students in PE? What role do you usually play?

2- Do you consider yourself socially accepted and valued by your peers? Why?

3- Do you look forward to your PE class? Why?

4- How do you see your motivation level in PE? Why?

5- Do you feel important and competent in PE?

6- What do you like the least about PE? Why?

7- Can you tell us about a frustrating experience in PE?

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Table 2. Structure of the personal reflective journals.

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1- Acceptance and relationship with classmates: (how you relate to them, with how many, you feel comfortable and free when giving an opinion, you have confidence in them, you feel self-conscious or undervalued by some of them...)

2- Level of motivation to take the class: (you feel like taking the class, you think you will be successful in the tasks, you enjoy the class or you are looking forward to it...)

3- Frustrating experiences in class: (relate or detail those class situations that make you feel really bad)

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Table 3. Basic script used for the final discussion group with the families.

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- 1- How did your daughter experience PE?
  - 2- Does she share these experiences at home? How?
  - 3- Does this directly affect her social environment? How?
  - 4- What is her motivation level before a PE class?
  - 5- How do you manage this situation at the family level?
-