

Volume 1

THE PERCEPTIONS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
SPORTS BASED EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THEIR WELLBEING.

By

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Abstract

Improving the wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) in education has gained momentum of the last few years, as it has been associated with increased motivation, life satisfaction and overall flourishing (Bücker et al, 2018). Literature suggests that adolescence is associated with ‘storm and stress’ (Hall, 1904), identity development (Erikson, 1968), and challenges with mental health and wellbeing, with this argued to be more challenging for girls. To support, new and creative ways are constantly being sought, to help promote positive wellbeing in CYP in school. Sports based extra-curricular activities (SBECAs) have been argued to enhance self-esteem, social interactions and coping skills (Oberle, 2019).

The present study intended to add to the research that is developing around using SBECAs as a means to support CYP and their wellbeing. This study explored how girls in their mid-adolescence experience SBECAs and how they perceive SBECAs relates to their wellbeing. By eliciting the voice of girls in their mid-adolescence, it is hoped that this study will inform both educational settings and professionals to consider how they can broaden their approach towards supporting wellbeing. Semi structured interviews (SSIs) were employed to gain to collect data from eight girls, and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The findings highlight the variation in experiences, and the differences in the meaning attached to SBECAs. Belonging and connection, Emotion management, exploring levels of competence, Agency, and inequality and exclusion were found to contribute to participants of SBECAs. In relation to their wellbeing, SBECAs were found to impact on participant’s self-esteem; mental health, feelings of purpose and fulfilment, thoughts around gender norms, empowerment, and the levels of risk. The implications from the findings are discussed in relation to educators and the role of the educational psychologist.

Dedications

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“I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me” – Philippians 4:13 (KJV)

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Abbreviations

EP – Educational Psychologist

ECA – Extracurricular activities

SBECA – Sports based extra-curricular activities

SEMH – Social Emotional and Mental Health

COVID – Coronavirus Pandemic 2019

RTA – Reflexive thematic analysis

TA – Thematic analysis

DA – Discourse analysis

PA – Physical Activity

IPA – Interpretive Phenomenological analysis

BPS – British Psychological Society

LSA – Learning support assistant

LA – Local authority

SEN – Special educational needs

CYP – Children and young people

AEP – Assistant Educational Psychologist

PERMA – Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement

PE – Physical Education

SSI – Semi structured interviews SWB

- Subjective Wellbeing

PWB – Psychological Wellbeing

BEAR – Birmingham Environment for Academic Research

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

SDT – Self-determination Theory

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction and overview of chapter

This chapter outlines the context for this research with regard to girls in their mid-adolescence, sports based extra-curricular activities (SBECAs) and wellbeing. It provides the positioning and rationale for conducting research in the chosen area of interest. This research was conducted as part of the three-year Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham. The project was carried out during the third year of study, alongside a two-year placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) at the local authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS) within a West Midlands borough.

In addition, insights into the development of this research around girls in their mid-adolescence, SBECAs and wellbeing, as well as the justification and purpose of the research are outlined. This will be followed by a summary of the development of the research idea, the justification for, and purpose of the research. The relevance to educational psychology, will also be discussed. The chapter will then finish by outlining the thesis structure and chapter outline.

1.2 Development of research idea

This research was born out of my previous experience as a learning support assistant (LSA) in a mixed sex private school in Birmingham. Whilst being a private school, there were a high proportion of pupils on the special educational needs (SEN) register. Within this role I was asked to help lead on a new enrichment initiative based on strength training, which involved taking a mixed ability group of pupils to strength and conditioning type gym in Birmingham to train with elite level coaches, once a week throughout the school year. I found it fascinating to see those pupils, boys and girls, who were perceived as ‘hard to engage’ in more ‘academic’ subjects, begin to shine in this new sports based environment. I enjoyed watching their faces light up with joy at the mastery of a new skill, and receive high praise and positive reinforcement from the coaches. I observed a good level of social and emotional skills such as turn taking, emotional regulation (characterised by being able to cope when certain movements had gone wrong) and resilience. For me, a

personal highlight was observing some of the girls who appeared conscious of their appearance, and who presented as shy in nature participate and enjoy themselves, with some becoming more interested in where strength training could take them. As time went on, I believe that I saw a transfer; these pupils would return back to school appearing more confident, happy and excited for the next week. This is an experience that, to this day, has never left me. Whilst I am in this position of having observed and learned during professional experience, I was keen to develop research around girls who were in their mid-adolescence in particular, and their experiences of SBECAs and how this may relate to their wellbeing, from an educational psychology perspective.

On a personal level, I have experienced improved wellbeing from engaging in strength and conditioning type training specifically at MSC Performance in Birmingham. I have heard many conversations around sports being used as a potential tool to support wellbeing, and have read a lot of literature regarding this. From this, I have become intrigued by girls in their adolescence and their experiences of sports, and have often wondered about how they feel this might relate to their wellbeing. I feel that it is important to highlight and develop a greater understanding of how sports, and the processes within sport can be used to support wellbeing in adolescence. Further, this is important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created changes to the everyday lives of CYP, which in turn impacted on their wellbeing.

Professionally, I have worked as an assistant educational psychologist (AEP) within two local authorities, where I took on a range of work around social emotional and mental health (SEMH). This varied from project work, conferences and numerous pieces of individual casework. As a TEP, I have worked on placement across a series of educational settings. I found it interesting to see the interventions that different settings had implemented to promote wellbeing in CYP and which settings would opt to use sports based approaches to further support their pupils. It brought key questions into focus, including the use of sports and what kind of relation it had to CYP wellbeing. I became interested in hearing the views of pupils themselves, in particular girls in their mid-adolescence who, according to research, in comparison to their male counterparts may not always opt for sporting activities. These experiences increased my professional confidence,

in addition to encouragement and motivation provided by other educational psychologists, to not give up on exploring this area of research idea.

1.3 Relevance for Educational Psychology

The role of the educational psychologist (EP), is wide-ranging, where there is a commitment to enhancing educational experiences for CYP on multiple levels. An EP serves to promote positive wellbeing for CYP, whilst continually exposing new opportunities for CYP to experience achievement and success (Roffey, 2015). Kitching (2018) posits that EPs work to gain a holistic understanding of CYP in context, in order to support their wellbeing. With this in mind, SBECAs, should also be taken into account when trying to understand CYP. However, interestingly there are few studies which have considered the use of SBECAs, and their role in supporting CYP following the return from the pandemic into education. When working with schools, EPs should consider other contexts outside of the norm of which they are accustomed, and consider SBECAs as a context for developing and promoting positive wellbeing.

1.4 Values as a Trainee Educational Psychologist

My experiences gained as a TEP, and prior as an AEP have helped to shape my professional values. My values fall in line with some aspects of positive psychology, (Seligman 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, 2005), in regards to my commitment to fiercely seeking out the strengths of CYP and how they can be used to develop weaknesses, learning how and when they experience 'flow', and finding creative ways in which their strengths can be magnified further in order to enhance individual wellbeing. I am passionate about finding new contexts in which young people shine and I find myself opting mostly humanistic psychological approaches in my daily practice, where individual subjective experiences are favoured. Through this approach, I am able to focus on learning more about individual experiences and how they impact upon education. I find that this also helps me consider how I can use this knowledge to help CYP reach their goals in life. With this, I have become interested in exploring new and creative means of supporting CYP wellbeing, within the field of educational psychology.

Throughout my period of professional training, I have developed an appreciation for ecosystemic perspectives, which refers to the idea of viewing each CYP in context (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In my daily practice, this is reflected in the use of approaches that help me to achieve this, such as personal construct psychology which suggests that people develop personal constructs about the world and how it works. These constructs are used to make sense about their experiences (Kelly, 1955). This is applied within my practice, in addition to the use of assessment tools such as the ideal self (Moran, 2001) and the context of strengths finder (Bozic, 2013).

1.5 Values as a researcher

In my capacity as a researcher, I adopt a constructivist position to research, whereby knowledge is a result of individual interaction with the world (Given, 2008). The use of semi structured interviews for this research project reflects the aims in which to discover the views of participants.

Due to my background and level of engagement in sports, I acknowledge that there is a very close relationship between myself in a researcher capacity and this research (Creswell & Clark, 2007). My experiences with SBECAs have always been positive, and therefore I recognise that this has caused me to develop my own personal constructs, and how this may have influenced my choices of method and subsequent analysis.

However, I have ensured that to reduce the effect of my own bias and interpretation, that I have engaged in high quality supervision and research in a reflexive manner. Reflexivity was crucial to ensure that I considered how my personal experiences and circumstances influence the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Within this research I have written in the third person ('the researcher') in line with academic protocols. When writing about reflectively about the research, I have written in the first person ('I').

1.6 Justification for research

This study aims to add to the growing body of work that seeks to find new and innovative ways to enhance wellbeing for young people. It also offers novel research through an educational psychology lens, that gives insight into lived experiences. It is hoped that the

findings can be used to help inform future research endeavours and could help provide an understanding of the different resources that can be used to support CYP wellbeing.

Typically, the literature suggests that possessing a good level of wellbeing is important to thrive in life (Kruger, 2011), and is associated with increased motivation, life satisfaction and flourishing individuals (Bueker et al, 2018). This has served to refocus future developments, and has resulted in the creation of various policies and initiatives (Holder, 2009).

Extra-curricular activities (ECAs) are school based activities outside of structured lesson times, with regular meets, adult supervision and have the ultimate goal of promoting positive development in multiple domains. ECAs are known to be a part of the lives of many CYP, and have been associated with a plethora of benefits, including providing another context for developing interests and competencies. SBECAs involve taking the initiative, and engaging in physical activity. They also include the opportunity to develop social relationships, social and coping skills – especially in team sports (De Meester, 2014). Studies that have explored the benefits of SBECAs on development report higher levels of self-esteem, and enhanced social interactions (Oberle, 2019). Further discussion about these terms will be included in Chapter Two.

Generally speaking, girls' competence in sport and other ECAs have been studied extensively within the literature, from different professional angles (Slingerland, 2014). However, there remains a slight gap in regards to ascertaining the perspectives of these girls, and gaining insight into how SBECAs relate to their wellbeing (Kirkcaldy 2002; WHO, 2002). Preexisting literature explores populations including undergraduate students, primary aged students with some focusing on boys in particular. Therefore, it was felt that this would be an appropriate area to investigate further, only this time gaining the voices of the girls themselves. Of specific interest in this work is how girls perceive SBECAs relate to their wellbeing.

In spite of this, it is apparent that little is known from an educational psychology perspective – indeed, a perspective this research hopes to provide. As EPs work to promote wellbeing, though the adoption of creative means, it would be useful for EPs to develop a better understanding of their role within this context. By gathering such information, the

findings of this work will highlight a range of experiences that can be used to inform prevention and intervention strategies, in addition to future research areas.

1.7 Purpose of study and research question

This study seeks to explore how girls in their mid-adolescence perceive the relationship between SBECAs and their wellbeing. The findings of this study will provide new insights into how sports can be promoted in schools, in a way that will enhance the wellbeing of students. In addition, findings may be used to encourage the educational psychology profession to think more broadly about the diverse strengths young people can have outside of the formal curriculum, and how these strengths can be used to further enhance their educational experiences.

The research questions to be explored are;

- *How do girls in their mid-adolescence experience SBECA's?*
- *How do girls in their mid-adolescence perceive SBECA's influence their wellbeing?*

1.8 Dissemination of findings

The findings of this research reported within this thesis and will be disseminated through my current local authority placement as a TEP and at my future educational psychology service, upon completion of my training. I also intend to share my findings at educational psychology events that focus on new and creative ways to support CYP with SEMH, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.9 The current study:

Structure and overview of the research

The content and structure of the remaining chapters Volume One have been outlined as follows:

- *Chapter two: Literature Review*

This chapter will evidence this current study's relevance and its addressing of gaps concerning the perspective of how mid-adolescent girls experience SBECAs, and how they perceive it relates to their wellbeing.

- *Chapter three: Methodology*

The third chapter, summarises the research aims and questions. A social constructivist research paradigm, with a subjectivist epistemology was adopted. Semi structured interviews were employed, and reflexive thematic analysis was applied to the data set.

- *Chapter four: Findings*

The findings are presented in the fourth chapter in relation to the research questions. The findings are had been organised into key themes, and will include both narrative and reflexive comments.

- *Chapter five: Discussion*

The fifth and final chapter, explores and discuss the findings in relation to existing research. The limitations of the research will then be outlined, followed by suggestions and further implications for practice. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research and will consider implications of the research for professional practice of educational psychologists.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This research focuses on girls in their mid-adolescence, seeking their perceptions of SBECAs and how these may relate to their wellbeing. The literature review adopts a funnel approach, with key concepts are defined, followed by a discussion of the wider literature and research. To further understand the purpose of this study, specific literature related to the notion of wellbeing will be explored.

Subsequently, adolescence, the focus age in this investigation, is considered. In this thesis mid-adolescence is taken to mean the ages between 14-17 years old, a decision elaborated further, below. This age range seems to be in line with the views of many developmental psychologists, who suggest that mid-adolescence begins at the age of 14 or 15 (Coleman, 2011). This will lead to an exploration of the experiences of females in mid-adolescence. Finally, the place of physical activity in adolescence will be considered, before turning to the role of SBECAs within this area.

Aims and Objectives

This literature review seeks to explore current research relating to adolescence, SBECAs and wellbeing, highlighting work that isolates females in their mid-adolescence. By doing so, the gaps in this area are magnified, helping to situate this current study.

This literature review is structured as follows:

- Section 2.2 outlines the key search methods used for this review and the search terms that were used to assist in the process.
- Section 2.3 explores the terminology used within this research, considering different definitions and constructs of wellbeing, adolescence including mid adolescent girls, and SBECAs. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wellbeing is also discussed.
- Section 2.4 provides the rationale for this current study, and concludes by outlining the aim of this research study, which is exploring mid-adolescent girls' experiences in regards to SBECAs, and how they feel this impacts on their wellbeing

Rationale for included literature

There is a scarcity of research that is conducted solely with girls who are in their mid-adolescence living in the United Kingdom. Therefore, this review draws on a range of work that has been conducted internationally.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

To start with, electronic database searches of google scholar, web of science and the University of Birmingham library service were conducted to identify suitable research for analysis. The literature search took place between June - September 2022, and served as a starting point from which to begin this research. For the above, the following search terms were used: 'adolescence', 'wellbeing', 'mid-adolescence' 'females in sports' 'sports', 'sports based extra-curricular activities' and 'extra-curricular activities. To further broaden my literature review, and to ensure the aims of this research were met, an additional search was conducted on a broader range of additional websites.

2.3 The concept of wellbeing

'Wellbeing' is a multi-dimensional, complex term, captured through the development of broad definitions and public discourse (McLellan & Steward, 2015). It is worth noting that although there are multiple definitions of wellbeing, 'positive wellbeing' is mainly characterised by feelings of energy and positive mood (Argyle & Crossland, 1987). Meanwhile, negative wellbeing includes components such as distress, negative mood and hyperarousal (Clark & Watson, 1991). Wellbeing can arguably be viewed as a social construct, where its meaning cannot be fixed, as it varies according to knowledge systems, world views and cultural contexts (Gergen, 2001). The absence of a uniform definition has created some challenges as to how best to promote positive wellbeing amongst populations (Diener, 2012). Wellbeing within this study draws on self-reports, as the focus is on how girls in their mid-adolescence experience SBECAs in relation to their wellbeing.

The notion of wellbeing draws on two philosophical stances: Hedonism (Kahneman et al, 1999) which underscores being happy, focusing on pleasure and life satisfaction. Also, Eudaimonism (Ryff, 2008) which instead emphasises reaching a true sense of human potential, putting our efforts into things that will give us meaning.

Based on traditional hedonism, Diener (2012) aimed to broaden the understanding of this stance by introducing the concept of subjective wellbeing (SWB). SWB recognises individual differences in the perceived quality of life, in addition to the meanings attached to experiences that frame someone's overall feelings of life satisfaction. However, measuring one's subjective wellbeing appears to be dependent on one's ability to consciously reflect on past experiences (Lyke, 2009). Nonetheless, adopting this outlook acknowledges the range of factors that can affect SWB such as positive and negative emotions, economic position and medical factors. Evidently, more research is required in this area, as it is only recently that this concept is being tested.

In contrast, Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) proposed by Ryff (1989), based on traditional eudaimonism, emphasises that in order to have true wellbeing, individuals must shift from striving for life satisfaction to focusing on achieving maximum potential, developing virtues that focus on personal capabilities and growth, and self-realisation. Through this model PWB can be understood as a six factor construct that includes self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relationships with others. This model is widely recognised, and is considered to be a coherent, logical construct, in addition to being a strong contribution to research on wellbeing (Pineiro-Cossio, 2021).

To date, a number of studies provide a more holistic view of wellbeing, by combining both hedonic and eudaemonic perspectives that emphasise factors such as quality of life (Shin & Johnson, 1978) and fulfilling personal goals (Butler, 2022). An example of this is the self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2001). This theory suggests that in order to maintain a good level of wellbeing, individuals strive to adapt their resources to reset this balance. Huppert and So (2011) alternatively define wellbeing as ten elements that focus on feelings, emotions and coping. These elements include feelings of accomplishment, high optimism and having meaningful relationships.

In addition, Dodge (2012) offers an accessible definition of wellbeing that can be universally applied. Whilst also acknowledging the multi-dimensional construct of wellbeing, this conceptualisation focuses on specific areas including the set point for wellbeing, and the fluctuating state between challenges and resources. Out of this came a new definition of wellbeing, where it is likened to a see-saw. Wellbeing is therefore seen as the balancing act between individual resources and the challenges of life that are encountered. Along the same lines as Huppert and So (2011), Dodge (2012) accentuates the notion of coping in this definition. Thus, positive wellbeing is the feeling of having the resources to overcome adversity. Failure to cope with the stressors of life could compromise an individual's wellbeing if they do not have enough resources to balance out the impact of the stressors. The National Wellness Institute (2016) emphasises wellbeing in terms of fulfilling emotional needs and enhancing personal experiences. Factors such as security, safety, competence, sense of belonging and friendships all contribute to wellbeing – providing us with a definition that can be operationalised. Nonetheless, in much of the literature, the focus seems to tend towards the individual, failing to recognise other sources of support that we are able to gain from others.

Hedonism and eudaimonism perspectives can also be seen in the field of positive psychology, introduced by Seligman in 1998. Seligman sought to develop a theory that acknowledged what is good in life in order to develop interventions that would help promote wellbeing (Rusk & Waters, 2015). According to Seligman (2000), wellbeing is multi-faceted and is comprised of numerous elements including: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA). Seligman stresses the importance of taking these into consideration, as opposed to focusing solely on the psychological, social and cognitive aspects of wellbeing. Rooted within Seligman's notion of PERMA include self-esteem, resilience, optimism and self-determination. However, it is only when an individual experiences all five elements of PERMA, that they are experiencing overall positive wellbeing.

Whilst Seligman offers what appears to be a multi-dimensional approach towards understanding wellbeing, PERMA is not without its shortcomings. For instance, Huppert (2013) argue that given wellbeing is complex human phenomena, it should not be reduced to simple operational definitions and psychological measures (Khaw, 2014). Similarly, it

explains what the elements of wellbeing are, but does not appear to share how to achieve them. Additionally, a large majority of studies produce empirical findings that focus on the individual at the expense of wider factors, which can also impact on wellbeing.

It is worth mentioning the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), whose work on 'Flow Theory' comes under the umbrella of positive psychology. Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' can be compared to Seligman's notion of 'engagement' within his PERMA model, as mentioned above. Flow is described as absorption in an activity to the point where everything else fades, representing an optimal state of intrinsic motivation where one is functioning at their fullest capacity. This perspective can be aligned with the eudemonic perspective on wellbeing, with flow being a manifestation of experiencing positive wellbeing (Wessling, 2022).

