

'I'm a bit of a snowflake. I Can't Meet the Male Expectations'. how adolescent boys' perceived competency shapes their motivation for physical activity

Amelia Beddoe, Rebecca Hings & Charlotte Kerner

To cite this article: Amelia Beddoe, Rebecca Hings & Charlotte Kerner (26 Aug 2026): 'I'm a bit of a snowflake. I Can't Meet the Male Expectations'. how adolescent boys' perceived competency shapes their motivation for physical activity, Sport, Education and Society, DOI: [10.1080/13573322.2026.2716164](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2026.2716164)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2026.2716164>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 26 Aug 2026.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 79



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

'I'm a bit of a snowflake. I Can't Meet the Male Expectations'. how adolescent boys' perceived competency shapes their motivation for physical activity

Amelia Beddoe , Rebecca Hings  and Charlotte Kerner 

Division of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, Department of Life Sciences, College of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UK

ABSTRACT

Adolescent boys' engagement in physical activity is shaped by gendered norms that prioritise strength, competitiveness, and muscularity, which can create barriers to inclusive participation. Framed by Self-Determination Theory, this study uses hegemonic and inclusive masculinity theories to examine how masculine identities and societal expectations influence boys' perceptions of competency and engagement in physical activities. Thirteen boys aged 13–17 participated in two rounds of photo-elicitation interviews combining researcher-led and participant-led photography to explore boys' embodied experiences and motivation. Findings suggest that boys who perceive themselves as physically competent are more motivated to participate, while those with lower perceived competency often experience marginalisation and withdraw. Perceptions of competency are formed in early childhood but may shift during adolescence as boys renegotiate identities in response to changes in their bodies, peer relationships, and social contexts. Importantly, perceptions of physical competency are shaped not only by skill and performance but also increasingly by muscular ideals associated with masculinity, which act as a benchmark for physical capital and peer status. During adolescence, the increasing competitiveness and aggression of male – dominated contact sports shape boys' perceived physical activity competence. Within many school physical education contexts, the continued emphasis on competitive sport environments can marginalise boys with lower perceived competency in these activities. Boys' muscular development, body size, and height significantly influence how competent they feel. Lower perceived physical competency is associated with body dissatisfaction and reduced motivation, reinforcing exclusionary patterns tied to dominant masculine norms. The findings demonstrate that bodily changes, masculine norms, peer dynamics, and perceived competency influence their motivation, highlighting the need for inclusive, diverse opportunities for all.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 July 2025

Accepted 3 August 2026

KEYWORDS

Masculinity; adolescent boys; perceived competency; self-determination theory; physical activity

Introduction

Adolescent boys are often expected to conform to dominant gender roles that emphasise strength, athleticism, and competitiveness (Amin et al., 2018). Perceived competency in physical activity (PA)

CONTACT Charlotte Kerner  charlotte.kerner@brunel.ac.uk  Division of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, Department of Life Sciences, College of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Brunel University London, Kingston Lane, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, UK
 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2026.2716164>.

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

plays a critical role in shaping boys' self-esteem, peer acceptance within PA contexts, and overall well-being (Estevan et al., 2023). For this study, PA is defined as any bodily movement that requires energy expenditure (WHO, 2019), encompassing school physical activity (PE), organised sport, active travel, and informal PA, reflecting the contexts in which adolescent boys demonstrate their PA competency. Perceived competency in PA is shaped by actual ability (Estevan et al., 2023), body image (Roche, 2021), and preference for competitive environments (White et al., 2021). Boys who feel competent in their PA abilities are more likely to participate in PA, whereas those who feel less skilled tend to withdraw (De Meester et al., 2016). The effects are amplified through societal norms surrounding masculinity, particularly ideals that value power, physical prowess, and competitiveness (Messerschmidt, 2019). Boys who do not align with these ideals may feel discouraged and disengage from PA (Bramham, 2003; Tischler, 2011). Addressing low perceived competency and the impact of masculine norms is crucial to supporting all boys in PA.