Further studies such as the New Economics Foundation (2012) conceptualise wellbeing as how individuals feel, and considers how these feelings may impact on how they view their lives in its entirety. In the same vein Renshaw et al (2015) considers wellbeing to be a subjective experience, encompassing successful and healthy living. Diener and Diener (1996) highlight that from an evolutionary perspective, high levels of positive wellbeing may motivate exploratory behaviour, curiosity and coping. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms that allow most individuals to experience high levels of positive subjective wellbeing should be explored. This knowledge could then be utilised to inform interventions that can be implemented within a school setting to further promote wellbeing.

Emerging evidence has raised awareness about associations between wellbeing and learning. Furlong (2014) indicates that a good level of wellbeing is important in schools to help pupils learn effectively, exhibit pro social behaviours and develop into resilient, flourishing young adults. Other studies have commented on enhanced levels of intrinsic motivation, decreases in disciplinary problems, improving school satisfaction, decision making and problem solving skills (Bueker, 2018). It is recommended for future studies to engage with the elements that promote positive wellbeing experiences, to continue to highlight the importance of wellbeing for learning outcomes.

Within the context of this study, wellbeing is conceptualised as a subjective experience, which takes into account the individual experiences of their quality of life. Unlike other definitions of wellbeing, subjective wellbeing considers a wide range of positive and negative factors that impact on wellbeing. Elements of wellbeing in this study have also been viewed through the lens of positive psychology (Seligman, 2000), due to its strength in it being a multi-dimensional, taking into account numerous elements that contribute to wellbeing.

2.3.1. National Context

A dominant feature of this review is acknowledging the impact of the Covid – 19 pandemic on aspects of human life, which will assist in situating this study further. During this time, CYP missed out on frequent interactions with school staff members, who might facilitate opportunities for developing self-esteem, collaborative working, and peer relations (Walters, 2022). The withdrawal of friendships, reduction of structure and social isolation, appeared to negatively impact on CYP wellbeing. Walters (2022) elicited the perspectives of secondary pupils aged 11-18 years, in relation to the pandemic and their wellbeing. Through a retrospective online survey, pupils reported a reduced ability to learn in addition to feeling lower levels of self-worth. This was associated with a decrease in their experiences of their psychological wellbeing.

Further findings acknowledge that girls have been more affected than boys by the COVID19 pandemic. Mendolia (2022) aimed to add to the body of work around young people's wellbeing post-pandemic through a longitudinal study where families were surveyed. The results showed an increase in the range of emotional and behavioural difficulties amongst girls aged 10-15 years, in comparison to boys of the same age. This finding appeared to be more salient in girls who came from lower income families. Similar findings are seen in the work of Creese (2021), whereby girls were found to experience poorer wellbeing on average, as well as higher levels of anxiety. Further, teenage girls were shown to have reported that they were more unhappy with their mental wellbeing than other groups of young people during the pandemic. However, irrespective of this, many adolescents in general have been able to cope through various means. More recently, studies have sought to provide explanations as to why girls' wellbeing was under greater

pressure during lockdown, in comparison to their male counterparts. Hypotheses include changes to daily lifestyle and routine, or reduced face to face interaction with friends, which is more important to girls in adolescence than boys (Hurter, 2022).

In response to the impact of the pandemic, governmental initiatives have aimed to support the wellbeing of CYP. Most salient appears to be The Schools White Paper (DfE 2022), whereby new ambitions for more sports in schools to help promote wellbeing were postulated. However, it has been critiqued by the Youth Sports trust chief executive, for missing the opportunity in a time where it a change of approach would be useful to help rebuild healthier, resilient young people in light of the pandemic (Youth Sports Trust, 2022). It is further stated that whilst sports are acknowledged, they should hold a centralised position, for the part physical activity (PA) plays in CYP's development.

2.3.2 Adolescence

Adolescence represents the time between childhood and adulthood that develops alongside the ever changing social and economic landscape (Coleman, 2011). The changes experienced in adolescence are driven by changes biologically, socially, individually as well as there being key turning points and transitions (Coleman, 2011). Adolescents are exposed to pivotal turning points that influence how they enter adulthood (Graber, Brookes-Gunn & Petersen, 1996). Previously, adolescence has been characterised as being ridden with 'storm and stress' (Hall, 1904), challenges in regards to identity (Erikson, 1968) and where relationships with peers are esteemed (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Adolescents' cognitive abilities evolve, with them being able to make their own decisions, as they gain increased autonomy and additional human rights. With this, adolescents are able to think about the trajectory of their lives and what they wish to become involved in in the future.

Mid-adolescence has been defined by the United Nations being between 14-17 years (United Nations), or for some, spanning between 15-17 years (Beland, 2014). Mid-adolescence is the most critical stage in physical, intellectual and social development. At this point, mid-adolescents' capacity for thinking abstractly has developed, however, this is coupled with a range of mood swings. It is also common to experience challenges with identity, sense of belonging and with making moral and ethical decisions. Girls,

specifically, experience higher levels of social phobia and a fear of negative evaluations by others (Dell'osso et al, 2022).

In addition, mid-adolescent young people are able to choose what they want to do with their time, including their time outside of official hours. Existing data highlights middle teenage years as a risk point for where wellbeing declines (Chanfreau, 2013), due to a perceived lack of ability to cope with the changing dynamics. A cross-sectional study investigation consisting of 566, 829 mid adolescents across 73 countries found that girls are more likely to report experiences of low wellbeing (Campbell, 2021). Evidence from the Education

Policy Institute and The Princes Trust found that girls' decline in wellbeing starts to happen towards the end of primary school, followed with larger decreases by the time of mid-adolescence (Education Policy Institute, 2021). The declines in experiences of wellbeing for girls is thought to be exacerbated by other factors such as puberty and social media, although evidence on the latter is still needed (Birch & Gulliford, 2023). This decline of wellbeing during adolescence strengthens the rationale for this study, suggesting the need for new and creative ideas to provide intervention and support, particularly in light of the pandemic and associated impacts to adolescent wellbeing.

This study focuses on the experiences of mid-adolescent females who range between the ages of 14-16 years, between academic Years 9-11.

2.3.3. Physical Activity

A growing area of interest lies in the role of PA in the lives of CYP, from psychological and health perspectives. Biddle (2004) postulates that this growing interest stems from the phenomenon that PA declines with age, especially for females. When considering PA for adolescents, it is a broad term relating to all forms of bodily movement that require physical energy. Whilst PA encapsulates elements of school physical education, extra-curricular sports and other activities, it also accounts for indoor play, work related activities and travelling. Conversely, in school, physical education (PE) refers to the planned learning experiences within the curriculum, delivered to all pupils, with the context being PA. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002) recommends 60 minutes of exercise a day in order to sustain a good level of wellbeing between the ages of 5-18

years. Research exploring the use of PA to augment CYP health often cite the benefits to include weight maintenance (Alberty, 2023), improved self-esteem (Boyd & Hyrcenko, 1997) reduced psychological dysfunction (Cohen, 2023) and enhancement of prosocial behaviours (Li, 2022). Evidence suggests that engagement in PA during adolescence years could lead to an increased likelihood of continuation into adulthood, thus, highlighting the importance of adolescents being exposed to PA opportunities.

Under various evaluations, the role of PA has not always been significant in CYP lives. For instance, Burgess et al. (2006) found that after a period of exercise, improvements in CYP self-perceptions including their competence and self-worth were noted. However, other findings such as Walters and Martin (2000) found that CYP who engaged in PA over a period of 18 weeks did not show much improvement in their self-concept. These findings reflect PA in the lives of CYP more generally; how it might impact their wellbeing is still a developing area that warrants further investigation.

Whilst physical education (PE) is cited as the common mechanism that promotes PA in schools (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001), Sallis et al (2000) argues that a large amount of the recommendations aimed at promoting PA for adolescents cannot be achieved or sustained through the confines of an already packed PE curriculum. Therefore, SBECAs have been acknowledged as a means of promoting activity in schools, Yet, Pate et al (2006) posit that its impact has not been studied extensively.

More specifically to the purpose of this study, various insights have been gained regarding the contexts that influence girls' experiences of PA. For instance, through a focus group, Whitehead and Biddle (2008) found girls who were less active held more stereotypical views about their appearance than active girls. This feeling prevented them from engaging with PA, as they deemed it impossible to be both active and feminine. However, there were other girls who challenged this notion, and were more likely to partake in PA, having more of a positive experience

Clark (2011) used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to also explore girls' experiences of PA. Clark hoped that this would encourage researchers to consider the full range of perspectives, and the meanings attached to their experiences. It was found that whilst PA was experienced through a slender lens (e.g., competitiveness and appearances),

extra-curricular PA was viewed in a more positive light as it permitted greater self-expression and creativity. Many barriers for girls accessing PA in general often cited are perceived self-efficacy (Chase, 2001), competence (Trew, 1999) and accessing gender-relevant PA (Schmalz, 2006). However, what seems to be lacking is a detailed understanding of how girls experience PA, using qualitative methods. A contribution towards filling this gap may serve to help identify other potential barriers, and suggest how to address them.

2.3.4 Extra-curricular activities (ECAs)

Debates as to how best to facilitate CYP development using ECA to promote learning and growth are slowly intensifying (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). ECAs are diverse activities that are separate to the national curriculum, and have been argued to be a positive context for developing a range of skills (Greenbank, 2015). Many ECAs available in schools share similar characteristics such as regular meetings, opportunities to work with more competent adults and goal orientation (Darling, 2005), in addition to other supportive elements such as providing physical and psychological safety (Mahoney et al., 2004). The extent of which ECAs CYP have access to, however, is dependent on the individual schools. For instance, it is argued that independent schools offer a breadth of activities in comparison to more of the comprehensive schools (Social Mobility Commission, 2023).

The argued benefits of ECAs have been reported in research (Thouin, 2022), namely, having an impact on self-concept and later life aspirations (Gerber, 1996). Hereby, Feldman's (2007) literature review exploring ECAs recognises the opportunities that adolescents have to explore their identity, as they learn to understand themselves through participating in various activities. For some adolescents, ECAs may be place where they receive recognition beyond academic achievement, and where they obtain different types of success that can still be associated to with the school context. ECAs are also known to enhance social capital through building a strong network of friends and engaging with adults who offer mentoring relationships, which could also serve as a means to supporting wellbeing.

The term 'extra', although can seem quite vague, suggests activities that are beyond what schools are legally responsible for (Hallberg & Kirk, 1971). It had been established in

previous work, that ECAs were deemed as ‘less important’ in comparison to other academic subjects (Fredericks & Eccles, 2006). However, it has been contended that if a school’s main concern is solely academic, then ECAs would be observed as ‘unimportant’ and as a form of ‘relaxation’ (Holland & Andre, 1987). With reference to activities being ‘extracurricular’, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2006) (SDT) offers a framework of motivation, from which this can be better understood. Drawing on this theory, adolescents engage in ECAs due to different types of motivation that range from being intrinsically determined to more externally determined motivation (Amrose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Choices that are self-determined rather than being driven by external controls, such as teacher desires, serve to enhance feelings of wellbeing, which is critical to adolescent development (Steinberg, 1990).

SDT posits that experiencing high levels of autonomy, competency and relatedness helps an individual to feel more motivation, engage more and experience well-being (Ryan, 2009). Autonomy associates with the desire to feel agentic through exercising choice and making contributions to various learning activities. Therefore, arguably those who are self-determined have the ability to take stock of what is available, select an option that aligns with their own values and beliefs, whilst considering the extent of their engagement. Adolescents may experience feelings of competency, believing that they can succeed in attaining their goals and master unique challenges. They may also seek opportunities to develop social networks with peers and leaders, which can be both rewarding and trusting. However, when self-determination is lost, this can lead to the reduction of well-being in addition to other disadvantages (Ryan, 2009).

2.3.5 Sports based Extra-Curricular Activities (SBECAs)

Bloomfield and Barber (2009) postulate that SBECAs may provide some opportunities for personal growth and progress. Further, like ECAs, SBECAs creates opportunities for the development of strengths including self-efficacy, self-esteem and social skills, as well as enhancing psychological wellbeing. (Trang, 2011). Armour and Sanford (2013) collected impact data from 600 pupils and were able to conclude that sports can be viewed as a developmental tool for young people. However, the study is not without its limitations, as it was hard to predict how the skills gained could be applied outside of this area. Other benefits cited include developing initiative, emotional competencies and new skills,

allowing adolescents to tap into resources that promote wellbeing and positive functioning. An example of where SBECAs have a positive influence on adolescent development is through validation of identity. Having one's self-image validated can promote psychological wellbeing and better attachment. SBECAs are also known to facilitate flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1993), which can also promote wellbeing and psychological health (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Although the important aspects of SBECAs have been mentioned within the literature, it is argued that girls are less likely to take part in SBECAs for reasons including being harder to reach and experiencing lower levels of self-esteem (Telford, 2016). These apprehensions could have wider implications for girls, schools, education professionals who have the responsibility of promoting the wellbeing of all pupils (AEP, 2020). In spite of this, there remain some girls who are involved in SBECAs who are accessing the benefits in regards to their wellbeing (Garrett, 2004). Understanding the experiences of mid-adolescent girls of SBECAs in relation to their wellbeing present its challenges, based on the premises of individual experiences.

SBECAs offer a range of sporting opportunities, which are accessible in terms of location and cost. SBECAs offer increased chances for sports participation in the familiarity, and comfort of the school environment amongst likeminded peers, making them more of an attractive alternative to community sports (De Meester et al, 2014). Similar to ECAs, pupils are able to participate on their own accord, as they are not included in the main curriculum, but rather organised in cooperation with the school (De Meester et al, 2014).

Literature recognises two forms of SBECAs that are offered outside of the school curriculum: interscholastic and intermural sports. Interscholastic sports are created with the intention of attracting the most talented youth, for the purpose of individual competition between schools. In some countries, for instance in the USA, these SBECAs are more appreciated, and so they are strongly promoted. Alternatively, intramural sports are designed to target those who are not already taking part in SBECAs, with the aim to encourage the exploration of skills and talents through a range of activities (Pot & Van Hilvoorde, 2013). Intramural sports can either be competitive or non-competitive, and serve to promote PA through lifetime activities in order to have a wider reach (Kanters,

1997). It must be noted that most of the work around interscholastic and intermural sports has been conducted in the USA. As this study explores mid-adolescent girls' experiences of SBECAs in relation to their wellbeing, it would be interesting to see if any of the findings relate to this concept in the UK.

2.3.6 Motivation

Motivation can play a fundamental role in the choices adolescents make in relation to SBECAs. Motivation is argued to be a key determinant behind actions taken and choices made. Therefore, it would be of use to understand some of the motivations that contribute to how SBECAs are experienced. It is apparent that there are individual motivations, and experiences of SBECAs that should be taken into account. Theokas et al (2005) accentuates the importance of noting the quality of the SBECA for each individual, in order to identify the conditions in which adolescents may flourish. This advocates that the quality of experience makes the difference between positive or negative developmental outcomes and may be the reason for variations in wellbeing outcomes. Eccles (1993) posits that adolescents who are actively engaged in their SBECAs, are psychologically motivated and who have confidence in their abilities, are more likely to attach greater value to their SBECAs and reap greater wellbeing benefits than those who are less invested, or do not have the ability.

The person-environment fit theory (French & Kaplan, 1972) offers a framework that highlights the need for adolescents to have a match between their developmental needs and their environment in order to feel motivated. As adolescents continue to develop, their level of autonomy and identity formation (Erikson, 1968) become more important to them. There must be a fit between the needs of the individual and the SBECA so that growth can occur. In contrast, the Human Givens Approach (Griffin & Tyrell, 2008) suggests that individuals have in-built needs that should be met in order to ensure wellbeing. These needs include having an emotional connection to others, experiencing a sense of achievement and finding purpose. Based on this theory, adolescents desire to participate in SBECAs because they offer a chance to fulfil these needs. It would be useful for future studies to focus their efforts in areas which explore adolescents' perceptions of this.

Alternatively, the achievement goal theory (Midgley, 2002) highlights two types of achievement which include 1) performance-based goals and 2) mastery-based goals, focusing on self-development. It is suggested that wellbeing is associated with the goals that an individual wishes to pursue. Thus, according to this theory, mastery-based goals are known to be associated with positive motivational outcomes as they are related to personal growth, whereas performance based goals that are reliant on individual competence reduce feelings of motivation as they are based on personal ego. Literature around achievement goal theory takes into account the wider social influences on motivation, which can also include coaches, friends, parents and teachers. Research by Ng (2017) looked at the role of achievement goals and found that ECAs are a good context for providing students with the opportunity to develop competency in certain skills and experience success.

Separately, as previously mentioned, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2006) is also used to explore motivation. Specifically, it acknowledges distinct differences between autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, which refers to internally or externally pressured engagement in an activity (Aelterman et al 2012) and motivation which is lacking intentionality or engagement in behaviours for unknown reasons. Research by De Mester (2014) explored motivation between those who took part in SBECAs and those who did not. The multilevel regression analysis showed that boys were more physically active and autonomously motivated than girls. This raises the question as to how adolescents, girls especially, can be motivated to engage in SBECAs and access the benefits for their wellbeing.

In self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) motivation is impacted based on one's judgment of one's own skills. These beliefs provide the foundations for an individual's level of intrinsic motivation and personal accomplishment, as they indirectly impact the goals one seeks to accomplish, in addition to the energy that is put towards achieving these goals (Bong & Skaalvik, 2004). Based on this notion, it would be interesting to see if the experiences of mid adolescent girls are influenced by their perceived level of self-efficacy.

2.3.7 The role of schools

The emphasis on developing the 'whole child' and enhancing wellbeing in schools is apparent in wider research that suggests wellbeing can be linked to pro social behaviours

and emotional capacity. Schools are considered to be institutions whose roles extend beyond academic work, to rather preparing CYP holistically for wider life. This is in comparison to previous models, where schools pushed academics as evidence of being a successful school. McGrath (2009) also notes the shift in the approach towards supporting wellbeing, highlighting focus on self-esteem, social skills, resilience, in addition to acknowledging the strengths of CYP.

2.4 Rationale

Whilst the focus on wellbeing has intensified, research focused on SBECAs in the lives of mid-adolescent girls is under represented. The lived experiences of girls could be of use to adults who are seeking to implement new ways of promoting wellbeing. CYP should continue to share their views on topic areas that are important to them, and on matters that could impact their experiences of wellbeing.

The present need to support wellbeing post pandemic, is vital, including the views of CYP in important decision making processes and ensuring that personal views are acted upon. This, in return, could help foster feelings of belonging and community in school life. On the basis of this narrative review, it appears that the extent to which these findings represent mid adolescent girls' experiences of SBECAs, is inadequate. The opportunity to isolate the voices of mid-adolescent girls offers a unique extension to existing research. This provides scope for further research efforts in this area, which will offer new ways of supporting the wellbeing of adolescence in education.

2.4.1 Research aims and questions

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of mid-adolescent girls in regards to SBECAs, and how they feel this impacts on their wellbeing. This current study will contribute to the existing, albeit limited, research in this area through the use of a qualitative methodology to elicit the experiences of mid-adolescent girls. It is also hoped that this research will provide new insights into how SBECAs can be promoted in schools in order to enhance the wellbeing of students as well as to encourage EPs to perhaps consider the wider, diverse strengths of CYP that can be outside of the curriculum.

The following research questions have been developed:

- *How do middle adolescent girls experience SBECAs?*
- *How do middle adolescent girls perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?*

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

Chapter 2 highlighted research gaps, supporting the aims of this current study. Based on the literature review and the aims of the current research, this chapter outlines the approach adopted for this research; and the rationale for and decision points in the implemented approaches. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How do girls in their mid-adolescence experience SBECAs?
2. How do girls in their mid-adolescence perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?

This rationale for the chosen methodology for the current study, details the procedures and methodological, including ethical, considerations. It commences by discussing the philosophical orientation which underpin the important choices made in relation to the chosen methodology: a flexible design, involving a qualitative approach was used to obtain data using semi-structured interviews, with data analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The reasons for using RTA over other approaches is then presented. Finally, this chapter will conclude with consideration given to the quality of the research and ethics in relation to the study.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions

The following section outlines the underlying philosophical assumptions that guide this study.

3.2.1 Epistemology and Ontology

All research methodologies are underpinned by their ontological and epistemological positions, and reflect the researchers views about the nature of reality. In turn these impact choices regarding research design, method of data collection and how it is analysed (Thomas, 2022).

Ontology relates to the nature of social reality, and takes into account what we believe constitutes reality. It is often debated within philosophy whether reality can be measured, or whether there could be multiple subjective interpretations of reality (Cohen et al, 2017). This study has adopted a relativist ontological stance, with the view that reality is a finite subjective experience through interactions with the wider world (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge and how we endeavour to know more about the social world (Willig, 2021). A relativist ontology fits well with a subjectivist epistemology, whereby reality is not independent of human perspectives (Gray, 2021). Knowing this, I adopt an interpretivist research paradigm, with the aim of developing contextual knowledge out of meaning making processes. I recognise that social reality is inter-subjective and that there are multiple realities and experiences of SBECAs for mid-adolescent girls. I aim to elicit how mid-adolescent girls experience social phenomena, and what meaning they attach to their experiences.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Qualitative methodologies

Qualitative methodologies are exploratory, and through specific methods help the researcher to explore data, and elicit unique experiences of phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In difference, quantitative methodologies place more emphasis on strategies, techniques and assumptions through numerical data. This information gained from this data can then be generalised to larger populations (Gulliford, 2015). Many authors recognise the value of qualitative methodologies as being flexible, allowing participants to

fully express themselves in order to create rich data. In this study a qualitative method is more suitable to explore how mid adolescent girls experience SBECAs, and how they feel this impacts on their wellbeing. Research in this area seems to be growing slowly, however, there is a limited amount that uses the voices of adolescent girls, using the data to inform practice moving forward.

The disadvantages of using a qualitative method for this study have been considered, including the challenges that arise when trying to generalise the findings to the wider population (Mohajan, 2018). However, whilst it appears that quantitative methods are more likely to be generalised, the findings may argue to be reductionist. Opting for quantitative methods would also reduce the opportunity to take into account contextual factors, and gaining views from a first person perspective (Mohajan, 2018). In relation to this research project, a qualitative approach aligns well with an inductive thematic analysis, which allows the researcher to look more closely at participant experiences.

3.3.2 Sampling and Recruitment

All participants were recruited through purposive sampling, from within the LA, where I am on placement. I shared my thoughts with EPs and asked them to distribute information sheets across the schools that they were working with (Appendix 3 & 4) . This was in addition to sending information sheets across my own patch of schools. All schools were given the option to discuss the research in more detail either through phone or face to face.

School staff members who expressed interest, in response to the initial contact and who were able to identify students who would be suitable for this study, were then sent additional information and consent forms. Dates and times were then arranged for the face to face interviews. Between two schools, six participants were identified and were interviewed for this study. After completing the sixth interview, the data was briefly examined during the initial immersion stages, to ensure a diverse range of views. Following this the decision was made in supervision to recruit two more participants who did not have as much experience with SBECAs in comparison to the other participants, to help diversify the sample.

3.3.3 Participants

The participants were comprised of eight females whose ages fell in the mid adolescent age range. School staff were initially asked to identify and approach pupils who met the inclusion criteria for this study (Table 1).

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female pupils within the mid adolescent age range• Currently attending a mainstream setting• Has had involvement in SBECAs• Pupils who are able to reflect on their experiences and communicate them	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female pupils who are not in the mid-adolescent age range• Pupils with special educational needs• Pupils who are not able to reflect on their experiences

3.3.4 Research Context

The importance of describing the research context is emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2021). Two secondary schools were used within this study, one of which was an all-girls grammar school, for ages 11-18 years. This setting offers a range of ECAs outside of the main curriculum, some of which are for an additional charge. The second school was a coed comprehensive maintained school for ages 11-18 years. This setting also offered a range of ECAs for students, and had on side facilities to accommodate this.

3.3.5 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview (SSI) schedule was used in this study to answer the research questions (Appendix 5). SSIs have been defined as a type of interview which has “predetermined questions, but the order can be changed based on what the interviewer deems as appropriate” (Robson, 2002: p.270). The research aims and interpretivist paradigm adopted meant that SSI were deemed as the preferred method to help describe participants experiences relating to SBECAs and wellbeing. The information presented in the literature review helped to provide topic areas that helped to structure the interview, whilst holding true to its exploratory nature (Appendix 5).

SSIs have the advantage of being flexible, and promote the essence of freedom as participants are able to explore their answers in depth. The structure means that there is less rigidity in comparison to structured interviews, for example. This promotes enhanced conversations and might be more useful for participants who may be shy, or take a while to open up and explain their views. SSI allows for the interviewer to spend more or less time of certain questions based on the flow of the interview, in addition to being able to change the order of the questions (Robson & Maccartan, 2006). This was important to the process, as rather than trying to get participants to think in a certain way, they were given the time and safe space to explore.

Prior to selecting SSIs, other methods of collection such as focus groups were entertained. Focus groups would be difficult for participants who may feel as though they cannot get their opinions across freely. Due to the nature of the set-up of focus groups, it would be challenging to gain in depth data and record multiple opinions at once. As this study explores girls and SBECAs, focus groups would be hard to gain honest opinions in a room with a range of sporting abilities and could lead to some social desirability bias in the responses. Whilst SSIs are flexible, it creates variation in what is discussed, and possibly the depth of the discussion had between participants. Reliability is not always guaranteed in SSIs as a result of the unique experiences.

3.3.6 Procedure

All of the interviews were conducted face to face in a private room within their school setting on three different occasions. I interviewed 4 participants each on two occasions, and 2 participants on the final occasion. Each of the interviews ranged between 40 to 50 minutes. The beginning of the interview allowed for a re-explanation of the aims of the study to participants, in hopes of easing feelings of nerves and anxiety. Participants were reassured that there is no wrong answer, which was important to help make them feel comfortable throughout the process.

The interview employed a range of questions based on previous literature around this topic, and in order to fulfil the researcher's aims. The interview schedule allowed a degree of flexibility to support and facilitate the engagement of the participants around various topics, and to accommodate should participants digress.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Careful consideration was given to the British Psychological Society’s (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009), the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the Health and Care Professions Council’s Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics (2016). This was in addition to the University of Birmingham’s Code of Research Conduct and Ethics. Ethical approval for this study was granted in August 2022 (see Appendix 1).

Key ethical considerations aimed to address some of the potential issues arising from the research (Table 2). One of which includes gaining informed consent both from parents and CYP, in a means that was accessible for pupils. Further, confidentiality was ensured by making answers anonymous and not linking the details of the individual to the research.

The right to withdraw from the research was offered on multiple occasions i.e., in the consent form and reiterated at the start of the interviews. The potential for psychological distress was considered, by judging whether participants had the ability to reflect and understand what is being asked of them. Prior to full approval, minor amendments were made in regards to where the data was going to be kept.

Table 2: *An overview of ethical issues relevant to this research and how they were addressed.*

Principle	How the principle has been applied within this study
Commitment and Rigour	<p>This refers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The researcher’s commitment to the research topic and process2) The researchers in -depth consideration and completeness of the data collection, analysis and interpretation. <p>This was demonstrated through my appropriate use of RTA when analysing the data. Rationales for my decisions have been discussed throughout this methodology.</p>

<p>Coherence and Transparency</p>	<p>Coherence relates to how thought out philosophical assumptions are, and how well they are communicated in order to make sure that the research process aligns with the theoretical assumptions guiding the research.</p> <p>Transparency refers to the data processes being communicated, and how the researcher reflects on how they may impact the research process (Yardley, 2008). I have kept a research diary and engaged in supervision throughout the process to support my reflections. This enabled me to consider how aspects of myself, and my life experiences influence the research. By doing this, the activity enhanced my level of thinking about how my experiences influenced how I conducted this research.</p>
<p>Impact and Importance</p>	<p>This refers to the usefulness, impact and implication of this study. These have been discussed in Chapter 5.</p>
<p>Informed Consent</p>	<p>It is imperative for informed consent to be gained from participants at the start of the research process. Participants must have relevant knowledge in regards to what the research entails before making an informed decision about their level of participation.</p> <p>In this study informed consent was obtained from each participant, parents and school staff. Before the interview, participants and their parents were given information sheets which outlined the details of the study. Information was also provided in regards to how data was going to be collected, right to withdraw and contact details. At the start of the interview, all of the relevant information was provided again, and participants had the opportunity to decide whether they still wanted to participate.</p>

Confidentiality and Anonymity	<p>Participants have the right for any information collected about them to remain private (BPS, 2021). Thus, any information about the participants collected is not identifiable as belonging to them.</p> <p>In this study all participants were reassured that their data was going to be kept securely and remain confidential. Code names were assigned for the individual interviews to prevent participants from being personally identified, and protect confidentiality. The interview recordings were stored on the university of Birmingham systems, and participants were informed that this would be deleted following transcription.</p> <p>Complete anonymity was not possible due to the interviews being face-to-face. However, information about participants were kept confidential. This includes the data transcripts, recordings and consent forms.</p>
Safe and appropriate handling of data	<p>Interviews were recorded using safe software, and then transcribed. Immediately after each interview, the data was moved onto the University of Birmingham cloud-based system which was password protected.</p> <p>Written notes that were made during the live interview were safely stored in a locking filing cabinet, which is only accessible to the researcher. This was in addition to the consent forms, which were also kept locked away in line with governmental procedures.</p> <p>In line with the ethical guidelines outlined at the University of Birmingham, all data will be kept for a maximum of 10 years on the Birmingham Environment for Academic Research (BEAR) storage. Through this duration the researcher, supervisor and university examiners will be able to access the data. Once the 10 years is complete, this data is erased and transcripts will be shredded.</p>
Dissemination of research findings	<p>All participants were made aware that they were able to obtain a copy of the findings from the researcher. They were made aware that the findings were be formatted in a report form from the University of Birmingham, with the potential of being adapted for later publication.</p>

Right to withdraw	<p>Participants have the right to withdraw from the study, without giving an explanation (BPS, 2021).</p> <p>Participants in this study were reminded verbally before the start of the interview of their right to withdraw. They were also given a specific time frame as to when they could withdraw their data following the interview. If this request was made, all data would be destroyed and removed from the research.</p>
Debriefing and feedback	<p>Participants were given the opportunity to ask any follow up questions after the interview. They were also given access to my contact details in addition to the details of my university supervisor.</p>

3.5 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was the analytic method applied to systematically explore the experiences of mid-adolescent girls, SBECAs and wellbeing. It is an easy, accessible approach that supports with pattern identification and themes (Byrne, 2022). Broadly speaking TA offers us concepts, practices, techniques and guidelines can be used to help organise, interrogate and interpret a data set. However, RTA emphasises the importance of the analysis process being iterative, working in a continuum rather than in sequence.

Whilst RTA shares some similarities with other methods such as discourse analysis (DA) and grounded theory for instance, it has a distinct relationship to theory. RTA is thought of as a method rather than a methodology, because it includes just the process, whereas the methodology includes both the process and theory. RTA was originally deemed as a ‘Paradigmatically flexible analytic method’ (Byrne, 2022) because it could be used within a wide range of epistemological and ontological considerations. However, its roots are embedded in the values and beliefs of a qualitative paradigm that believes in a world that is subjective. Thus, in contrast to other forms of analysis, RTA shuns any trace of positivist interpretation.

RTA is different because of three main things: 1) coding reliability approaches whereby the researcher would strive for consensus amongst coders. 2) codebook approaches, where a book is used to share how themes are conceptualised. 3) Lastly, when compared to other forms of analysis, RTA emphasises reflexivity. This is the process and active practice of

the researcher who is both constantly, and critically reflecting on how their personal and theoretical assumptions impact on the quality of the overall results. This is important as in qualitative research, everything is subjective. Therefore, to avoid personal biases coming to the forefront, reflection is necessary, and by doing this it gives justice and due diligence to the unique experiences of the participants that are foreign to the researcher.

It is suggested within RTA for the researcher to reflect on their positionality, practice and their involvement in the process. When applying this analytical process, I thought about the following questions:

- Why did I choose RTA?
- Who am I researching?
- What kind of privilege do I have?
- What about my personal beliefs about sports?

My topic of research? This is important as there are many wider debates regarding girls in sports. Could it be possible that my participants have not arrived here with fully formed insight on this topic?

3.5.1 Rationale for selecting RTA

Prior to selecting RTA for this research project, I considered other methodologies such as IPA (Eatough, 2017). IPA shares many features of RTA which include making sense of individual experiences, drawing out key themes in addition to similarities in how the data is analysed (Smith, 2011). In comparison to TA, IPA aims for a in depth understanding, requiring the researcher to completely immerse themselves in the individual experience. Alternatively, RTA allows the researcher to look broadly across multiple cases on a more semantic level, which is a better fit for this project's aims. Unlike other approaches such as IPA, the similarities and differences within the data set become more apparent, which is crucial for shaping the end outcomes and implications for future research.

Practically, RTA is an efficient form of analysis when compared to other methods that can be considered as time consuming. Nevertheless, the pitfalls of RTA are acknowledged, including its possible lack of flexibility. This may create inconsistencies and a lack of coherence when developing themes (Javidi & Zarea, 2016). Studies assert that RTA has less substance when compared to other approaches, thus having less interpretative power

when not used with an existing theoretical framework. When compared with the likes of DA, RTA does not depend on commentary on the language used in the interviews for example, which would otherwise be useful to the analysis (Willig, 2003).

RTA was considered to be the most suitable form of analysis for this study, taking into account this study's theoretical position.

3.6 Data Analysis procedure

Braun and Clarke's (2019) RTA framework were applied to the interview data sets. Data analysis was data-led, using inductive coding, as the codes were created out of the data set (Appendix 7 & 8). Doing this allowed for full immersion in the data, adding depth to the analysis process. Semantic coding was employed to help summarise codes during the analysis, which helped to create naturally occurring codes which could later be developed into themes, followed by latent coding to enhance this.

The RTA processes followed within this study is outlined in Table 3. RTA is a flexible approach that allows for a recursive and reiterative process to take place. Therefore, whilst the process followed is presented linearly below, there was a lot of back and forth between the phases.

Table 3: *Outline of steps employed at each stage of RTA in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2019).*

Stage of RTA	How this has been actioned in this study
<p>Familiarisation with the data</p> <p>This phase involves the following processes: full immersion in the data, preliminary note making about the data and critical engagement.</p>	<p>I familiarised myself with the data firstly by listening to each interview recording alongside each transcript, multiple times and in different orders. The first time I made bullet point notes that summarised the overall conversation, with things that immediately stood out to me. This provided me the opportunity to reflect on how the participants presented themselves through gestures and mannerisms that were not noted down in the interview.</p>

<p>Coding</p> <p>This is known as the process where shorthand, descriptive or interpretive labels that may be relevant to the research question are made.</p> <p>Coding can be done at either the semantic or latent level. Semantic codes are identified through surface meanings of the data, where the researcher does not try and create meaning out of what has been said (Byrne, 2021). Latent coding refers to deeper engagement from the researcher, who is trying to uncover deeper meanings.</p>	<p>All coding was completed by hand, which involved printing out all transcripts and using coloured highlighters and pens for organisation (Appendix 6).</p> <p>I began by coding the transcripts with my first research question in mind, writing along the sides of each transcript. At this point, no attempt was made to prioritise semantic over latent coding and vice versa. I did this process twice, mixing the order of the transcripts. This step was repeated with the second research question in mind. I felt that having the transcripts printed out in front of me gave me more clarity during this process, supporting my critical engagement with the data.</p> <p>Interview transcripts were re-read on multiple occasions, going between semantic and latent coding. Following this, time was spent re-reading and re-finishing my codes constantly going back to the transcripts. This was to ensure that my codes were fair, non – biased and provided sufficient detail for later theme development.</p> <p>It was difficult to move onto the next stage, as I was cognisant to the fact that I wanted codes that accurately captured the essence of the interviews. After some time spent reflecting on my own, with peers and with my supervisor, I felt as though my themes captured the interviews well, making me ready to move onto developing initial themes.</p>
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<p>Generating themes</p> <p>This phase involves searching for meaning across the dataset. The researcher notices how certain codes link so that sub-themes and themes can be developed. It is important at this point that the patterns of codes communicate meaningful messages that serve to help answer the research questions (Byrne, 2021).</p>	<p>Multiple initial themes that shared similarities were collapsed together to form initial candidate themes. To support with this thematic map were created to help understand how themes connect to one another.</p>
<p>Developing and reviewing potential themes</p> <p>In this phase the researcher reflects on how well the themes are meaningful interpretations of the data.</p> <p>Braun and Clarke (2012) encourage thought around certain questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is this a theme or a code? - What is the quality of this theme? - Is there enough data to support this theme? - What are the boundaries of this theme? 	<p>For this process I spent some time away from the data, so that I could think and reflect. During this time, I discussed thoughts with my supervisor and peers. This was a helpful process, where I could gain different opinions and feedback and then make the relevant adjustments.</p>

<p>Refining, defining and naming themes</p> <p>The researcher continued to refine individual themes and subthemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All themes were refined further so that they reflected the narrative of each theme, and to ensure they were appropriate (Appendix 9 & 10). • Once again, these themes were shared with my supervisor and my peers to ensure quality.
<p>Writing up the report</p> <p>A recursive approach is to report writing is taken, as codes and themes continue to evolve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A report was produced which demonstrates the exerts that were chosen, representing key themes. The results from the data analysis are discussed in the following chapter: Findings and Discussion.

3.6.1. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a crucial practice when using qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It refers to the researcher’s ability to think what influences their worldview. This process serves to support their interpretation, and allows them to open up and receive others understandings and perspectives (Macbeth, 2001). Being reflexive researcher involves having a consciousness of their subjectivity in the research process, constantly reflecting on these throughout (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

To this project, I bring myself as a middle–class, British-born, privately and state educated, able-bodied and sporty self. Throughout my school experiences I have engaged in a range of SBECAs, and as an adult today, I continue to engage in a range of sports, strengths and conditioning type of activities. I acknowledge that I belong to a well-known strength and conditioning club, coached by highly skilled coaches, all have which serve to frame my worldview around SBECAs. I recognise that this will impact on my research as I may have developed a bias towards those who enjoy SBECAs, and may not be able to relate such diverse views. However, I have attempted to counter this through acknowledging by creating a balanced view in the literature review, and seeking guidance and supervision throughout the research process.

To further support with self-reflection, a research diary was produced where I have been able to consider my personal and professional motivations further (Appendix 2). Key reflections were recorded at the most salient parts of the decision making process. This included thoughts around the following points:

- The practicalities of conducting a study in this topic area, and how this would be different from other studies.
- The most appropriate method that would help answer research questions.
- Epistemological position
- Thoughts that developed following supervision with both academic and placement supervisors
- My role within this study.

3.6.2 Validity and reliability

~~Validity and reliability are important to consider in research generally. However, as these terms are more associated with quantitative methods, they would not be suitable for qualitative methods (Smith, 2003).~~

Lincoln and Guba (1989) state that the framework for determining the rigour of qualitative research are dependability, transferability, confirmability and credibility. Further, they argue for their importance as it would mean that the decisions made within the research can be trusted. Suitable steps have been taken within this study to ensure a high level of validity remains within this study (Table 4). Shenton’s (2004) has been applied within this study to ensure the trustworthiness in this data.