In 2016, *The Lancet* reported that 77.6% of boys aged 11–17 were insufficiently active globally, including 74.4% in the UK and 64% in the USA, failing to meet the daily recommendation of 60 min of moderate-to-vigorous PA (Guthold et al., 2020). In response, the WHO launched the *More Active People for a Healthier World* initiative, aiming to reduce adolescent inactivity by 15% by 2030 (World Health Organisation, 2019). Understanding the determinants of adolescent boys' engagement in PA is critical, with perceived competency representing a central motivational factor (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the primary focus of this study. Within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), perceived competency refers to the feeling of being effective and capable in achieving goals within a specific domain, such as PA (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Existing research on adolescent boys' PA reveals persistent gaps in understanding how perceived competency is shaped by intersecting social (e.g. peer comparison), cultural (e.g. masculine body ideals), and personal (e.g. past experiences of success or failure) influences (Baceviciene et al., 2022; Barker et al., 2022; Messerschmidt, 2019; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Social norms surrounding masculinity, particularly the influence of dominant masculine ideals, shape boys' experiences and participation in PA contexts (Campbell et al., 2016; Messerschmidt, 2019; Parker, 1996). Concurrently, individual factors such as masculine identity (Anderson, 2009; Stewart et al., 2019), body image (Baceviciene et al., 2022), and competitiveness (Findlay & Bowker, 2009; Hauge & Haavind, 2011; Huhtiniemi et al., 2022) shape boys' perceptions of competency and their ability to navigate PA environments.

This study contributes to the literature by employing innovative qualitative visual methods, combining participant and researcher photography in photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs; Harper, 2002), conducted at two time points to explore boys' lived experiences of PA. While research on adolescent boys' perceived competency in PA motivation often prioritises behavioural and physiological outcomes (De Meester et al., 2016; Estevan et al., 2022), it frequently overlooks the sociocultural processes through which masculine identities are constructed and influence motivation. This study extends SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) by highlighting how hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) influences boys' motivation, perceived competency, and engagement in PA. We explore how boys navigate male expectations through the lenses of Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell, 2005) and Inclusive Masculinity Theory (Anderson, 2009).

Self-Determination theory and adolescent boys' perceived competency in physical activity

SDT was used to explore how boys' perceptions of competency influence their motivation to engage in PA. Guided by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2020), this study focuses on the basic psychological need (BPN) of perceived competency. SDT provides a robust framework for analysing how boys' perceptions of physical competency influence their motivation in PA settings (Beddoe et al., 2023; Kelso et al., 2020). Previous research highlights how addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation within social contexts can support a more nuanced understanding of boys' engagement in PA

(Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). Using an SDT framework is particularly effective for examining how perceived competency is shaped by broader social and gendered dynamics (Fraguela-Vale et al., 2020). In this study, SDT informed the interpretation of how feelings of ability and confidence, as well as feedback from peers, shaped motivation across different PA environments.

SDT conceptualises motivation along a continuum, from intrinsic motivation (driven by enjoyment) to extrinsic motivation (influenced by external rewards or pressures). This continuum encompasses amotivation, external regulation (utilising rewards and punishments), introjected regulation (experiencing guilt and shame), identified regulation (embodying personal values), and integrated regulation (aligning with core values) (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The core of SDT lies in the fulfilment of three BPNs: autonomy, competency, and relatedness, which are essential for optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When these needs are unmet or thwarted, individuals are more likely to rely on controlled forms of motivation, driven by external expectations, social norms, or a desire to avoid disapproval (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

Research indicates that fulfilling these psychological needs enhances adolescents' engagement in PA (Fraguela-Vale et al., 2020). Perceived competency in PA has been demonstrated to have a particularly strong influence on boys' motivation and sustained participation (Tischler, 2011). Boys who perceive themselves as having higher competency show greater physical self-concept, body satisfaction, and physical fitness. This study extends understanding of perceived competency by exploring a broader range of PA contexts. Framed by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and theories of masculinity (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005), the research investigates how masculine identities during adolescence shape motivation and participation. This approach highlights how gender norms influence boys' perceived competency, either facilitating or hindering PA engagement. While SDT provides a lens for understanding motivation and perceived competency, theories of masculinity offer a complementary sociocultural framework for examining how gendered expectations and social hierarchies shape these experiences.