Table 4: *Adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1989)*

Criteria	Description	How this has been applied within this study

Credibility	Establishing confidence that the results produced are credible and believable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braun and Clarke (2006) Thematic Analysis has been applied within this study. • Peer supervision was sought during the coding process, to ensure that researcher bias was at bay.
Dependability	Ensuring the findings produce enough detail for this to be replicated if it happened within the same cohort of participants, coders and contexts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevant details have been provided in regards to sampling techniques and data collection. • The limitations of this study have been noted, so that those conducting future work in this area can consider.
Confirmability	The confidence that the results are purely from the data and have not been influenced by the researchers' own biases and predispositions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All research decisions have been thoroughly considered and justified. • The researcher engaged in supervision with the placement provider and academic supervisor, to question decisions made. • A research diary was used to brainstorm thoughts, and to monitor any potential biases.
Transferability	How far the results from the study can be generalised to another study or context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details around participants have been noted

3.7 Pilot

Initially a pilot study was considered for this study in order to judge the impact of the interview schedule, and how it would work with the participants. Following guidance from my supervisors, it was decided that a pilot study would not go ahead. The reason being the lack of time of available, due to waiting to receive ethics and being able to recruit schools. When assessed, it was deemed that it would be best to move ahead with the interviews. The details of the interview were discussed with member of staff within my placement psychology service, to ensure they were appropriate. The questions were also shared with my fellow peers to gain their feedback, as to whether they thought the questions would be help elicit the data to best answer the research questions.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has provided relevant information in regards to the rationale for the current methodology. My philosophical position has been justified, linked to the means of analysis. Considerations of other approaches have been mentioned in addition to limitations of the current approach. The following chapter will continue with the presentation and discussion of the findings, following the analysis that has been described within this section. I will present an overview of the main themes that have been developed from the analysis, and themes will be made evident through the use of extracts from the raw data set.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter provides an account of the RTA for both research questions. Eight overarching themes (Appendix 9 & 10), with their subthemes are discussed in relation to the research question to which they pertain to. These themes are presented with supportive extracts from participant interviews.

Research Question 1: How do mid-adolescent girls experience SBECAs?

4.1 Theme 1: Belonging and Connection

When considering how participants experience SBECAs, the theme ‘belonging and connection’ came across as salient. This theme can be broken down into two subthemes: social interactions and aspirations, and teacher encouragement and support. Both subthemes appeared as key components which served to shape the experiences of SBECAs for participants.

4.1.1 Subtheme: Social interactions and aspirations

Some participants reflected on SBECAs as a way to form friendships with likeminded peers. I identified an association between making friends across the data set, developing a sense of closeness and having fun within the transcripts. For example, participant 5 commented:

“And then if you’re doing it with friends, maybe you might like want to do it together because it’s just fun doing it” (Participant 5).

In the extract above, engaging in SBECAs with friends is described in a positive light, which could suggest that other ECAs which do not facilitate the development of friendships, would be more difficult to engage with. Participant 3 shared a diverse view related to social interactions:

“If I was in a team, it would help me boost up my confidence. And if I wanted to join a team, it would help me in the future to be able to talk to new people easily” (Participant 3).

When discussing thoughts around belonging and connection in SBECAs, participant 5 focused more so on working with existing friends, whereas participant 3 introduced the

possibility of developing her confidence so that she could make new friends. Both seem to share the view that SBECAs can enhance belonging and connection in which SBECAs promoted the opportunity to engage with their friends.

Based on this I interpreted a sense for schools to ensure a range of SBECAs are promoted to suit individual needs. These findings suggest a great value is placed on forming relationships, and there appears to be an expectation that this is going to happen within SBECAs. However, this might not be the case for some pupils who may be shyer in personality, or who may not wish to come out of their comfort zone.

Some participants reflected on team based SBECAs and the support that she gained through this means. This was an interesting addition to the discussion regarding belonging and connection. Participant 1 for example shared, *“I prefer to do team sports as it makes me feel connected and as if I have somewhere I can go and someone I can speak to all the time.*

Yeah, but with team sport, you’re more connected, achieve, working together and you get to know people more” (Participant 1). At first glance, I considered this to indicate that there was a lot of value placed on SBECAs that were team based over individual. Nevertheless, it seems that in teams sports having immediate and continuous access to peers allows for a deeper sense of belonging and connection. Participant 2 added another layer to this discussion, and spoke about wanting to be as good as her friend. She shared: *“Because my friend was really good. I wanted to be good like that”* (Participant 2). From this I see the importance of peer modelling, and have those who are more able showing what is capable, which could be an attractive factor for SBECAs.

Participant 7 acknowledged feelings of loneliness and isolation that may be reduced during SBECAs, in addition to being able to minimise academic pressures:

“Before I play sports, I sort of, I feel isolated. I feel if I’m lonely especially when I’m doing subjects that I know I’m not good at. Then when I play sports, feelings that I have about the academic pressure goes away because in that one moment in that one time, you’re thinking about yourself and you’re thinking about your team. (Participant 7).

From this, I interpreted a sense of pressure for pupils to achieve academically, where more emphasis is placed on this element of school life over developing other hobbies. There appears to be a loneliness that is experienced in more academic subjects, where success is placed solely on the individual. From what I understand, it appears that SBECAs allows the focus to be lifted off one's self and towards others. Time away from academic stresses appears to be valued here, however, this might not be experienced for all pupils who perhaps would show a preference towards more academic subjects.

4.1.2 Subtheme: Teacher encouragement and support

Some of the participants reflected on the impact teaching staff had on their experiences of SBECAs. I identified a link between developing relationships with staff, and positive sporting experiences. For example, participant 5 commented:

“Basically, from my personal experience, I’ve been having anxiety attacks recently, right, and I don’t feel comfortable going to certain teachers, so I know that if it happens, I can always go straight to the PE department. Yeah, because I’ve built a connection with them and a bond and it’s easier to talk to them than other teachers. With the coaches you build a different kind of bond with them because you feel well, I feel more connected to them than I would a normal teacher”. (Participant 5).

In the extract above, teachers are described in a negative light, which suggests that having good adult models is imperative for adolescent development. Participant 5 focused on the adult characteristic, such as ability to form bonds, openness and instilling positivity. She also drew a comparison between a ‘coach’ and a ‘teacher’, which I assume to mean a teacher of academic subjects. From this I interpret that coaches are able to provide a different type of pastoral care, and are trusted as they are somewhat detached from the ins and outs of schools. At first glance, I considered this to indicate that there was a lot of value placed on having adult role models and mentors for pupils to access when things are challenging. However, with further consideration, I also wondered about the unique qualities of a coach: the idea that it could be beneficial for pupils who may struggle with their wellbeing to be able to access pastoral care from adults with different types of skills sets. Or, can perhaps promote positive experiences through new sporting endeavours.

Other participants added layers to this discussion, focusing on the impartiality of some teachers, who despite their level of ability were able to help motivate and encourage. This view can be seen in participant 1 who shared:

“I would say the people that we do it with, theyre quite enduring and motivational. So, if we make a mistake, they’ll show us its ok to make a mistake. So, I never knew how to do a layup until I got to this school and Miss XXXX used to pull me to the aside and teach me how to do a layup instead” (Participant 1).

I interpreted a sense of modelling that teachers do to ensure that pupils can achieve new things. This suggests that value is placed on individualisation, and working with each pupil according to their skills. There appears to be a notion from participants that all pupils that engage in SBECAs will have the ability, however, this is not always the case, and thus adults who are willing to teach and be patient with pupils are highly valued.

4.2 Theme 2: Emotion Management

A strong theme that I construed from the transcripts related to the being able to manage emotions. The two key elements that this theme was based upon included being able to escape from stressors and being able to self-express and enjoy themselves. Within this theme, I felt a sense that SBECAs provided a type of flow that enabled some of the participants to channel their emotions this way.

4.2.1 Subtheme: Escapism from stressors

Experiencing feelings of freedom and relief from everyday life both internally and externally, were raised by some of the participants as contributing to their overall experiences of SBECAs. For instance, participants 4 and 5 commented:

“It helps take your mind off things in general. Like when I’m doing basketball, I forget about everything else. It’s just basketball and focus, you know?” (Participant 4)

“Mainly it’s like you’re releasing so much power from you that it’s sort of you know it takes away anything that you’re feeling”. (Participant 5).

I understood SBECAs to be somewhat of a cathartic experience for some of the participants. I interpret it to mean that SBECAs can be used to support a type of emotional exchange, for more positive wellbeing. There appears to be some sort of barriers experienced in academic lessons and in wider school life that results in stress and lack of enjoyment. From these extracts, a sense of relief seems to be experienced in SBECAs that affords. However, it was apparent in participant experiences, that there are other creative avenues that can achieve this feeling too. For instance, participant 1 stated:

“So, I can go into the gym or dance or Sports at any point and I’ll just forget about whats going on in other lessons and stuff. So, it’s like an escape and I don’t have to worry about what is going on until afterwards. (Participant 1).”

SBECAs that are perceived as a form of stress relief could be viewed as a form of emotion management, and warrant further exploration as to whether this impacts on educational experiences.

4.2.2 Subtheme: Self-expression and enjoyment

Self-expression and enjoyment were elements of the discussions within some of the transcripts. SBECAs creating space for putting yourself out there without judgement was sensed with some participants. Reflecting on her experience, participant 4 stated the following:

“I like to express myself through sports, I always have. In sports it’s an easier way of expressing how we are and how we feel” (Participant 4)

In the extract above, I assume that it may be easier to be more open in sports, in comparison to other aspects of the school curriculum. When considering this further, I construed the extract to link with thoughts around a panopticon society, whereby the use of disciplinary power (surveillance) is used to control people. As a result, people police their own behaviour for fear of becoming the wrong kind of person in society, or being seen as deviant (Foucault 1977). Pupils in schools are expected to behave according to school norms, and anything outside of this is considered deviant. I wonder whether pupils fear fully expressing themselves in all subjects, or whether they feel comfortable enough to do so, fearing the consequences of being perceived as deviant.

It would seem that there are individual differences in how pupils respond to the pressures placed on them at school. Reflecting on the data, I believe that being exposed to different types of atmospheres could create a new type of excitement for some pupils. As most lessons are conducted in the same format, it causes me to wonder about the diverse environments where sports happen. Participant 1 wanted to emphasise going out of school grounds to participate in sports which created feelings of happiness and engagement:

“For me its Sports because when I play sports, I feel happy and when we go outside of school and we play sports, it’s something that distracts me from my stress and work that I have and pressure at school” (Participant 1).

4.3 Theme 3: Exploring levels of competence

A strong theme that I discovered within the transcripts related to exploring skills sets, and experiences being impacted by individual abilities. Across the data set, participants reflected on different capabilities in sporting domains, and how the bigger possibilities within sports can at times be reserved for those demonstrating more promise.

4.3.1 Subtheme: Opportunity to build on strengths and skills

Constructs around natural talent were elements of the discussion within some of the participant transcripts. The possibility of further sporting opportunities was discussed and I sensed optimism amongst some participants in regard to the avenues that SBECAs can lead to. Reflecting on her experience, Participant 2 stated:

“Maybe you can get like serious with it and then you can do It you like, really good, whats it called when you, like, become more competitive” (Participant 2).

I considered this to imply that being exposed to different avenues of success in education could be important for pupils, helping them to broaden their horizons. For me it seems that that reaching a skill level that opens up door for competitive sport, could enhance psychosocial development in adolescence.

Discussions with participants extended to consider personal abilities. I gauged from some of the participants an element of pride in possessing skills that seem to allow them to enjoy their SBECA experiences. Participant 6 stated:

“I think it’s nice to have a skill that you’ve got and you can tell people. Yeah, I’ve done this and that, you know, just to improve and to look back. I might doubt my skills now, but looking at what I’ve done before, I’ve come really far” (Participant 6).

I inferred from this that personal growth, development and experiencing a sense of achievement is an important aspect in education. This example suggested to me that having clear measures of progression to draw comparisons in the future is a salient part of the school experience.

4.3.2. Subtheme: Influenced by individual abilities

It would seem that exploring levels of competence is going to be impacted by individual abilities. For example, failing to meet expectations in sports can at times leave pupils open to feelings of discouragement. It could leave some pupils with a negative outlook on SBECAs, which may be later reflected in the uptake of such activities.

Participant 3 highlighted the realisation of pupils who might perceive their abilities as lower in comparison to others:

“Maybe if you’re trying and you’re not that good, I, yeah, you might feel less motivated to keep on doing it. and you might lack kind of motivation to keep on going” (Participant 3).

Whereas within Participant 5’s interview, she acknowledged the variation in abilities which are the result of the length of time spent doing SBECAs. She says:

“I think I had this era where I was like ‘I’m so bad at that’. Well actually I can’t do this and I was really doubting myself. And I didn’t enjoy training as much like it was a drag because it’s like why train if I’m not going to get any better and everyone’s better than me? But then I have to think, these people are training as much as I am, and some have been training for longer, so of course there’s going to be some people that are going to be better than me. “You don’t even have to be particularly good at it. you don’t have to be an expert, and you know, we’ve got girls that come to netball training that literally aren’t on any teams and they don’t

want to be. Yeah, however they come to netball because it's like... why not?"
(Participant 5).

Taking into account the range of views across the dataset, I reflected on the social element of school life. It seems that ability has elicited different responses for participants. For some, their level of protective factors such as personal resilience and inner belief, allowed them to persist in SBECAs regardless of their abilities. It has clear implications for education settings, in regards to how best to foster confidence in pupils.

4.4 Theme 4: Agency

This theme was constructed due to the discourse within the transcripts that related to how the participants wished to use their own time outside of school hours. Within the interview participant drew upon their personal priorities, and the variation with what they choose to do with their time, taking into account what activities they access to.

4.4.1 Subtheme: Priorities and accessibility

From the dataset, I associated participant views with their social cognition in adolescence. Their cognitive skills have developed and thus, they are able to weigh up the pros and cons of taking part in certain activities. Participants choices may be different from what the adults in their life wish for them to do, however this is an aspect of adolescence gaining personal autonomy. Participant 3 reflected on activities that were of more value to her than SBECAs:

"I just don't have the time because after school I like to do other stuff. I don't have time to go after school. But I wouldn't mind doing like a lunch time one" (Participant 3).

In contrast, Participant 2 alluded to SBECAs not being a priority for all girls. She emphasised personal opinions around SBECAs, and the idea that different passions can be explored.

“Some people don’t really need clubs too. Some really don’t like Sports though, so they don’t need Sports to be like their own personal whatever... or be confident like maybe someone’s passion is something else” (Participant 2).

I understand that discovery is an important part of the adolescent experience as whole. For me I interpret that as personal independence is gained during adolescence, it is important that they be afforded the opportunities to explore how they wish to use their growing agency.

Another point was raised by Participant 1, about the SBECAs that she has now been exposed to in secondary education. She implies here that there is a broader range of SBECAs to explore, in comparison to in primary education. This was demonstrated when she said:

“There’s a wide variety to do here, so it’s that I like never had handball when I was in primary, but since we came here, we’ve had more to do and more options” (Participant 1).

The idea of accessing options was interesting to me because I thought about whether boys felt the same. It would suggest that girls may need more signposting in schools regarding what they are able to access. This notion would impact on girls’ experiences, as if they are unaware of what can be accessed, then surely this would be a barrier to how they experience SBECAs.

4.5 Theme 5: Inequality and Exclusion

This theme relates to the potential inequalities and exclusions, identified by all participants as impacting on their experiences of SBECAs. Female representation in sports in general, were found to contribute to experiences of SBECAs. Participants perceived the unequal opportunities in sports for girls compared to boys, to negatively affect their experiences of SBECAs.

4.5.1 Subtheme: Female representation

I associated some of the participants discourse with wider debates regarding female representation in sports. Some participants highly regarded positive images of females in

sports, as it served as a motivating factor for their involvement with SBECAs. For example, Participant 7 said:

“Recently the women’s Euros when they got the win. So, like seeing all these women like some of them, influences us to start picking up as well” (Participant 7)

I considered this to suggest that female representations in professional sport can impact on girls in their adolescence. Society reframing the landscape of females seems to contribute to girls developing a healthier view of themselves in a traditionally male dominated area. This view is demonstrated by participant 3 who expressed *“But maybe some people don’t really care about other people’s opinions. They just want to benefit themselves. maybe” (Participant 3)*. I considered this to imply that experiences in SBECAs are shaped by wider societies representations of females. It would suggest that there is a space for pupil in school to learn and be exposed to positive female representations.

4.5.2 Subtheme: Unequal opportunities

Unequal opportunities in SBECAs at school seemed to be an area of concern. When considering this further, it reflects the broader dominant narrative of sports being a male domain. Whilst this perception is changing in society, it seems to be a work in progress in some education settings. Some of the participants were frustrated by the limited options available to them, despite having the same level of ability as their male counterparts. For example:

“This so-called female sport and its stuff like that that makes you sort of think why do we not get the same experiences that these boys do? Because we’d be able to play the same things that they do, and I think that’s something that the girls complain about a lot” (Participant 5).

A similar notion was also demonstrated by Participant 8 who stated:

“It’s so much harder to have the same things that the boys do. We as females do not get the same experiences that the boys so, and you know theres so much about equality, but it doesn’t happen within these school. We want to be doing the same things that the boys are doing (Participant 8).

The idea that girls are complaining about unequal opportunities is reminiscent of wider debates about women and equal rights, and how it was a fight for women to be able to obtain the same experiences and acknowledgement as their male counterparts. Contemplating this, it seems that restricting opportunities for SBECAs reinforces feeling of exclusion and inequality.

Research Question 2: How do mid adolescent girls perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?

4.6 Theme: Self-improvement

This overarching theme related to self-concept and how it relates SBECAs and wellbeing. Participants developing view of their own body image was seen as playing a role in SBECAs and wellbeing. Thoughts regarding SBECAs being considered as a protective factor for positive mental wellbeing.

4.6.1 Subtheme: Body Image

The idea of altering body image were elements of discussion across the data set. SBECAs being used a mechanism to alter physical aspects of themselves, came across as important for good wellbeing. For example, Participant 2 stated:

“Some teenage girls have motivation to take part in clubs, maybe because some of them want to change their body and how they look maybe. And if they were to like, do many clubs, it could help them. lose weight maybe?” (Participant 2).

When I considered this further, I linked the views expressed above to cultural norms around ‘thinness’, and as adolescents are still shaping their identity, they may be more susceptible to cultural norms and ideals. Adolescent girls are more likely to be dissatisfied with their weight, and overall body image. Also, it is known that girls in their adolescence are more vulnerable to dips in their wellbeing, as a result of their social media consumption, where certain images presented may reinforce messages that their appearance is more highly valued. An example of this notion can be seen in Participant 3’s discourse, she stated:

“We go on social media a lot and some people don’t like have the same bodies as other people on social media and they try to do Sports a lot more frequently to kind

of change their bodies, maybe” (Participant 3)

It speaks to the role of education, to help pupils develop strategies and resilience to where they are able to combat the messages of the media, that could negatively impact on their wellbeing.

4.6.2 Subtheme: Protective factor for mental health

Protecting mental health was identified by some participants as a way in which they perceive SBCEAs influences their wellbeing. Some seemed to enjoy the lower expectations and demands placed on them, which enabled them to enjoy their sports without worry. For example, Participant 5 said:

“We don’t get graded on Sports or anything like that. So, it’s just about having fun. You’re not getting tested or you don’t need to revise for whatever. You just do it there. Then it’s just stress free” (Participant 5).

From this I interpreted that there may be a sense of pressure academically to do well, which is not felt in SBECAs. There seems to be an emphasis on enjoyment and play, which is also an important aspect of development. I construed an appreciation for activities where there is not a need to prepare, or stress over beforehand, which seems to be of benefit psychologically.

Other participant emphasised the hyperfocus and flow in SBECAs that impacts on their wellbeing. For example, participant 1 said:

“Like times with peace by yourself, maybe, and you could just focus on like yourself within, like the moment” (Participant 1).