Masculinity theories and perceived competency

Masculinity theories offer a lens for understanding how boys perceive and develop their competence in PA. Hegemonic Masculinity Theory examines how particular configurations of masculinity become culturally authoritative and operate as contextually embedded processes through which gendered power relations are maintained (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In PA settings, hegemonic masculinity shapes which forms of participation and embodiment are socially recognised, contributing to the marginalisation of masculinities that do not confer status, relatedness, or perceived competency. For adolescent boys, peer interactions, bodily comparisons, and broader institutional and cultural expectations shape how PA is experienced, with dominant gender norms organising the social valuing of practices such as strength and competitiveness, shaping perceived competency and marginalising those who do not conform (Hickey, 2008; Tischler, 2011). Building on this, Messerschmidt (2016) emphasises that masculinities are constructed and negotiated across multiple social levels, highlighting how peer relations, institutional practices, and the specific cultural conditions of PA and PE settings dynamically shape hegemonic masculinity among adolescent boys. While hegemonic masculinity theory remains a useful framework, it has been noted for its limitations in capturing the diversity and fluidity of boys' everyday practices, particularly in contexts where masculinities are situational rather than dominance – oriented (Waling, 2019; Wedgwood et al., 2023).

Inclusive Masculinity Theory offers an alternative framework for understanding how masculinities are organised across social contexts, particularly sports environments, where declining levels of homophobia have reduced the rigid policing of masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Within these contexts, masculine relations are less structured around hierarchical dominance, enabling greater flexibility in emotional expression, physical practices, and social behaviour without loss of peer status, with masculinity conceptualised as more fluid and horizontally organised. Inclusive Masculinity Theory offers an alternative framework to Hegemonic Masculinity Theory by identifying contexts

in which the regulation of gender relations is less strongly enforced, while still allowing analysis of the persistence and contextual variability of masculine authority (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005). In PA contexts, Inclusive Masculinity Theory highlights environments in which boys may engage in PA for enjoyment, personal development, or participation in non – traditional activities without pressure to demonstrate competitiveness or valued forms of physical competence. Together, these frameworks support a nuanced understanding of how masculine relations are both structured and reconfigured across different PA contexts. While Inclusive Masculinity Theory usefully highlights changing masculine practices, it may afford limited attention to how power relations and structural inequalities continue to operate, albeit in more subtle or reconfigured ways, within ostensibly inclusive contexts (O'Neil, 2015).

While Inclusive Masculinity Theory highlights contexts in which masculine hierarchies may be less rigidly enforced, boys' gender performances remain highly situational. Research shows that boys adapt how they express masculinity across settings, adopting complicit behaviours to align with dominant norms in competitive or male – only environments (Barbierik et al., 2023; Connell, 2005). Although inclusive contexts can enable alternative masculinities characterised by openness and emotional expression (Anderson & McCormack, 2018), this is not consistently reflected across PE settings. This is particularly evident in ancillary spaces such as changing rooms, where peer surveillance, bodily comparison, and heteronormative expectations are intensified (Hauge & Haavind, 2011). As a result, many boys continue to feel pressure to perform behaviours associated with dominant masculine norms to avoid marginalisation and secure peer acceptance, with binary and exclusionary norms remaining embedded within everyday PE practices (Barbierik et al., 2023; Joy et al., 2021; Larsson et al., 2011).

Perceived competency across physical activity contexts

Dominant masculine stereotypes continue to shape boys' self – perceptions of competence in PA. Foundational research demonstrates that boys' sense of self can become closely tied to athletic success, with social recognition often dependent on skill, strength, and endurance (Messner, 1992). Subsequent research has emphasised that boys' confidence in PE is not only about ability and performance, but also their capacity to negotiate and perform within peers' and teachers' expectations, demonstrating how social interaction shapes perceived competency (Drummond, 2003). Research on English school PE shows that boys organised activities, including high school (senior) rugby, reward physical competence, toughness, and dominance, conferring status and recognition on skilled boys while marginalising those less able (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Light & Kirk, 2000). However, alternative PE approaches suggest that these dynamics are not inevitable, as studies show that when curricula incorporate more diverse activities emphasising teamwork, cooperation, and emotional expression, boys report greater engagement, a stronger sense of being valued, and increased participation (Campbell et al., 2016). Pedagogical approaches that prioritise cooperation, safety, reflection, and personal improvement, rather than competition alone, can encourage a more positive perception of competence across diverse masculinities (Drummond, 2003; Stewart et al., 2019).

School PE has historically functioned as a PA space where gender performativity has played a significant role in fostering hegemonic masculinities (Light & Kirk, 2000; Tischler, 2011). Status and value in secondary PE contexts are often determined by muscularity, strength, and physical proficiency, reinforcing hierarchical masculine norms (Hill, 2015). Although some boys can resist these dynamics, a hierarchy of masculinities is commonly perceived, with marginalisation and peer teasing prevalent (Bramham, 2003). Boys perceived as having the 'wrong' body shape or being less athletic were positioned as less legitimate within PE, with peer ridicule and exclusion commonly tolerated (Tischler, 2011). Such experiences can lead boys to withdraw from PE, disengage from PA, or isolate themselves during participation to protect their sense of self and avoid physical, verbal, or emotional abuse (Hill, 2015; Joy et al., 2021). Similarly, Hickey (2008) identified PE as an environment that

celebrates hyper – masculine behaviours, fostering an ethos of entitlement among boys who conformed to dominant norms, while reinforcing exclusion and inequality for those less able to embody dominant valued forms of masculinity.

In addition to examining adolescent boys' experiences in organised, competitive sport, research has explored engagement in more informal, self-directed forms of PA (Wheaton, 2013). Studies of activities such as skateboarding (Beal, 1996), ultimate frisbee (Crocket, 2013), and parkour and surfing (Wheaton, 2013) suggest that these contexts may offer greater scope for autonomy and identity expression for boys who do not align with the competitive hierarchies commonly associated with school sport. Unlike traditional PE lessons and school playing fields, which often reinforce dominant masculine norms centred on competition, hierarchy, and conformity, alternative spaces such as community sport, informal leisure activities, or outdoor environments can enable boys to engage in PA autonomously (Symons Down et al., 2013). However, these spaces should not be understood as free from gendered power relations. Alternative and informal PA contexts may also reproduce hierarchies, exclusions, and masculine ideals, although these may be organised differently from those associated with conventional school PE and mainstream organised sport. Status, for instance, may be attached to risk-taking, technical skill, peer recognition, or subcultural belonging, reflecting different ways that competence can be recognised within alternative and informal PA contexts (Beal, 1996; Crocket, 2013; Wheaton, 2013). Research examining adolescents' perceived motor competence shows that perceptions of competence differ across contexts, with some young people reporting higher perceived competence in settings beyond PE and organised sport (De Meester et al., 2016). The present study examined boys' perceived competency across all PA and sport environments rather than focusing exclusively on PE or organised sport.

Research consistently shows that PA remains an important site for the organisation of masculine status and legitimacy during adolescence through peer relations and institutional practices. While hegemonic gender relations continue to shape school sport and PE (Connell, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019), boys' masculine practices are increasingly recognised as variable and context – dependent rather than organised through a single, fixed hierarchy (Harding, 2022; Stewart et al., 2019). Synthesising this work, Magrath et al. (2020) argue that sport continues to play a central role in reproducing gendered power relations, even as societal change has created space for alternative ways of enacting masculinity. A systematic review by Beddoe et al. (2023) identified a limited number of qualitative studies examining adolescent boys' motivations and experiences in PA contexts. The review emphasised the need to situate boys' PA motivation within gendered societal expectations and embodied experiences in PA spaces, rather than treating motivation as an individualised construct detached from social context. Despite growing recognition of the role of gender norms in shaping boys' participation and identity formation in PE and sport, the review identified limited attention to how these gendered constructions influence boys' self – perceived competence in everyday PA settings.

Body image and perceived competency

Boys' perceptions of their bodies influence their sense of competency in PA (Baceviciene et al., 2022). Body image is a multidimensional construct that encompasses perceptual components, how accurately individuals perceive their body size and shape, and attitudinal components, such as satisfaction, concern, or dissatisfaction with their appearance (Grogan, 2016). Barker et al. (2022) emphasise that body image in PE is shaped not only by a boy's attitudes to their body, but also by pedagogical practices, peer cultures, and broader social discourses about bodies.