In the extract above, SBECAs are associated with peace and being present. I assume that for some SBECAs allows them to hyperfocus on an activity. From this I interpret a connection with flow state, which improves subjective and psychological wellbeing. The impact of being in a flow state can include developing higher self-esteem, and better concentration and attention skills. The implication for schools would be around supporting flow states in education, and exploring how sports, and other activities create this.

4.7 Theme 2: Purpose and fulfilment

This theme has two subthemes: Value and self-worth and enhanced feelings of positive emotion. Some participants point out the purpose and fulfilment that can be experienced whilst doing SBECAs that can impact on wellbeing. Other participants point out other ways that can provide a sense of purpose and fulfilment, which too can positively impact wellbeing.

4.7.1 Subtheme: Value and Self worth

The participants discussed changes to how they see themselves from being involved in SBECAs. I identified a link between praise and reinforcement, with feeling of self-worth. For example, participant 4 commented:

*“I’ve got people saying stuff that I’m good and no one can take it away from me”
(Participant 4).*

It seems as though the praise of others helps to improve inner pride and confidence. There seems to be an assurance in knowing that something can be achieved, and not taken away by others. When discussing value and self-worth, participant 8 focused SBECAs creating feelings of acceptance.

“It’s there to show us that we can do it no matter what is going on and to show us that we’re accepted” (Participant 8).

This belief may have positive implications for adolescent girls, who, through such a turbulent life stage, may be wanting to feel that they are accepted for who they are.

4.7.2 Subtheme: Enhanced feelings of positive emotion

Some participants reflected on the impact SBECAs had on their emotions. I identified a link between positive emotions and fulfilment. For example, participant 5 commented:

“I definitely think I’ve become much happier since I’ve done netball because I didn’t really, I struggle with being sort of. I don’t even know the right word, but just numb. I never really had one sport that I was like. Yes, this is my favourite thing ever and it was sort of just I did a bunch of stuff really. I did everything that I could,

I signed up for everything, did everything, but nothing really sort of filled that antique void.

This sounds really sad, but I guess I think I've definitely become happier”
(Participant 5).

The positive implications of SBECAs are discussed with reference to enhanced feelings of happiness. This could reflect the developmental aspect of adolescence, actively seeking out activities that will increase happiness, and where they can express themselves fully. Interestingly, other participants focused on the broad range of activities whereby feelings of happiness are experienced. For examples, Participant 2 said:

“It's not just Sports that can make people happy, and it's important not to judge the people on what their hobbies are, because if it makes them happy then it makes them happy” (Participant 2).

SBECAs are described as a useful vehicle that promotes positive emotions, however, it is recognised that this is not the only means. It suggests that it is important not to categorise activities, as the impact on wellbeing will differ for each individual. For schools the implications could include promoting a wide variety of ECAs in addition to sport, promoting them all to the same extent.

4.8 Theme 3: Gender norms and expectations

Thinking about how participants perceive SBECAs influences their wellbeing, the theme ‘gender norms and expectations’ came across as noticeable. This theme can be broken down into two subthemes: female empowerment, and negative evaluations and identity processes. Both subthemes came across as key elements as to how participants perceived SBECAs influenced their wellbeing.

4.8.1 Subtheme: Female empowerment

Some participants reflected on the impact of female empowerment within SBECAs. I identified this with the changing attitude towards women and their capabilities, and senses this is still an ongoing struggle in society. Reflecting on her experience, participant 4 stated the following:

“Particularly like quite a while ago, women weren’t seen as people who could do sports, it was a masculine thing to do. And then I think it’s important for us to challenge that.” (Participant 4).

Sports being considered as a masculine activity is a worry for girls in their mid-adolescence, and warrants more exploration if this negatively impacts on their participation in SBECAs. From this, I think that whilst improvements in society are acknowledged due to advocacy for more female role models, this is still an ongoing struggle. To me, for girls in their mid-adolescence, unless education works to promote SBECAs as a safe space for girls, with positive staff role models who can empower, such attitudes around gender will continue to persist.

4.8.2 Subtheme: Negative evaluations and Identity Processes

Fear of being negatively judged by peers was evident within participant discourse. It seemed as though comments about their sporting efforts could positively or negatively impact on how they see themselves, and their identity. As adolescence is still a time of development, comments from peers carry more weight, which could in turn impact on their wellbeing. For example, participant 2 commented:

“I don’t want to be seen as boyish. Because I think especially with football, I’ve known that there’s like a stereotype that all girls who play football are basically just boys and no one wants to. No one wants to do that, so it’s like they just don’t want to” (Participant 2).

It seems as though SBECAs has connotations with appearing as ‘boyish’ amongst peers, which suggests that debunking negative stereotypes in school for girls is imperative: the narrative around being ‘boyish’ impacts on girls’ attitudes and behaviours towards SBECAs. I interpreted a sense of individuation amongst participants, and the desire to assert their own independent identities. From this I interpret that the views of friends hold more weight in the lives of girls in their mid-adolescence, who are still developing who they are, and their interests, and therefore being viewed negatively by peers could have an impact on psychological wellbeing. It could also reflect ideologies around what it means to be a girl, and not wanting to be perceived as deviant if falling outside of such ideas.

Other participants added layers to the discussion, focusing on the negative evaluations that are a result of doing things wrong. This view can be seen in by participant 3 who stated:

“If you do like something wrong and you get criticised over it, it will make you feel like you can’t do it and it will sometimes make you feel like you should quit. And also, if you don’t do it right the first time, it will also make you feel a bit sad and make you want to give up” (Participant 3).

I interpreted a sense of discouragement, and questioning one’s self that come a result of negative criticism. It may lead to social anxiety or unhealthy levels of social comparison in SBECAs if participants are constantly being reminded of what they cannot yet do. Further, I wondered about the value that placed on feedback and reinforcement, both of which can impact on wellbeing.

4.9 Theme 4: Empowerment and Disempowerment

This theme incorporates two subthemes: Individualised outcomes, and demoralisation. Participants identified feelings of empowerment and disempowerment within SBECAs, as influential to their wellbeing.

4.9.1 Subtheme: Individual differences in outcomes

Some participants reflected on individual outcomes of SBECAs on their wellbeing. I identified a link between feeling able to express themselves fully with positive experiences of wellbeing. For instance, Participant 4 commented:

“Well-being is how you treat yourself and how other people see you and stuff like that. But with Sports it’s not like we have an image to live up to anymore that’s been changed. It’s we can be who we want, how we want in Sports. It doesn’t matter what we look like (Participant 4).

A comparison made as to what contributed to wellbeing in and out of sports was raised by Participant 4. I interpret a sense of freedom in SBECAs, with the idea of expressing yourself without being fearful of judgement, indicating that wellbeing involves inner work and discovery, which could promote feelings of empowerment.

Other participants added layers to this conversation, focusing on the wellbeing gains that have come through SBECAs. One example of this can be seen in participant 5 who shared:

“Because of all like people saying stuff about the way I looked and the things that I did, it was like, well, what part of me is good? And then netball was like, well, I’m, what the word? I sort of now I’ve got my rewards from it – the happiness and all of that. It’s like, well, I am good at something” (Participant 5).

I construed a sense of self-realisation, which enables participants to feel that they are able to do good things. It suggests that finding activities that promote feelings of empowerment in adolescence are valuable. It creates a space for schools to find ways where girls can feel empowered, by actively recognising and promoting strengths and interests that can be used to further their development in adolescence.

4.9.2 Subtheme: Demoralisation

Contrastingly, some participants reflected on some of the negative impacts that SBECAs had on their wellbeing, including feeling demoralised. I identified a link between those who were less interested in sports, with more negative wellbeing experiences. For instance, participant 6 commented:

“If you’re not good, then you probably feel like you’re not good enough. You’re just not good at it and maybe you think negatively, like thinking, why can’t I do this when other people can and that you probably think “what’s wrong with myself?” (Participant 6).

In the above extract, the impact of SBECAs on wellbeing was described negatively. Participant 6 focused on ability here, which highlights that regardless of ability, the implications are not always favourable. It seemed to cause a lapse in her self-belief, and in increase in social comparison, and negative thinking traps. This seems to contribute to feelings of demoralisation, and a change in attitude towards SBECAs. I considered the role of ability, and duration in SBECAs and how more value seems to be placed on these elements, rather than having fun and enjoyment, without which can impact on wellbeing.

Other participants added to this focusing on the competitive aspects of SBECAs and its impact. For example, participant 7 commented:

“Losing every game can like, knock your self-esteem and confidence” (Participant 7).

I interpreted a sense of embarrassment from competitive losses. For me, it suggests that the knock-back in more competitive SBECAs can have a negative impact on wellbeing. There appears to be the notion that competing in sports is an achievement that should be celebrated regardless, however, if there is minimal success then these positive feelings are lessened.

Theme 5: Sports as a risk factors, the downside of sports

A strong theme that I gauged from the data set related to the negative side of sports. The two key elements that this theme was based on include the poor mental wellbeing and the increased risk of injury.

5.1 Subtheme: Poor mental wellbeing

Some of the participants reflected on their challenges with their wellbeing. I associated a link between the pressure to perform, and more negative wellbeing. For instance, participant 8 said:

“I do like playing them, but then I’ve also got like a feeling of anxiety even if the match is like two weeks away and I sit in class and I think about it. Then my heart starts beating because I’m really scared. And so, I’ve got anxiety” (Participant 8).

I interpreted a sense of the need to perform in SBECAs which has a negative impact on subjective wellbeing. The impact can include episodes of rumination which could develop feelings of panic. Pressure to perform well appears to rob the enjoyment away from SBECAs, and thus activities that do not pose a threat to wellbeing are more valued.

5.2 Subtheme: Risk of injury

The prospects of sustaining an injury in sports were elements of discussion within a few of the transcripts, and associated with a risk factor of being involved in SBECAs. For instance, reflecting on her experience, Participant 8 says:

“Yes, like as I said, definitely feeling exhausted and having all of these like injuries aswell. Like I’ve got dodgy knees” (Participant 8).

When contemplating the risk of injury further, I considered variation in psychological responses towards injury for athletes. For some, responses can include a change of attitude towards their chosen sport and a reduction in confidence. These might be coupled with the

fear of reinjury. However, literature acknowledges some positive responses such as increased motivation to rehabilitate and return back to sports, in addition to the development of resilience.

The discussion extended to consider pre and post injury, with participant 5 indicating fear around not returning back to SBECAs at a lower ability level:

“I just never be able to play properly because in netball the main thing you use is your legs. So, there’s that, which is sort of in the back of my mind” (Participant 5).

It would seem that expectations around playing well, and being good at sports cause injuries to have more of an impact on pupils who wish to be viewed this way. An implication for education could be targeting sports injury prevention in SBECAs to ensure that activities are safe, and that there are clear rehabilitation pathways available to for pupils should injuries occur. It also speaks to the role of schools developing resilience in their pupils, in addition to fostering belonging and acceptance in education regardless of ability.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has presented the key themes as it pertains to each research question. In regards to how girls who are in their mid-adolescence experience wellbeing, the findings magnify feelings of belonging; emotion management, level of competence, agency, inequality and exclusion as impacting on the overall experience of SBECAs. Considering how girls perceived SBECAs to influence their wellbeing, changes to their self-concept, feelings of purpose, gender norms and expectations and empowerment were highlighted. This is in addition to acknowledging the disempowerment, risk factors and the downsides of sports. The next chapter will discuss these findings fully, considering the implications of these findings, with reference to preexisting literature and theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter the key findings from this research are discussed, with reference to the existing literature summarised in Chapter two. The discussion points will be provided under the research questions they pertain to, and will reference some additional literature t

enable the interpretation of new insights that have emerged from the findings. These points will be provided under the research questions they pertain to. The main aim of this study is to use a reflexive thematic approach to further understand mid-adolescent girls' perceptions of SBECAs in respect of their wellbeing. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide new knowledge as to how sports can be promoted in schools, in a way that can enhance the wellbeing of students. In addition, the aim is to encourage the educational psychology profession to consider the diverse strengths that CYP can have outside of the curriculum, and how this can be used to enhance educational experiences. A summary of the key findings is provided, following an explanation of how they contribute to a broader research context. The implications for schools and EPs are considered, and methodological limitations are evaluated.

How do mid adolescent girls experience SBECAs?

5.1.1. Belonging and Connection

The insights gained from the analysis highlight the importance of 'belonging and connection' for participants, which can be linked to their adolescent development. Based on existing literature, for instance Orben (2020) a plausible explanation for this is that in mid-adolescence the desire to belong in the social world becomes stronger, especially for females. This is a known aspect of adolescent development, where friends and peers become more significant as the young person breaks away from their family (Erikson, 1968). Also, given the context of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, it can be implied that feelings for belonging have intensified, with adolescents seeking different ways to fulfil this need (Rogers, 2021). The results propose that SBECAs can be used as a mechanism to support social interactions with peers, and facilitating new friendships which in turn can be associated with experiences of belonging and connection.

Contemplating the theory of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2009), the girls' overall perceptions emphasise the importance of the psychological need for relatedness, which becomes satisfied when feeling closely connected and important to others. Based on Erikson's

identity theory (1968), another theoretical domain, adolescents spend more time with their friends in an attempt to understand themselves, and where they fit in wider society. Whilst Erikson's theory has been critiqued for conducting most of the studies with boys, it provides an interesting framework for adolescence at large. The participants of this study spoke of the confidence that they would gain through SBECAs, which would enable them to develop stronger connections with their peers. This supports Berger's (2020) findings, where participation in ECAs can lead to peer collective identities based on shared interests. Further, these processes create a developmental arc bridging collective and individual development, supporting socio-emotional development and positive relationships. It also supports

Feldman's (2007) findings, whereby ECAs in general help to enhance social capital in the form of building a strong network of friends. This may also open doors to further access to resources that enhance wellbeing.

However, some participants did not report positive experiences of belonging and connection through SBECAs, because it did not seem as something of interest to them. Thus, it may be that some participants do not view SBECAs as something that can offer them belonging and connection, and instead this can be satisfied through other means. This could be due to a difference in leisure preferences amongst adolescents. For instance, Blum (2022) states that online means of connection is becoming a large part of adolescent lives, and it changes the ways in which they connect with their peers.

Perceptions of teacher encouragement and support, as described by the participants, suggest that adult figures who display ongoing commitment and care positively shape the SBECAs experience for girls. Relating to Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986) theory of development, reciprocal interactions between the individual and their environment are important. Based on the analysis it could be argued that SBECAs do provide participants with time to work with competent adult figures, who serve to provide feelings of safety and connection, and acceptance, whilst also facilitating social opportunities.

During the interviews, some participants highlighted the positive actions of their sports teachers, which included encouragement and support. ~~This can be seen through the lens of Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (1978).~~ Teachers involved in SBECAs, could be viewed as the more knowledgeable others, who support participants through their zone of proximal

development. Teachers are able to interact with pupils in ways that they cannot in the classroom, which may be more advantageous for learning development. These findings suggest that positive experiences around encouragement and support are key for belonging and connection as noted in the discourse. It is hoped that this finding encourages educational settings to consider ways in which social opportunities can be scaffolded, in addition to increasing access to positive adult models outside of the classroom. This could enable to more positive experiences of SBECAs and school as a whole for girls in mid-adolescence.

5.1.2 Emotion Management

Escaping daily stressors experienced in school through SBECAs was felt by some of the participants. This ties in with previous psychological research that highlights the potential of sports to support emotional regulation (Petlichkoff, 2004), and reduce excessive stress (Nelson, 2006). It also supports Steptoe's (1996) findings whereby emotional wellbeing is positively associated with physical activity and sporting activities in adolescence. As adolescence is associated with powerful changes (De Goede, 2009), participants valued SBECAs for decreasing feelings of worry, and enabling them to forget about their problems. These findings are complementary to Csikszentmihalyi (2000) who describes these feelings as participants experiencing a 'flow state', that involves optimal functioning where everything in the person 'flows' in a natural way. Participants experiencing a flow state, may have felt a loss of self-consciousness and time as their sole focus in on the sporting activity. When this happens, it is likely that the participant is performing to their fullest capacity which seems effortless and enjoyable to them.

Self-expression and enjoyment appear to contribute to how SBECAs were experienced by the participants. Some reported being able to use SBECAs to express themselves, and their emotions to other people, whilst others were able to reflect on feelings of happiness and distraction. This aligns with Chase's (2001) viewpoint whereby ECAs that are considered favourably by participants allowed for more self-expression and creativity. However, as this finding was not shared by all participants in this study, the importance of individual nuances is to be acknowledged. This is in line with Lerner (2005) who notes that it is the quality of the experience that makes the difference in the outcomes. Since adolescence is a

time of developing personal identities, being able to express oneself and find avenues to do so is important.

5.1.3 Agency

Research highlights adolescence as reaching milestones around choice, decision making, and individual goal setting (Haller, 2018). All participants valued their increasing levels of agency, which permitted them to make their own choices in regard to how they use their time outside of timetabled hours. Linking in with existing literature, adolescents are likely to work through three main types of priorities: they face personal priorities around education, work and the future; interpersonal priorities around families and friendships; and psychological priorities centred around developing their personalities (Kleinschmidt, 2012). It therefore can be implied that being involved in SBECAs is a choice, that is opted for if it aligns with personal priorities and values. The insights from the analysis accentuate the importance of choice in the context of ECAs.

Interestingly, the school environment could impact on how the girls use their agency in regards to SBECAs. In line with Barber (2009) if a school has deemed ECAs as less important in comparison to other academic subjects, that culture may be adopted by its pupils who may then also deem ECAs as ‘unimportant’, or as a form of ‘relaxation’. This view is also echoed by Corr (2019), who suggests that this sends a message to girls that SBECAs are not important, despite the ample benefits cited in the literature. The girls’ discourse around choosing what aligns with their values can be considered through SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2009), whereby adolescents desire to feel agentic through exercising choice. It is further implied that those who are self-determined are able to take into account what is available to them, and select activities that do align with their beliefs, whilst considering the extent of their engagement.

In this current study, the availability of SBECAs impacted on how the participants sought to use their time. Where a wide selection of sporting choices was made available, there seemed to be a link to more favourable experiences of SBECAs. This is in line with De Meester’s (2014) findings where SBECAs were considered as an attractive range of activities in the comfort of the school environment. However, there are many barriers that could impinge on the experiences of SBECAs for participants. Some research has

identified the risk that many options at mixed sex schools are made more accessible for boys, lowering the uptake by girls (Wallace, 2020). Thus, if school PE lessons are the only frame of reference for girls, schools may need to develop SBECAs and how they promote them to pupils.

5.1.4 Inequality and Exclusion

Insights around inequality and exclusion from the analysis of participant experiences can be linked closely to the female experiences of sports. Evidence suggests that female athletic role models are portrayed in the media less than males and draw on images of conventional, female societal beauty (Sherry et al, 2016). The lack of female sporting representation seems to have hold negative implications for younger girls, who may not have been exposed to what is possible through sports. ~~Resonant with feminist theory (Butler, 1990)~~ Gender experiences in sport are made more evident through how the media chooses to portray female athletes. Female athletes are often marketed differently, which has served to reinforce inequalities within sporting domains. However, recently female representation has grown, suggesting changing social constructs of females in sports, which may be reflected in some of the participant's discourse. For example, participant 4 said, "*But maybe some people don't really care about other people's opinions. They just want to benefit themselves*". An example of this is the 2022 European championship win by England womens' football team, which has created positive role models for young girls, potentially empowering girls to see that they are able to achieve in domains that would have otherwise been perceived as being highly male dominated.

Discourse around unequal opportunities in SBECAs highlights the role of schools and how they choose to promote sporting experiences for all. Schools often encourage students to believe that they are capable of many things. Nevertheless, this does not seem congruent with the experiences of girls, where when it comes to comes to accessing sporting opportunities and becoming proficient, they may be being held back. If schools are gatekeepers to progressive opportunities and promoting oppressive gender norms, then this should be remediated as the repercussions of this can be far reaching. This theme therefore encourages more systemic thought regarding what is being reinforced in education, in line

with the Equality Act (2010), what ethos and environments are created, and what girls and boys are permitted to do.