While traditional measures of perceived competency in PA focus on motor skills and performance, recent research emphasises physical appearance and muscularity as key aspects of adolescent boys' embodied self-perceptions (Roche, 2021). Connell's (2005) research demonstrates that boys' bodies become a key marker through which hegemonic masculinity is constructed, regulated, and performed. Boys who perceive themselves as insufficiently muscular or lacking what they interpret as a 'male' body shape may therefore experience body dissatisfaction that undermines their perceived

competency in PA (Roche, 2021; Stewart et al., 2019). Concerns about not fitting masculine ideals, such as not being muscular enough, tall enough, or having features like broad shoulders, wide back (lats), and a developed chest can heighten self-consciousness and discourage participation in activities where their bodies are visible or compared with peers (Gattario et al., 2015; Kerner et al., 2018).

Competitive physical activity environments and perceived competency

Competitive contexts in PA also shape adolescent boys' perceptions of competency by establishing performance expectations and social comparison. While competition can motivate some boys, it may undermine intrinsic motivation for those who feel less skilled or prefer non-competitive activities (Røset et al., 2020; White et al., 2021). Boys' PA motivation varies by preferences for team sports, individual pursuits, or PA focused on personal improvement (Findlay & Bowker, 2009). Social pressures from peers, parents, schools, and broader cultural norms reinforce gender ideals that boys are expected to value competitive team sports as a key source of social status among their peers (Anderson, 2009).

Research on fitness monitoring and testing in PE highlights the detrimental effects that competitive and performative practices can have on some boys. Fitness monitoring, such as completing timed runs, beep tests, or recording weight repetitions, tracks and compares students' fitness levels over time. For those who feel uneasy about the public visibility of their PA performance, being tested, monitored, and compared with peers can diminish their perceived competency and, in turn, reduce motivation and lead to PA avoidance (Huhtiniemi et al., 2022). These practices can entrench feelings of inadequacy among boys who obtain lower scores in fitness testing (Cale et al., 2014; Hauge & Haavind, 2011). Hauge and Haavind (2011) found that PE lessons prioritising test outcomes and peer comparison risk marginalising boys who do not perform strongly. Cale et al. (2014) similarly argue that widespread fitness monitoring in English schools reflects a 'performative culture' that prioritises results over learning, reinforcing masculine norms that equate physical worth with measurable performance.

Theoretical integration: bridging motivation and masculinity

Integrating SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) with masculinity theories (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005) offers a nuanced perspective on boys' perceived competency in PA. While SDT clarifies how feelings of competence influence motivation and engagement, it does not address which competencies are socially valued or how gendered power dynamics affect access to these experiences. Masculinity theories address this gap by illustrating how dominant norms shape PA environments, privileging certain performances and bodies. Together, these frameworks reveal that perceived competency is not merely an individual evaluation, but a status negotiated within gendered social hierarchies, shaping boys' motivation and participation.

This study

Building on the theoretical perspectives outlined above, this study investigates boys' perceived competency and motivation across a variety of PA contexts. Using qualitative visual methods, the study aims to capture how boys experience and express PA competency in ways that may not align with dominant masculine norms. In particular, the study explores how boys' BPN of perceived competency interacts with their masculine identities to shape engagement, motivation, and self-perceptions. By focusing on alternative expressions of masculinity and underrepresented experiences, the study addresses gaps in prior research that has largely concentrated on boys who thrive in traditional sports settings.

This study addresses these gaps by using qualitative visual methods to explore how boys experience competency and motivation across a variety of PA contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The research questions are:

1. How does the basic psychological need for perceived competency influence adolescent boys' motivation to engage in PA?
2. How do adolescent boys' masculine identities affect their perceived competency in PA?

Methodology

Recruitment and participant data

A relativist ontological approach, recognising that reality is subjective and shaped by individual experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2013), was adopted to reflect the diversity and contextuality of adolescent boys' PA experiences. Social constructivism guided the epistemology, viewing knowledge as socially constructed and supporting an interpretivist focus on participants' subjective meanings (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to the recruitment process. Thirteen male adolescents (aged 13–17) from five UK schools/colleges were recruited via their parents or caregivers through Instagram, facilitating a diverse sample in terms of age, educational setting, athletic ability, and type of regular PA (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Two of the participants self-identified as British Chinese, one British Pakistani, eight White British and one White European. One participant self-identified as bisexual, ten as heterosexual, and two did not respond; twelve self-identified as male at birth, and one chose not to respond; twelve self-identified as male at interview, and one chose not to respond. To ensure participant confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout the paper in place of real names.

Methodological approach and data analysis

Photo-Elicitation Interviews (PEIs) were selected due to their ethical suitability for participants aged under 18 and their effectiveness in facilitating engagement with complex, abstract concepts, such as motivation and identity, by accommodating diverse cognitive and communicative capacities among adolescent boys (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2015). PEIs facilitate a shift in the adult–child power dynamic frequently observed in research, where adults are often viewed as authority figures, similar to teachers or parents (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2015). Using participant photographs provides participants with a greater sense of autonomy and competency in the research process (MacPherson et al., 2016). PEIs align with the study's constructivist methodology (Sparkes & Smith, 2013), emphasising the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participant.

Two rounds of PEIs were conducted in participants' homes, with a parent or caregiver present in a next-door room, with the door open, and the researcher holding a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to ensure safeguarding protocols were met. In Phase 1, researcher-led PEIs (duration ranged from 40–85 min) used selected public domain photographs to prompt discussion around PA-related topics, including body image, gender norms, emotions, environments, social influences, and leisure (Appendix A). At the end of each interview, participants were introduced to the Participant Brief for Photography (Appendix B), which provided guidance on ethical, safety, and technical matters. The boys were then invited to take photographs representing both their motivations and amotivations toward PA. The participants' photographs were reviewed by a parent or carer and submitted securely via WhatsApp before being transferred to an encrypted server. Phase 2 interviews (duration ranged from 25–50 min), conducted 2–12 weeks later, were participant-led. Follow-up questions revisited earlier discussions and helped rebuild rapport, leading to open-ended conversations about the photographs the participants had taken. Participants were asked to describe the context, emotions, and meanings associated with each image. Photographs and participants'

verbal accounts were analysed together to ensure interpretations remained grounded in the participants' intended meanings and to preserve the relationship between image and description.

The two-phase design, commencing with more structured, researcher-led PEIs and followed by participant-led interviews, facilitated a gradual rebalancing of power and enhanced participant engagement. For younger participants, this approach provided an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the research process, build confidence, and reflect on the questions being posed. The interval between interviews also allowed for contemplation of more complex or abstract ideas. Visual methods in both phases encouraged sustained engagement and offered a flexible mode of communication (Mannay, 2016). The combination of deductive and inductive approaches across the two phases enabled the production of rich, co-constructed (Thompson & Lindo, 2024) accounts rooted in participants' perspectives.

In an abductive methodological framework, the distinctive lived experiences of the participants were investigated, guided by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and masculinity theories (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005) that informed, yet did not limit, the analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abductive reasoning facilitates the co-construction of data, allowing insights to emerge through the interaction between the researcher and participants, without requiring participants to possess prior theoretical knowledge (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach combines inductive and deductive reasoning, enabling the theory to inform the analysis while remaining open to new insights emerging from the participants' data. The primary researcher recorded, transcribed, and anonymised the PEIs. The six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) were conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2019): (1) Familiarisation, (2) Coding, (3) Generating themes, (4) Reviewing themes to allow for context, (5) Refining and defining themes, and (6) Writing up, involving reflexive discussions, and presenting findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

The analysis explored how perceptions of competency and motivation were expressed through boys' accounts of PA. The RTA process (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was iterative and interpretive, involving repeated engagement with the data, ongoing reflection, and theoretical consideration of how individual experiences related to broader social understandings of motivation and gender. Themes developed abductively from the two sets of PEIs and participants' photographs, iteratively defined from the data while remaining closely grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Ongoing reflexivity was employed to consider how the researcher's positionality may have influenced both the research process and data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The female primary researcher's position is distinct from dominant, masculine cultures, informing a critical sensitivity to how perceptions of competency are shaped by gender norms. Previous experiences of low perceived competency in school sport and her role as a parent of adolescents contributed to an empathetic understanding of how young people express and make sense of their PA experiences, supporting the co-construction of meaning throughout the study. Interpretations were further developed through reflexive discussions with the researchers and critical friends, which helped challenge assumptions and deepen theoretical insight.