5.1.5 Exploring levels of competence

Participants' emphasis on being able to explore their strengths, skills and abilities can be related to literature pertaining to self-perception, motivation and flow. Considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs activities that provide a "*full use and exploration of talents, potential and capacities*" (Maslow 1970, pg. 150), are most significant to development. It could be inferred from this that participants use SBECAs to facilitate the development of strengths and skills which can be used in a range of domains. If linking in with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), perhaps the enjoyment that is associated with flow encourages repetition of the sporting activity which allows them to progress their skills and strengths. SBECAs may also support adolescence with their identity development, in the sense that activities that are considered to be most important to participants are those that allow for that full exploration of talents (Waterman, 2004).

Through the lens of Harter's competence motivation theory (1981), it could be that individuals seek to be competent, and aim to show this by engaging in mastery attempts. If these attempts are successful and are positively reinforced, then the individuals view of their competence is sustained. The relevance of this for the opportunity to develop sporting skills is clear. Based on Ryan & Deci (2009)'s SDT theory, it can be argued that the need for competence can be satisfied through SBECAs. This was evidenced by some participants who became intrigued by the prospects of competition if their competencies increased over time. The findings support arguments around interscholastic sports (Por & Van Hilvoorde, 2013), where opportunities for competition and development appear as more attractive.

Participants' thoughts around exploring their competencies could be linked to research on intrinsic motivation, where they engage in SBECAs for their own sake, interest and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Therefore, it could be argued that exploring strengths through SBECAs is internally motivated as there are reduced external pressures, but rather enjoyment. It may be that higher levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1969), enhances participants level of intrinsic motivation, and those with higher self-efficacy had goals they

wanted to accomplish within SBECAs, and were more willing to put in more energy towards achieving these goals (Bong & Skaalvik, 2004).

However, to counteract previous interpretations, it may be the individual differences in experiences could be linked to low levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1969), reducing participants motivation to engage in, or enjoy SBECAs. Wagunsson's (2014) findings suggest that in adolescence views about competence develop as they form perceptions of themselves in relation to others. It could be that some individuals do not have the motor skills to take part in SBECAs, which are positive indicators of positive competence. With most schools offering team based sports, it could be that girls who may lack motor competence are discouraged, causing them to drop out of SBECAs (De Meester, 2020). They may be more likely to be exposed to interscholastic sports that at times restrict participation to those who are more skilled. It is for these reasons that educators should aim to create sporting atmospheres that promote effort and enjoyment over abilities. Also, to considering how they work to explore unique strengths and capabilities in students. Whether it be through SBECAs or other means, how strengths are explored should be broadened to take into account different domains where students can excel. The findings might also point to the importance of personalising SBECAs experiences so that they can be enjoyed by all regardless of the level of competence.

RQ2: How do mid adolescent girls perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?

5.1.6 Purpose and fulfilment

Insights from the analysis suggest that SBECAs enabled participants to feel purpose and fulfilment, which positively influenced their wellbeing. This can be linked to Ryff's (1989) definition of wellbeing which emphasises the individual striving for life satisfaction, finding purpose and self-acceptance. It is known that meaningful experience promotes feelings of purpose, which is important in adolescence, where discovery and learning is still happening (Beni, 2017). According to the self-worth theory (Covington and Beery, 1984), individuals prioritise finding self-acceptance through engaging in experiences that

allow them to contribute and achieve. This seems to be in line with some of the participants experiences, enhancing feelings of purpose and fulfilment.

Other theoretical explanations include PERMA theory (Seligman, 2005), where wellbeing is achieved when individuals have: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement. Some of the participants demonstrated these wellbeing elements, relating them closely to their experiences they had in SBECAs. For example, some of the participants spoke on feelings of worth and happiness. More interesting, the findings of this study can be explained by the Broaden-and-build Theory of positive emotions (Frederickson, 2001). At the crux of this theory, positive emotions help to broaden awareness and response to events aswell as building resilience and coping skills.

5.1.7 Gender norms and expectations

Participants' perceptions of how SBECAs influence their wellbeing were expressed in relation to gender norms and expectations. For example, some of the girls' alluded to the gendered nature of sports, emphasising not wanting to be seen as boyish. This study's findings can be linked to wider debates in society regarding gender stereotypes. Some participants held stereotypical views about what is deemed as feminine and masculine activities, which appeared as barriers to being physically active. This supports the findings of Whitehead and Biddle (2008) where girls who were less active had developed more stereotypical views regarding their appearance. This seemed to prevent them from participating in PE, due to perceived difficulties around being active and feminine. A suitable explanations links to the sociological theory of functionalism (Fletcher, 1956), early socialisation, and what is deemed as feminine and what is not. Functionalism emphasises the idea that females are caregivers for their families, and focuses on how women should behave, what they should and should not do. Therefore, it is frowned upon when they detach themselves from this ideology. It is assumed that this negatively impacts on wellbeing, as girls are often having to choose between participation in their activity of choice, verses how they are perceived by others.

Another explanation for this can include self-presentational concerns, where individuals aim to control the impression, they make on others (Leary and Kowalski, 1995). In relation to this study, it might be that this influences the girls' involvement in SBECAs.

Concerns around self-presentation came across in this study, with concerns around contradicting the traditional feminine images that are portrayed in society. It would be important for girls in their adolescence to feel more empowered to become involved in SBECAs, and to reshape their perceptions of physical activity generally.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) can help our understanding around gender norms and expectations. This emphasises the role of our motivations to comply with social norms and beliefs. It could be argued that thoughts around engaging in SBECAs are shaped by the systems around the participants. Participants' discourse focused on the negative evaluations from others such as not wanting to be seen as 'boyish', or 'sweating', which could adversely impact on their wellbeing. A counter argument to this could be that some may be able to cultivate a level of resilience that enables them to combat these challenges. Evidence emphasises the key role of developing resilience in youth to be able to adapt and overcome adversity, without which can lead to more negative experiences of wellbeing and developmental consequences (Gough & Gulliford 2020). Some of the participants demonstrated qualities in their discourse, that developed in them a will to continue with their SBECAs. These views seem to be in line with Dodge's (2012) construct of wellbeing, whereby an individual has the resources to overcome adversity. The results here emphasise education as being a place of primary socialisation and development for pupils. Therefore, thought should be given to how we can foster wellbeing and encourage participation in SBECAs, in light of powerful social norms.

5.1.9 Empowerment and disempowerment

Participants in this study noted feelings of both empowerment and disempowerment through the belief that the impact of SBECAs on their wellbeing is different for each individual. It could be argued that some of the participants whose account suggested that they had lower levels of motivation (Bandura, 2004 cited in Benight, 2004), were not able to experience the psychological wellbeing advantages of sports that are often cited. If girls in adolescence assess their sense of wellbeing in SBECAs in relation to their competence, and assess that they are not good enough, then this could have repercussions for on their psychological wellbeing. Through the lens of the person-fit-environment theory (Caplan, 1993), it could be that participants are seeking a match between their

developmental needs and their environment. For some, this need might be satisfied through SBECAs leading to positive wellbeing, whereas for others this might be satisfied through other means.

5.1.10 Self Improvement

Participants insights on SBECAs impacting on their self-improvement merits discussion. Some of the participants discussed SBECAs as a means to alter their physical appearances, especially mentioning losing weight. It is known that adolescents are vulnerable to body dissatisfaction due to the physical changes that are happening, in addition to being subject to culturally determined messages to be thin which can negatively impact on wellbeing (Smolak, 2004). This view also supports Eime's (2016) longitudinal study where body dissatisfaction increases for girls between the ages of 13-15 years. Participants' thoughts regarding SBECAs could be viewed as extrinsic goals which are influenced by the desire for peer acceptance and status (Ingeledew & Sullivan, 2002). Research in this area has shown that exercising for weight loss is one of the main reasons adolescent girls engage in physical activity, and because it would indirectly improve their feelings of self-concept Burgess (2006).

However, individual difference should be accounted for, as Walters and Martin's (2000) findings suggest that CYP who engaged in physical activity over 18 weeks did not show improvement in self-concept. Such insights could also be explained by 'social physique anxiety' whereby some participants' worry that their physical appearance will be negatively commented on, which in turn shapes exercise goals and motivation (Gillison, 2006). The girls' perceptions around developing their body image, can also suggest positive impact of SBECAs on wellbeing. Belli's (2022) study confirms the positive link between sport and body image as it can encourage adolescents to adopt a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Some of the participants' views around improving their body image were influenced by their frequent use of social media. Tiggerman and Slater (2001) also found that concerns around body image increased with time spent on the internet. Adolescents' physical changes are known to coincide with exposure to societal forms of beauty. This could influence

adolescent girls' efforts to alter their appearance, so that they gain validation from their peers (Papageorgiou, 2022).

SBECAs as a protective factor for mental health, as described by the girls suggest that sports *can* have a positive impact on wellbeing. This supports the positive youth development theory (Benson, 2006) whereby sports provide opportunities to engage in activities that increase confidence and connectedness, which can reduce the risk of psychological and behavioural problems. Sports have also been cited to help moderate stress, and protect against poor mental health in early adulthood (Jewett, 2014). Based on the analysis it could be argued that SBECAs do protect the mental health of participants, however it is important to consider individual differences. It could be argued that the extent to which mental health is protected, is dependent on the extent of participation. This view is consistent with Meyer's (2021) findings where physical activity buffering the negative effects of life only happens if the individual is intrinsically motivated.

5.1.11 Sports the downsides

Participants' thoughts around SBECAs influencing their wellbeing were linked to some of the disadvantages of sports. For example, some of the participants emphasis on risk of injury and poor mental wellbeing can be linked to some of the wider challenges within sports, such as responses to injury, recovery and sports performance (Nippert, 2008). Existing literature can offer explanations for this, whereby some sporting contexts can increase the risk of poor mental wellbeing among young adolescents (McKay, 2019). The impact of this can result in injury, burnout and further disengagement due to not wanting to experience this level of stress. Further Rice's (2019) findings show that adolescent girls are more likely to report feelings of anxiety, however the reasons for this remain unclear.

Contemplating the general sporting context, it could be suggested that the emotional pressure that occurs from unrealistic standards in sports is negative in adolescence. In such a vulnerable period, some adolescents may have not yet developed the resilience to combat against the emotional pressures that are tied to sporting performance. This relates again to Dodge's (2012) definition of wellbeing, where without the resources to deal with psychological and physical challenges, personal wellbeing is imbalanced. The impact on wellbeing might be different depending on which SBECAs the girls are a part of. For

instance, individual sports are more judgement based, with more chances of social comparison and where pressured are heightened. With team sports, the pressure might be the knowledge that other people are depending on your individual skill set. Whilst type of SBECAs was not isolated for this study, it could be worth taking into account for future studies. Based on the analysis it could be argued that SBECAs may have a negative impact on the participants' wellbeing, especially if they are more interscholastic in nature, where the pressures to perform are more evident. These findings suggest that fostering a range of protective factors for girls in mid-adolescence is beneficial for their wellbeing. In regards to SBECAs, adults should not discourage girls' uptake for fear of the downsides, but rather be aware of the wellbeing challenges that may occur and provide support accordingly, whilst encouraging participation in a wider range of activities.

5.2 Methods, Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis

The results of this study should be considered in the context of the methodological limitations that are discussed below.

A small sample of eight participants between two secondary schools were used in this study. In line with exploratory research, the aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of mid-adolescent girls, to identify broad themes across a data set. Therefore, concerns around the extent to which the findings can be generalised were not the primary focus in this study, in line with qualitative research (Gulliford, 2023)

Purposive sampling was used, whereby teaching staff were asked to identify participants who would be suitable for this study. My inclusion criteria were girls who had some involvement with SBECAs at some point of their adolescence. However, this may have biased the results, representing more positive experiences of SEBCAS by girls in mid-adolescence overall. It might be the case that the teaching staff were biased in their choosing of participants, selecting those who were more able at sports. However, when prompted, staff were able to share recruitment information with additional pupils who were not involved in SBECAs, to help balance the sample.

5.3 Semi structured interviews

SSIs used in this study allowed participants to express their own perspectives, drawing on their own stories, to consider how the participants view the relationship between SBECAs and wellbeing (Robson, 2002). The interview schedule included both open and closed type questions, that were suitable and effective in gathering data to help meet the research aims. As SSIs are flexible in nature, it created a space whereby participants could elaborate further, which again contributed to the gathering of meaningful data. I had hoped that within the SSI, participants felt that they could reflect back on their experiences. All interviews were conducted face to face rather than online, which helped with the overall interview process. I was able to encourage participants that there were no wrong answers, and use positive body language to help facilitate the discussion.

Initially focus group methods (Kruger, 1994) were entertained, but taking into account the aims of this study meant that participant individual views were sought. I felt that SSI would give participants more of an opportunity to speak freely, without being conscious of others, or as if they had to change their opinions in light what they may have heard. SSI also enabled me as the interviewer to fully engage with participants individually, and respond to their views in a sensitive and mature manner (Robson, 2002). Looking back on previous employment experiences I consider I am naturally good at communicating, useful in these processes. However, I acknowledge that these skills require further development, and therefore practising SSI technique beforehand would have been more valuable. There were no pilot interviews in this study due to time constraints throughout the research process.

However, this reduced the opportunity of gaining insight from staff, participants and co-workers before officially conducting the interviews.

5.4 Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

A strength of this research was the use of RTA where the emphasis is placed on reflexivity, making this an appropriate method for analysing meaning across the participants data sets. This process was of value to me as the researcher, given my personal background in sports and extra-curricular activities. The RTA process prompted me to reflect and really consider the decisions made throughout the research journey. A research diary that I produced on a

word document was used, where I wrote my free thoughts throughout the process in regards to how I as an individual, may have positively or negatively influenced the stages of this research journey. These thoughts were shared with my supervisor, where we were able to take steps in order to remediate the issues that occurred, such as reflecting on my researcher positionality. (Appendix 2). RTA was deemed as a suitable framework to answer the research for this study, as it takes into account my what I bring as a researcher to the analysis process.

As a newcomer to RTA, there were some small challenges, which included developing my confidence in using this form of analysis. However, the guidance from Braun & Clarke (2021) paper, additional papers and frequent peer and tutor supervision supported my application of this. In addition to the use of a research diary, reviewing themes and interpretations this way was most valuable. I appreciated the time spent engaging with the data, constantly thinking and refining along the way. With regard to the findings from the RTA being transferable, my interpretivist perspective takes into account the subjective experiences of each participant, in addition to my own unique interpretations as the researcher. Such exclusive views do not represent the perceptions of all adolescent girls within the UK; therefore, the transferability of these findings is subject to the individual and how they may wish to implement them.

5.5 Original contribution

Reflecting on this study's exploratory aims, and modes of data collection and analysis, I feel that this study serves as a solid contribution to the progressing research in this area. My interpretations largely support existing literature, whilst shedding light on new and different insights. Some of the ways in which this study is a strong contribution to wider research includes:

- A specific focus on sports based activities, in an attempt to bring elements of educational and sports psychology together, to help enhance the wellbeing of CYP in their adolescence.
- Collecting the views of mid adolescent girls, as this period of adolescence has often been neglected in literature, or has been studied using more qualitative means.

- Bringing the different views regarding sports to consciousness, highlighting the nuances in experiences.
- The positive and negative examples of SBECAs experiences, and the impact on wellbeing shared by participants in great detail.

5.6 Implications for schools

With appropriate caution, based on the localised nature of this study, this research accentuates implications for schools, which are well equipped to support CYP and their wellbeing. As schools are encouraged to protect the wellbeing of all CYP, the narrative around SBECAs should be considered. A school's ethos and community shape the attitudes of the pupils within it (Birch & Gulliford, 2023), thus, if SBECAs are valued then it is likely that this can influence some pupils. With this, schools can explore how they foster belonging and safety within a sporting context for pupils regardless of ability.

Given the challenges in adolescence, wellbeing is important for schools to consider (Birch & Gulliford, 2023). Schools could consider ways to increase the visibility of SBECAs across the setting, or outsourcing support from external agencies to help with the delivery of SBECAs. An example of this could be increasing signposting for SBECAs that take place both in and out of schools, information sheets sent to parents, revamping the timetable so that SBECAs become more accessible for all. This includes increasing the range of opportunities, and ensuring there are accessible sporting pathways for all provided within school, or outsourced from external sporting clubs. Personalisation in education should be championed, to ensure that pupil strengths are enhanced, and where pupils can flourish (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Sport role models and mentors could be introduced, to support with cultivating wellbeing and uptake in SBECAs. SBECAs, from the evidence here, can play a helpful role in this. SBECAs could play a role in relational approaches in schools for instance, to help foster positive relationships with CYP. This may help broaden perceptions of physical activities for some pupils who may worry about their competencies.

5.7 Implications for EP practice

These findings provide interesting thoughts for EP practice when promoting wellbeing systemically. As EPs remain up to date with research, they encourage schools to consider how wellbeing is promoted, for instance, through wellbeing audits and consultation. It is hoped that EPs broaden their awareness of SBECAs and other contexts where pupil strengths can be explored, and how sports based interventions can be used to support wellbeing. It is anticipated that this study will inspire EPs to explore SBECAs and other sports related activities in practice, and consider ways in which they can be used to better the educational experiences and wellbeing for CYP. It is hoped that this raises nuanced awareness in regards to some of the struggles that adolescent girls may experience in regards to their wellbeing, particularly in the current context of the worsening mental health of females in later adolescence (Sadler et al., 2018). The study can guide EPs to the ways in which SBECAs can be used to support self-concept and wellbeing, whilst also being privy to the ways where SBECAs can decrease or threaten wellbeing and manage this dynamic accordingly. When planning prevention and interventions, it is hoped this study will encourage those in positions of power to seek gain pupil voice using various mediums to help shape and inform ideas.

5.8 Implications for future research

This study explored mid adolescent girls' perceptions of SBECAs, and has sought to understand how they feel SBECAs relates to their wellbeing. Whilst this study contributes to the work in this area there remain research areas worth exploring such as:

- Different contexts of CYP who attend specialist settings to understand the similarities and differences, in addition to exploring potential barriers.
- Exploring some of the different variables and barriers that might impact on access to SBECAs for CYP, such as schools placed in different socio-economic areas.
- Looking at different types of ECAs to see if the themes identified in this study differ between different ECAs. This includes the difference between individual and team SBECAs.
- Evaluating the impact of SBECAs over time.
- Exploring individual differences in relation to SBECAs' impact on wellbeing such as ability, length of time in sports, type of motivation and team sports; or reviewing

staff approaches, perhaps through staff training to support positive relational approaches.

- Considering the impact of SBECAs on academic attainment and cognitive development.

5.9 Conclusion

This research aimed to ascertain the views of girls in mid-adolescence, to explore their experiences of SBECAs and how they felt it related to their wellbeing. Through SSIs that were analysed using reflective thematic analysis, salient themes were identified. This study magnifies the importance of supporting the wellbeing of adolescences as a whole, through new and creative means, and broadening opportunities where with pupils can flourish. It highlights the importance of personalisation in education, and of ensuring that support is tailored to individual needs. The limitations of this research include issues around sampling, and a lack of piloting. Implications for school setting include the implementation of sports based mentors, equal opportunities and cultivating a healthy ethos and narrative around SBECAs, and other activities that support wellbeing. These things need to happen in order to increase the likelihood of positive experiences and outcomes of SBECAs, if they are to be used to support wellbeing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethical approval and Ethics Form

Re: "The perceptions of mid adolescent girls of the relationship between sports based extra-curricular activities and their wellbeing"
Application for Ethical Review ERN_22-0551

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx>) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx>) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

Ms Sam Waldron (she/her)

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Application for Ethics Review Form

Guidance Notes:

What is the purpose of this form?

This form should be completed to seek ethics review for research projects to be undertaken by University of Birmingham staff, PGR students or visiting/emeritus researchers who will be carrying out research which will be attributed to the University.

Who should complete it?

For a staff project – the lead researcher/Principal Investigator on the project.

For a PGR student project – the student's academic supervisor, in discussion with the student.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice

When should it be completed?

After you have completed the University's online ethics self-assessment form (SAF), **IF** the SAF indicates that ethics review is required. You should apply in good time to ensure that you receive a favourable ethics opinion prior to the commencement of the project and it is recommended that you allow at least 60 working days for the ethics process to be completed.

How should it be submitted?

An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

What should be included with it?

Copies of any relevant supporting information and participant documentation, research tools (e.g., interview topic guides, questionnaires, etc) and where appropriate a health & safety risk assessment for the project (see section 10 of this form for further information about risk assessments).

What should applicants read before submitting this form?

Before submitting, you should ensure that you have read and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)
- The University's Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>)
- The guidance on Data Protection for researchers provided by the University's Legal Services team at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx>

Section 1: Basic Project Details

Project Title: The perceptions of mid adolescent girls of the relationship between sports based extra-curricular activities and their wellbeing

Is this project a:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project
University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project Other
(Please specify below)
[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the Principal Investigator or Lead Supervisor (for PGR student projects):

Title: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)Ms
First name: Anthea
Last name: Gulliford

Position held: Director of App Ed and Child Psy D
School/Department: School of Education

Telephone:
Email address:

Details of any Co-Investigators or Co-Supervisors (for PGR student projects):

Title: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
First name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
Last name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Position held: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
School/Department [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Telephone: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
Email address: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Details of the student for PGR student projects:

Title: Miss
First name: Melissa
Last name: Morrison

Course of study: App Ed and Child Psy D
Email address:

Project start and end dates:

Estimated start date of project: 01/05/2022

Estimated end date of project: 01/07/2022

Funding:

Sources of funding: N/A

Section 2: Summary of Project

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon - please explain any technical terms or disciplinespecific phrases. Please do not provide extensive academic background material or references.

Purpose:

The aim of this study is to explore how girls in mid-adolescence perceive the relationship between sports based extra-curricular activities (SBECAs) and their wellbeing. It is hoped that the analysis of participant interviews will offer new insight into the developmental role of SBECAs into the lives of young people.

Background and Rationale:

Blakemore & Mills (2014) posit that adolescence is a time of exploration and skill building in preparation for adulthood and future careers. To support with holistic development of individuals, extra-curricular activities have been considered as an important factor. SBECAs in particular have been reviewed as to whether they can support certain facets of development (Larson, 2000). Trang (2011) suggests that SBECAs may have a role in developing positive wellbeing, as it offers a platform for young people to find their strengths and thus self-confidence. In recent years the government has more generally sought ways to promote wellbeing as a whole. SBECAs are noted to contribute to positive wellbeing, with outcomes including; higher self-esteem and self-efficacy, supportive peer relationships and enhanced social skills (Valentine, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000).

Research suggests that girls are less likely to engage in sport at any level in comparison to their male counter parts. It is argued by (Telford, 2016) that girls in some cases, when compared boys, are less active, harder to reach and have lower levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, research by the women's sports and fitness foundation found that for some young people, entering sports activities is a process of entering male dominated arenas which can be discouraging for them. As a result, they may become involved but ensure they have decreased visibility. On the other hand, Garrett (2004) found some girls involved in SBECAs aim to break down dominant discourses in order to experience a sense of empowerment. With this in mind, there is room within the literature to explore middle aged adolescent girls' perspective of SBECAs in relationship to their wellbeing, using qualitative methods.

Research Questions:

- *How do middle adolescent girls experience SBECAs?*
- *How do middle adolescent girls perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?*

Expected Outcomes:

- *This study will further develop the growing research base in the area that explores female experiences of SBECAs. This in turn may lead to a holistic understanding of how SBECAs influence adolescent wellbeing, and provide insight into how engagement with SBECAs can be both promoted and supported in schools.*

Section 3: Conduct and location of Project

Conduct of project

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used. If more than one methodology or phase will be involved, please separate these out clearly and refer to them consistently throughout the rest of this form.

This research will adopt a social constructionist approach, as this study is concerned with how mid-adolescent girls (13-16 years) make sense of the world around them (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Further, this study will explore how mid-adolescent girls make sense of their involvement in SBECAs, through their interview transcripts which will be broadly themed.

A qualitative research design will be used, which allows for the collection of a range of data which will help answer my research questions. Semi-structured interviews have been chosen, as they are a flexible way of collecting information (Robson & McCartan, 2016). I acknowledge that semistructured interviews fit in with the epistemological orientation of the research design. Further, they are suitable as they allow participants to speak freely in response to each question (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Middle age girls from two mainstream secondary schools will be recruited to take part in individual sessions lasting between 45-60 minutes. I (the researcher) am a trainee educational psychologist on placement within a West Midlands Local Authority. The schools recruited to take part in this study are ones that I would have had contact with through my professional role. I will seek to recruit from these schools, but clarify that I do so as a researcher, not as in my professional role.

These schools would be appropriate for my study due to the wide range of SBECAs that the pupils are able to access. It would be more likely that participants may be able to provide comprehensive accounts of their experiences. Participants will be asked a range of questions in a semi-structured interview format, which will enable discussion around reasons for engagement in SBECAs and what participants feel the impact has been in regards to their wellbeing.

Following consent procedures (see Appendices) participants will be asked to complete an information form before the interview (Appendix 5), where they will be able to share what sports they are or have been involved with whilst at secondary school in any capacity. The information will be important when considering the relationship to wellbeing.

A pilot study will be undertaken with maximum 2 pupils, to review the interview schedule and to ensure the questions are appropriate. Feedback will be sought, and amendments will be made following this.

Geographic location of project

State the geographic locations where the project and all associated fieldwork will be carried out. If the project will involve travel to areas which may be considered unsafe, either in the UK or overseas, please ensure that the risks of this (or any other non-trivial health and safety risks associated with the research) are addressed by a documented health and safety risk assessment, as described in section 10 of this form.

England, United Kingdom Area
= Walsall

Section 4: Research Participants and Recruitment

Does the project involve human participants?

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

Yes

No

If you have answered NO please go on to Section 8 of this form. If you have answered YES, please complete the rest of this section and then continue on to section 5.

Who will the participants be?

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

Middle adolescent females, school Years 9-11, between the ages of 13-16 years

- Attendance at a school where there are many SBECAs available for participants to become involved in. I will determine this by looking at school websites within my local authority, as well as asking member of my team to recommend schools that they feel suit this criterion.
- Must be actively participating in a SBECA or have been in previous years
- Approximately 5-10 participants

How will the participants be recruited?

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g., instructor-student). Please ensure that you attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

Access to participants

I (the researcher) am trainee educational psychologist on placement within a West Midlands Local Authority. The schools recruited to take part in this study are ones that I would have had contact with through my professional role. Schools will be identified from my school allocations within the local authority that I am based. I have already approached one of the schools who have expressed their interest in this study when the time comes.

I will need to identify at least two more schools through discussions with Educational Psychologists within my placement service. I will give them the information sheet to share amongst their allocated schools, and leave it open for schools to contact me to express further interest.

Section 5: Consent

What process will be used to obtain consent?

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are under the age of 16 it would usually be necessary to obtain parental consent and the process for this should be described in full, including whether parental consent will be opt-in or opt-out.

All participants and the parents of those who are under the age of 16 will be given relevant information regarding their participation in the research in a written format before consent is sought: they will be given an information sheet with the details of the research, what their participation would look like, and how their interviews would be stored (Appendix 5). Following this, the opportunity to give informed consent by signing a consent form will be offered to parents and young people. Participants will also be provided with this information before the interview, and will be verbally asked if they wish to proceed before the interview commences.

Please be aware that if the project involves over 16s who lack capacity to consent, separate approval will be required from the Health Research Authority (HRA) in line with the Mental Capacity Act.

Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

Note: Guidance from Legal Services on wording relating to the Data Protection Act 2018 can be accessed at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/DataProtection/resources.aspx>.

Use of deception?

Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and the nature of any explanation/debrief will be provided to the participants after the study has taken place.

No deception will be involved

Section 6: Participant compensation, withdrawal and feedback to participants

What, if any, feedback will be provided to participants?

Explain any feedback/ information that will be provided to the participants after participation in the research (e.g., a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

- The findings of this study will be shared with all key stakeholders involved. This is to include the Walsall Local Authority and participating schools, and the pupils and their parents. The rationale for sharing the findings in this way is to inform and enhance the insight of stakeholders, including professional education staff, and support the Educational Psychology Service in understanding aspects of supporting adolescent female wellbeing.

What arrangements will be in place for participant withdrawal?

Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project, explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

All participants will be provided with the relevant information on their rights to withdraw from the research in verbal and written form (Appendix 5).

All participants will be given the opportunity to withdraw at the study either at the start of the interview, or up till 2 weeks after participation.

Please confirm the specific date/timescale to be used as the deadline for participant withdrawal and ensure that this is consistently stated across all participant documentation. This is considered preferable to allowing participants to 'withdraw at any time' as presumably there will be a point beyond which it will not be possible to remove their data from the study (e.g., because analysis has started, the findings have been published, etc).

As mentioned above, participants will have the right to withdraw at any point of the study., participants can withdraw up to two weeks after the interviews have taken place.

What arrangements will be in place for participant compensation?

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide further information about the nature and value of any compensation and clarify whether it will be financial or non-financial.

Click or tap here to enter text.

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

Interview data, notes and anything else that is scribed will be deleted / destroyed. This will not have any implications for the participants.

Section 7: Confidentiality/anonymity

Will the identity of the participants be known to the researcher?

Will participants be truly anonymous (i.e., their identity will not be known to the researcher)?

No

In what format will data be stored?

Will participants' data be stored in identifiable format, or will it be anonymised or pseudo anonymised (i.e., an assigned ID code or number will be used instead of the participant's name and a key will be kept allowing the researcher to identify a participant's data)?

Interviews with all participants will be audio recorded and stored in a private, password protected file on my laptop.

When transcripts are made, they will be saved on the secure University of Birmingham cloud storage. Transcripts will not include individuals' names or the names of any schools. I will allocate the pupils a code, and any identifiable information will not be included in the write-up. I will ensure that the write up does not include information which may result in the identification of participants.

Will participants' data be treated as confidential?

Will participants' data be treated as confidential (i.e., they will not be identified in any outputs from the study and their identity will not be disclosed to any third party)?

Yes

No

If you have answered no to the question above, meaning that participants' data will not be treated as confidential (i.e., their data and/or identities may be revealed in the research outputs or otherwise to third parties), please provide further information and justification for this:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 8: Storage, access and disposal of data

How and where will the data (both paper and electronic) be stored, what arrangements will be in place to keep it secure and who will have access to it?

Please note that for long-term storage, data should usually be held on a secure University of Birmingham IT system, for example BEAR (see <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/teams/infrastructure/research/bear/index.aspx>).

All audio recorded interviews on the university Dictaphones will be transferred onto a password protected and encrypted computer file. This will be on a highly secure UoB server, which can only be accessed by me.

Data retention and disposal

The University usually requires data to be held for a minimum of 10 years to allow for verification. Will you retain your data for at least 10 years?

Yes

No

If data will be held for less than 10 years, please provide further justification:

Click or tap here to enter text.

What arrangements will be in place for the secure disposal of data?

Electronic data will be erased and printed transcripts securely shredded. The audio data will be deleted from the university Dictaphones.

Section 9: Other approvals required

Are you aware of any other national or local approvals required to carry out this research?

E.g., clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), Local Authority approval for work involving Social Care, local ethics/governance approvals if the work will be carried out overseas, or approval from NOMS or HMPPS for work involving police or prisons? If so, please provide further details:

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance is held by the researcher.

For projects involving NHS staff, is approval from the Health Research Authority (HRA) needed in addition to university ethics approval?

If your project will involve NHS staff, please go to the HRA decision tool at <http://www.hradecisiontools.org.uk/research/> to establish whether the NHS would consider your project to be research, thus requiring HRA approval in addition to university ethics approval. Is HRA approval required?

Yes

No

Please include a print out of the HRA decision tool outcome with your application.

Section 10: Risks and benefits/significance

Benefits/significance of the research

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

The research has developed from gaps in the literature that looks at adolescent girls in sport, from the current climate post COVID-19 and from personal interest. The findings will build on previous work in this area, but will uniquely provide insights into how sports-based activities can be used to further support the wellbeing of students, a question that is especially valuable after the pandemic. It will also provide insight into how sports can be used as another context of strength in which to assess young people. The findings will give professionals and schools a better understanding of the various ways in which sports based extra-curricular activities impact on the wellbeing of adolescents, and will serve to help develop and improve sports based support going forward.

Risks of the research

*Outline any potential risks (including risks to research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research, the environment and/or society and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.) **Please ensure that you include any risks relating to overseas travel and working in overseas locations as part of the study, particularly if the work will involve travel to/working in areas considered unsafe and/or subject to travel warnings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>). Please also be aware that the University insurer, UMAL, offers access to Risk Monitor Traveller, a service which provides 24/7/365 security advice for all travellers and you are advised to make use of this service (see <https://umal.co.uk/travel/pre-travel-advice/>).***

The outlining of the risks in this section does not circumvent the need to carry out and document a detailed Health and Safety risk assessment where appropriate – see below.

Risks to my personal safety are minimal. However, to reduce risk further, all interviews will take place on school premises between selected hours of 10am-3.30pm. I recognise that discussing wellbeing can be a sensitive topic, and has the potential to invoke feelings of distress in participants. I will remain vigilant during the interviews for signs of distress and will provide a debrief sheet and information on support following the interviews (Appendix 3). The information sheet will include members of school staff and support services outside of school that participants can access after the interview. During the interview, participants will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw at any time.

There are no risks to the environment.

University Health & Safety (H&S) risk assessment

For projects of more than minimal H&S risk it is essential that a H&S risk assessment is carried out and signed off in accordance with the process in place within your School/College and you must provide a copy of this with your application. The risk may be non-trivial because of travel to, or working in, a potentially unsafe location, or because of the nature of research that will be carried out there. It could also involve (irrespective of location) H&S risks to research participants, or other individuals not involved directly in the research. Further information about the risk assessment process for research can be found at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/worksafe/policy/Research-Risk-Assessment-andMitigation-Plans-RAMPs.aspx>.

Please note that travel to (or through) 'FCO Red zones' requires approval by the University's Research Travel Approval Panel, and will only be approved in exceptional circumstances where sufficient mitigation of risk can be demonstrated.

Section 11: Any other issues

Does the research raise any ethical issues not dealt with elsewhere in this form?

If yes, please provide further information:

No

Do you wish to provide any other information about this research not already provided, or to seek the opinion of the Ethics Committee on any particular issue?

If yes, please provide further information:

No

Section 12: Peer review

Has your project received scientific peer review?

Yes

No

If yes, please provide further details about the source of the review (e.g., independent peer review as part of the funding process or peer review from supervisors for PGR student projects):

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 13: Nominate an expert reviewer

For certain types of projects, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks, it may be helpful (and you may be asked) to nominate an expert reviewer for your

project. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

First name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Last name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Email address: Click or tap here to enter text.

Phone number: Click or tap here to enter text.

Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 14: Document checklist

Please check that the following documents, where applicable, are attached to your application:

Recruitment advertisement

Participant information sheet

Consent form

Questionnaire

Interview/focus group topic guide

Please proof-read study documentation and ensure that it is appropriate for the intended audience before submission.

Section 15: Applicant declaration

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes to indicate your agreement:

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.

I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.

I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via

Date	Reflections: 'Year 9 is where it's at'
12.11.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to the other thesis ideas during the narrative approaches lecture I feel as though a lightbulb went off in my head. I realised something all along, right underneath my nose. • I realise that I have a preference for secondary school pupils, especially year 9s. I remember that I liked it because I felt as though their identity. Everyone develops their role, becomes more solid in who they are, have some sort of idea about what they want to be and how that might shape their option choices. • I loved watching them evolve, the new types of challenges that they were beginning to experience, what things they were becoming made me wonder how much engagement in these activities contributed to the process of identity formation in adulthood, if at all - and how that might impact on their attitude towards school, and maybe help to set them up for positive later life outcomes. • I specially am interested in the role of extra-curricular activities / sport and whether or not they have a role in how adolescents form identities. How that might impact on their attitude towards school, and maybe help to set them up for positive later life outcomes. • Identity formation • Risk / resilience • Extra-curricular activities play a mediating effect in these? Does it have a mediating effect at all? • Ppts who can actually engage and reflect on their experiences.
13.11.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erikson's developmental perspective – showing us that actually development never stops – our identities are never just fixed, we learn / discover new things about ourselves which help to further construct our identity. Identity isn't just created under the national curriculum, but actually we can do other things outside of the curriculum which shapes who we are, and our long term education that also shape our identities.
15.12.2021	<p>What am I interested in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My experience working in a secondary school – year 9 I found to be the most interesting year - Preparing for adulthood outcomes – how they would be adapted once in year 9 - Sport – extracurricular activities <p>What do I want to know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To see if being involved in extracurricular activities / community activities has an impact on identity formation? How would it impact wellbeing? <p>Gap?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few studies from an EP perspective – seems to be scattered across domains/ research fields <p>Thesis: Enrichment activities and their relation to adolescent development [Perceptions from adolescents themselves] RQ1 – How do adolescents experience enrichment? How do adolescent enrichment activities support their development?</p>

the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer. ☒

Please now save your completed form and email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aerethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

PUPIL INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

Hello...

- ✚ My name is Melissa Morrison. Most people call me Mel
 - ✚ I am training to become an educational psychologist
 - ✚ Educational Psychologists work with parents, pupils and school staff to help to make learning a positive experience.
-

Why am I contacting you?

- ✚ I am studying at university and as part of my course I am doing a research project in your school
 - ✚ I would like to invite you to take part in my project.
-

What is the project about?

- ✚ The project considers how adolescent girls experience sports based extra-curricular activities, and how they think about the relationships between these and wellbeing.
 - ✚ The findings from the project will help us to understand how to support children and young people.
-

What will this involve?

- ✚ I am inviting you to meet with me individually, for between 45 minutes – 1 hour to talk about sports based extra-curricular activities and wellbeing.

- ✚ There are no right or wrong answers, I am interested in what you think
 - ✚ You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to
 - ✚ You will have the opportunity to speak with me or (*Special Educational Needs Coordinator*) after the interview if you want to discuss anything we have talked about in more detail.
-

What will happen to this information?

- ✚ The meeting will be audio recorded using a Dictaphone
 - ✚ I will be the only person who hears the recording when I type up the discussions
 - ✚ I will keep the data recordings and transcripts locked in a cabinet and in line with university policy it will be kept for 10 years after which, all data will be destroyed
 - ✚ The only time I would share what you have said, would be if you told me about something that could harm you or someone else
 - ✚ What I learn about sports-based activities for girls will be written in a report given to your school and other educational psychologists that work in the local authority, but no one will be identified in person in this. I will not use your name when I write up the findings from the meetings so no one should know who has said what.
 - ✚ The findings may be used anonymously in publications and conference proceedings.
 - ✚ I will also share what I have found with you in a summary report.
 - ✚ You can ask any questions about the study at any time, if you take part.
-

What happens next?

- † I hope you can help with my research project. If you would like to take part, then we will need to gain consent from your parent/guardian
 - † You can take a consent letter for them after this meeting, and I hope you can talk to them about taking part in my project
 - † If you and your parent/guardian agree to take part, then I will arrange a time to meet with you in school.
 - † If you change your mind about taking part, you can let me know before the meeting, during or up to 2 weeks after the meeting, without giving a reason. You can do this by contacting me on the details below or by telling (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) who will let me know.
-

My contact details:

- † Melissa Mel Morrison (Trainee Educational Psychologist) † Telephone:
- † Email: [REDACTED]

My supervisor's contact details:

- † Anthea Guilford
- † Telephone: [REDACTED]
- † Email: [REDACTED]

PUPIL CONSENT FORM

Please read each statement below and circle your answer. If you have any questions, please ask.

I would like to take part in the research project	Yes	No
I understand that I do not have to take part in the research project	Yes	No
I agree to the interview being audio recorded	Yes	No
I understand that only Melissa will listen to the recording	Yes	No
I understand that what I say will be kept confidential unless I say something that suggests that I, or someone else is at risk of harm	Yes	No
I understand that I can leave the interview at any point if I would like to	Yes	No
I understand that I can withdraw my information at any point for up to two weeks after the interview without giving a reason, and if I do this my information will be removed from the study	Yes	No
I know who to speak to if I decide that I want to withdraw my information	Yes	No
I understand that the findings may be used anonymously in publications and conference proceedings.	Yes	No
If I have any questions, I know who I can ask	Yes	No

Signed:

Initials:

Date:

Appendix 4: Parent Consent letter and information sheet

PARENT CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent/Carer,

Who am I, and what is my role in school?

My name is Melissa Mel Morrison and I am a trainee educational psychologist completing my doctoral training at the University of Birmingham. I am working in (school name) as part of (local authority) Educational Psychology Service. Educational psychologists work with schools and families to make learning a positive experience for children and young people.

Why am I writing to you?

I am undertaking a research project and am interested in learning about the perceptions of adolescent girls about how they view extra-curricular sports based activities and about their wellbeing. I will be asking for girls to take part in a short interview.

What is the research about?

The aim of this study is to explore how adolescent girls experience sports based extracurricular activities and how this relates to their wellbeing. This study hopes to help understand how they can help CYP.

Next steps if you agree

Pupils can have a short presentation about the research. The pupils will then be asked whether they are interested in taking part, your child was then given this information letter once they had expressed an interest to take part.

Does my child have to take part?

No, participation is voluntary. If you give consent for your child to take part I will give your child an information sheet, and ask for their consent, separately. Your child can also withdraw from the study, including any information they have already given, up to 2 weeks after the interview, without giving a reason

What will taking part involve?

If you and your child agree to take part in the research, it will involve an individual interview with your child lasting up to 45-60 minutes.

During the interview, we will be discussing issues around sport-based activities and wellbeing. If your child changes their mind about taking part, they can of leaving the interview at any time.

What will happen to the information collected?

The interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone and some notes will also be taken. I will be the only person who hears the recording when I type up the discussions. Printed transcripts of the data will be kept in a secure, locked cabinet which only I will have access too. In line with university policy, data will be preserved and accessible for 10 years after completing the project. After this time, all electronic data will be erased and printed transcripts securely shredded.

The only time that information will need to be shared is if it is felt that a pupil may be in danger. If this is the case, information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in school, following child protection procedures.

I will not use your child's name, the school or the local authority's details when I write up the findings from the interviews. The findings will be written in a report which will be shared with the school and other educational psychologists that work in the local authority.

I will also share what I have found with your child in a summary report. The findings may also be used anonymously in publications and conference proceedings.

What happens next?

If you are happy for your child to take part in the research, please complete the attached consent form and return to (designated member of staff TBC at school by (date).

If you would like to find out more information or ask any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, my academic tutor or (designated member of staff at school via the details below.

My details:	Supervisor:	School:
✦ Melissa Mel Morrison Trainee Educational Psychologist	✦ Anthea Gulliford Programme Director University of Birmingham	
✦ Telephone:	✦ Telephone: [REDACTED]	✦
✦ Email: [REDACTED]	✦ Email: [REDACTED]	✦

Yours sincerely,

Melissa Mel Morrison

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Please circle your response:

✦ I agree to my child taking part in the research project, ‘The perceptions of phase adolescent girls of the relationship between sports based extra-curricular activities and their wellbeing’. Yes No

✦ I have read and understood the information detailing what my child’s participation will involve. Yes No

✦ I agree to the interview being audio recorded and understand that only the researcher will listen to this. Yes No

✦ I understand that the information will be kept securely in line with university policy for 10 years after the completion of the project. Yes No

✦ I understand that my child can leave the interview at any point if they would like to. Yes No

✦ I understand that I can withdraw my child’s information for up to two weeks after the interview, and if I do this the information will be removed from the study. Yes No

☞ I understand that the findings may be used anonymously in publications and conference proceedings. Yes No

☞ I understand that I can ask further questions at any time before or during the study. Yes No

Name of pupil: _____

Parent/Carer name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 5: Interview Schedule

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- ‡ Welcome and introductions
- ‡ Share purpose of research
- ‡ Highlight key points from consent, right to withdraw and confidentiality
- ‡ Provide opportunity for participants to ask questions
- ‡ Complete participant information form

Topic	Questions	Potential Follow up questions	Probes
--------------	------------------	--------------------------------------	---------------

<p>About you/ SBECA Purpose</p>	<p>What year are you?</p> <p>Could you describe to me the SBECA you are or have been a part of? And why you do it?</p> <p>How long have you been doing this?</p> <p>Why do you think SBECAs have been made available for you?</p>	<p>What was the attracting factor?</p> <p>Did you ever think about what you wanted to get out of this before you signed up?</p> <p>How does this contribute to your wellbeing?</p> <p>Have you done anything like this before?</p> <p>What do you perceive the importance of SBECAs to be?</p>	<p><u>Push to find out the full range of SBECAS</u></p>
<p>Adolescent girls</p>	<p>How would you describe the male to female ratio?</p>	<p>What type of SBECAs do your friends choose?</p>	<p><u>What do you think A.G hope to get out of SBECAS What are the key motivating factors</u></p>

	<p>Why do you think A. G take part in SBECAs?</p> <p>I wondered if you could talk about any important lessons, you may have learned from SBECAs?</p>		<p><u>Do you notice any significant changes</u></p> <p><u>What is your why?</u></p> <p><u>Opportunities / expectations</u></p> <p><u>I wonder if you could think about perhaps why some A.G may not want to get involved in SBECAS.</u></p>
Sport	<p>I wonder if you could talk to me about how you structure your life with sports in it?</p> <p>how do you think SBECAs compares to the other lessons you complete in school?</p> <p>What about your level of ability? Does that impact wellbeing?</p> <p>What motivates you to do this? What are you seeking to get out of your involvement?</p>	<p>What seems most important to you about sport?</p> <p>How do they make you feel? Can you describe what you experience?</p> <p>Are there any elements of SBECAs would do you wish to see transfer over into your other lessons?</p> <p>Would you feel the same if you were asked to switch from sport to say... music? – what is it about this sport that makes it</p>	<p>Wow. can you give any examples?</p> <p>How else?</p> <p>Barriers?</p> <p>Protective factor?</p>

		different to the others? What changes are you noticing/	
--	--	---	--

<p>Experience / Wellbeing</p>	<p>I wondered what you thought about the word ‘ wellbeing’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think contributes to your wellbeing? <p>Within this model, which element do you think through sport has developed the most?</p> <p>I wonder if you’ve ever felt there was any negative impacts of involvement in sports for your wellbeing?</p> <p>Within this model what is the most important part of your wellbeing? What are some of the things you notice amongst those who take part in SBECAs in comparison to those who do not?</p>	<p>How does it make you feel on inside?</p> <p>Do any of those feelings show up anywhere else?</p> <p>What are you doing that contributes to this feeling? Is there anything else you would do to enhance this feeling further?</p> <p>What are some of these things that you accomplish from taking part or not in these SBECAs? What do your friendships look like?</p> <p>Can you pin points any other areas of school / life that SBECAs have had an impact on?</p> <p>What about confidence or self-esteem, relationships.... or anything similar?</p>	<p>What else can you think of?</p> <p>Wow, that’s great – how else?</p>
		<p>What comes to your mind when I say those words?</p>	

“ I wondered if you have any other reflections that I have not yet mentioned?”

Closing comments

- † Thank participants for their time and participation
- † Gain consent to be contacted again to meet and share preliminary analysis of findings
- † Remind participants of their rights to withdraw, provide contact details ❖ Remind participants they will receive feedback in the form of a summary report ❖ Provide opportunity for participants to ask questions.

Appendix 6: Extracts of Interview Transcript and Coding

About it and.

00:31:56 Speaker 1

You're like, actually I'm not.

00:31:57 Speaker 1

I'm not too bad and and then it does. It makes me happy. So I think a lot of happiness.

00:32:03 Speaker 1

Has been gained.

00:32:05 Speaker 1

From it, because I never really used to get compliments from people like.

00:32:10 Speaker 1

Actively and especially like primary school.

00:32:16 Speaker 1

I wasn't one of the cutest primary school kids and primary school kids aren't nice, so I experienced a lot of like.

00:32:26 Speaker 1

Our comments and just I don't even know if you can guess it as bullying but just not being very nice.

00:32:32 Speaker 1

And then now that I've.

00:32:34 Speaker 1

I got like people saying stuff that like I'm good at napple no one can take it away from me.

00:32:41 Speaker 1

No one can say you're not good at netball, because if I've just had 90% of people say that I can play netball, why would I listen to that? Say people saying that I can't play?

00:32:54 Speaker 1

And and it definitely helps with self-image.

00:33:01 Speaker 1

How do you see yourself now self-image?

00:33:05 Speaker 1

Featured ability in comparison to others

Developing a different mindset

specific points a sense of recognition - feeling seen

Pride + self esteem

viewed positively amongst peers

acknowledges own personal strengths

knows and pride self knowing that she is able and competent

combat media rhetoric development of sense of self through SPECCAS.

feelings of self-worth.

00:33:21 Speaker 1

So it's like.

00:33:22 Speaker 1

That sort of stuff really kind of brings me down, especially as I mentioned earlier, because I'm in the grammar school, it's like.

00:33:29 Speaker 1

Well, everyone else is good at math, why?

00:33:31 Speaker 1

Am I not good at math?

00:33:32 Speaker 1

And then you got to think not every single person in the school is gonna be a stars at maths like you've just got to think about it, but I think that it it.

00:33:45 Speaker 1

When I think about my when I think about that, but it's like I might be not great at math, but I'm.

00:33:49 Speaker 1

Good at netball so.

00:33:51 Speaker 1

I'm not bad at everything you know, so it definitely makes me feel better about myself and I see myself in a more positive light because I never really used to like anything about myself.

00:34:05 Speaker 1

Because of all like people saying stuff about the way that I looked and the things that I did, it was like, well, what part of me is good. And then netball was like, well, I'm

- some academics have caused feelings of defeat
Failing to meet academic expectations

← acceptance of varying abilities

← other areas to shine outside the curriculum

← self-esteem / self concept

← POWERFUL !!!

Appendix 7: Codes developed for RQ1

Codes for RQ1: ‘How do adolescent girls experience SBECAs?’

Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low history of previous involvement with SBECAs• A way of finding inner peace• Fuelled of parent’s experiences and motivations• Form of connection with others• An escape from what is happening in other lessons• A way not to worry about stresses in life• Opportunities to build on strengths during SBECAs• Awakening of unrecognised potential• Feeling welcomed and accepted• A personal choice of spending leisure time• Experience impacted by perceived level of ability• Higher ability means less time to learn, and more time to enjoy• Chance for fun and teamwork• Group support• Motivation from others• Fun when completed in a group• Fun with engaged in activities that are in line with skill set• Fits around individual priorities• Keeping healthy• Accessible / flexible• A choice out of many that adolescents can do with their time• Not a priority amongst other activities• Teacher sustains motivation• Teacher modelling / practice / support• Control over extent of investment• Opportunity for growth• Competitive opportunities• Interscholastic sports• Develop strengths in line with level of commitment• Health / general wellbeing• Career options• Not wanting to be in male environments• Gender divide• Fear of negative evaluations that undermine motivation• A threat to gender identity• Negative emotions – fear of judgement in male territory• Not inclusive• Wanting to be like friends• Variety to be involved in• Creates healthy balance in life

- Competitive nature and pressure create a poor experience
- Putting your emotion into it
- Positive influence on others
- Building momentum for bigger opportunities
- Giving transferable skills
- A sense of responsibility
- Escaping from life's stress
- Having a clear mind
- Personality changes and learning about yourself
- Equal ground for everyone
- Limited prospects
- Inequality and gender bias
- Causes peer Comparison
- Confidence
- Changes attitude towards education experiences
- Exploration / freedom to explore
- Developing self-concept
- Stress management
- Connection, social bonds and new friends
- Positive self-perception
- Social connectedness and belonging
- Experiences need to be scaffolded – group support
- Identity expression beyond academics
- Behavioural, positive experiences
- Less pressure to perform
- Effortless
- Happiness and satisfaction
- Physical health
- Flow – feeling better
- Ability dependant
- Ego knocks
- Confidence decreases when not good enough
- Demotivating in male dominated spaces
- Pressure to uphold femineity
- Feeling a sense of control in daily routine is important
- A form of play that can be lost in adulthood
- Putting themselves out there after COVID
- Limited with costs as a barrier
- Taking time to develop individuality
- Easy to grasp SBECAs are more enjoyable
- Creates positive psychological outcomes
- A way to debunk gender stereotypes / negative voices
- Motivation can be developed elsewhere other than sports

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of confidence and strengths • Depends on the quality of the SBECA |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making flexible choices • A lot of options to access • Teacher and peer encouragement, confidence and belief • Holistic development for the future • Learning opportunities • Individual differences in experiences / the values placed on SBECAs • Depends on historic exposure from younger years • Working on mastery based goals • context of strengths • knowing there is inclusivity • more enjoyable when they are easier to grasp • enjoyable when aligned with the skills of the individual • control over level of investment • social identity and comparison • a wide range of emotions are experienced • injuries, physio and MRI appointments • sources of stress and worry • lots of disappointment if you don't improve • mind games • feeling empowered taking on roles • good at sports • makes you happy • taking part in the matches • competitive and challenge • school encouragement |

Codes for RQ2: How do adolescent girls perceive SBECAs relate to their wellbeing?

- Validation of personal identity
- COVID having a positive impact for coming out of comfort zones
- It's important to have Females role models in accomplished sporting positions
- *Shared happiness with others which lifts moods*
- Well-rounded individual, ready for the future
- Gives transferable life skills in different domains
- Enhanced resilience buffering against negative stereotypes
- Creating a positive view of self and body image
- Enhances self-esteem and perceptions of body
- Overwhelming criticism that discourages involvement
- Sense of self impacted, if not as able as others
- Feeling a sense of love and worth
- Relating to peers enhances positive experiences
- *Positive emotions are felt regularly*
- *Emotional regulation and rationale decision making*
- Finding a role that suits your competencies
- Feeling valued and heard
- Not wanting to be associated with negative gender stereotypes
- Disappointing negative media messages
- **Personal preferences impacting on wellbeing**
- Threatening to gender identity destroys motivation
- **Creates balance in life**
- **a lot of stress and anxiety from competition**
- lack of womens visibility
- deepening social bonds with others
- time to connect with friends
- channelling negative emotions into safe spaces
- experiencing fun and happiness
- finding purpose and satisfaction
- sense of fulfilment in school life
- Taking on a different identity
- Taking on new roles and responsibilities
- Praise and recognition from playing an active role
- **Unenjoyable if your ability is poor**
- Magnifies negative body images
- Disheartening when skills arnt progressing
- Fills an emptiness and void that can't be obtained from academics
- **Protective factor for mental health**
- Validation
- Receiving frequent words of affirmation
- **Wellbeing isn't just improved by sports**
- **Other mechanisms for developing WB**

- **Finding joy in other activities**
- *Safe space to channel efforts and reap rewards*
- Feeling like you can achieve things
- Pride when achieving rewards
- **Working on the inner being**

How do mid-adolescent girls experience SBECAS?

Theme	Sub – theme	Codes
<p><i>1. Belonging and Connection</i></p>	<p>Social relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group dynamics create better experiences • Connection, social bonds and new friends • Putting yourself out there
	<p>Teacher encouragement and support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling as though others believe in you • Teacher modelling / practice / support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and peer encouragement, confidence and belief • Boosting up confidence
<p><i>2. Emotion Management</i></p>	<p>Escapism from external stressors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An escape from what is happening in other lessons • A way not to worry about stresses in life • Escaping from life's stress • Having a clear mind • Favouring experiences that makes time disappear

	Self-expression and enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting your emotion into it • Less pressure to perform • Effortless • Happiness and satisfaction • A form of play that can be lost in adulthood • Fun and enjoyment
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	Risk to wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A negative source of additional stress and worry • Causing negative mind games • Causes negative peer Comparison
<i>3. Exploring levels of competence</i>	Opportunity to build on strengths and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to build on strengths during Sports • Awakening of unrecognised potential • Experience impacted by perceived level of ability • Higher ability means less time to learn, and more time to enjoy • Accessible / flexible

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strengths in line with level of commitment
	Influenced by abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering a growth mindset • Competitive opportunities • Interscholastic Sports • Easy to grasp Sports are more enjoyable • feelings of disappointment if you don't improve
<i>4. Agency and priorities</i>	Personal choices made over free time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A choice out of many that adolescents can do with their time • Not a priority amongst other activities • Limited with costs as a barrier • Able to exercise flexible over choices made is important
	Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over extent of investment • Depends on the quality of the SBECA • Knowing there is inclusivity in Sports
<i>5. Inequality and Exclusion</i>	Lack of female representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of womens visibility • Threatening to gender identity destroys motivation • COVID having a positive impact for coming out of comfort zones

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important to have Females role models in accomplished sporting positions
	<p>Lack of acceptance / opportunities for girls compared to boys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wishing to have as much as the boys difficult for girls • to be recognised in Sports and have the same opportunities in Sports • Limited prospects

Appendix 11: Codes and final developed themes for RQ2

RQ2: How do mid adolescent girls perceive SBECAs influence their wellbeing?

Theme	Sub – theme	Codes
1. <i>Self-concept</i>	Changing view of body image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a positive view of self and body image • Enhances self-esteem and perceptions of body • Magnifies negative body images • <u>a lot of stress and anxiety from competition</u> • Life metabolism and physical health are important • Weight loss and altering the physical image
	Self-perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking on a different identity • <u>Knowing theres ‘more to me’</u>
	Protective factor for mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner peace by yourself • Focus on within • Mindfulness

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Protective factor for mental health</u>
<i>2. Purpose and fulfilment</i>	Views and opinions are heard and appreciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling a sense of love and worth • Feeling valued and heard • Validation • Receiving frequent words of affirmation • finding purpose and satisfaction • Taking on new roles and responsibilities • Listened to by coaches •
	Enhanced feelings of positive emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense excitement at the thought of a match • Feelings of pride • Feelings of happiness • Fills an emptiness and void that can't be obtained from academics

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives transferable life skills in different domains •
3. <i>Gender norms and expectations</i>	Female empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling empowered taking on roles • taking part in the matches promotes feelings of worth
	Evaluations of gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A way to debunk gender stereotypes / negative voices • Gender divide

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of bad comments that may undermine motivation • A threat to gender identity • Not wanting to be in male environments
	Identity Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity expression beyond academics • Being content with yourself • Ego, and confidence knocks if of a poorer ability • Taking time to focus on developing individuality • Feeling a sense of control in daily routine is important • Positive self-perception
<i>4. Empowerment and Disempowerment</i>	Individual differences in outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding joy in other activities • Safe space to channel efforts and reap rewards • Wellbeing isn't just improved by Sports • Other mechanisms for developing WB • <u>Personal preferences impacting on wellbeing</u> • Sense of self impacted, if not as able as others
	Reduced enjoyment based on ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Unenjoyable if your ability is poor</u> • Disheartening when skills arnt progressing

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a role that suits your competencies
<p><i>5. Sports as risk factors / The downsides of sport</i></p>	Living up to expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety provoking Fear • • Frustration • Peaks and troughs • Pressures to perform
	Physical consequences with mental impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhaustion • Injuries