The first author facilitated conversational, non-judgmental PEIs to reduce research power dynamics (Leonard & McKnight, 2015). Reflexivity was maintained through a reflexive diary (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and discussions with academic critical friends, who challenged assumptions and enhanced rigour (Creswell, 2008). Over 20 h of transcribed data and 180 participant photographs were collected, ensuring participants' voices remained central to the research, with direct quotes and photographs supporting the themes. Figures 2–12 present 11 participant photographs that visually enrich their words. In the second PEIs, participants directed the content and dialogue to ensure a collaborative process of co-construction of meaning and that the themes remained grounded in their lived experiences (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2015). The participants had the opportunity to openly discuss their photographs and explain their meaning in their own words, allowing the words and images to complement one another (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Through abductive analysis, iterative coding, and the flexible use of SDT and masculinities theories as interpretive lenses, the

themes outlined in the next section emerged from and remained grounded in participants' lived experiences.

Findings

Four themes were developed by the researchers and participants using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to explore adolescent boys' motivations and perceived competency in PA (Figure 1):

1. 'I Guess That's Why I Can't Meet the Male Expectations': Hegemonic Masculinity and the Pressure to Perform.
2. 'It's Like a Motivation': How Perceived Competency Encourages PA Participation.
3. 'I Choose Them Because I'm Good at Them': Perceived Competency.
4. 'Everyone's Shouting at Me': How Context and Competition Shape Boys' Participation in PA.

1. 'I Guess That's Why I Can't Meet the Male Expectations': Hegemonic Masculinity and the Pressure to Perform

This theme explores how masculinity, puberty, and societal expectations influence adolescent boys' perceived competency in PA, affecting their confidence and self-esteem. Changes during puberty and social pressures affected boys' sense of competency, particularly when their peers began to grow taller or more muscular. Kenji reflected on this, saying, 'Getting tackled in football or getting charged at in rugby. That kind of fear of getting hurt. And I guess I don't meet up to that sort of male expectation'. Some stopped activities they found physically demanding; Khalid preferred mountain biking over rugby, saying, 'I'm not being charged at by a massive guy!'

By secondary school, boys were identified as 'sporty' or 'non-sporty'. Khalid stated, 'Yeah, I pick up sports pretty quickly', while Alex said, 'I don't see myself as sporty'. Football and ball games were

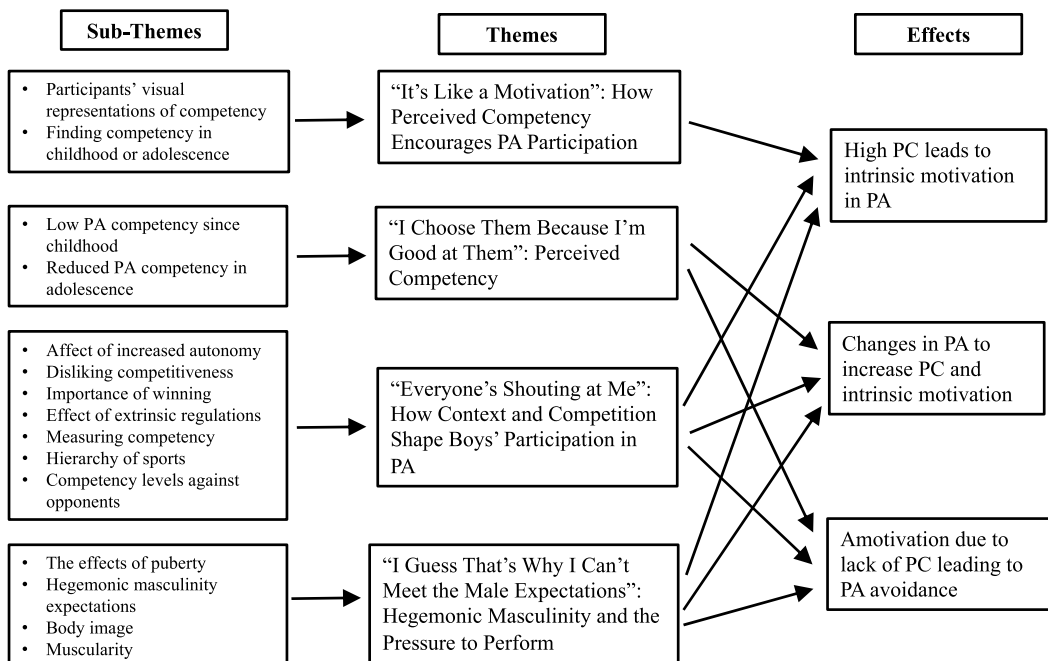


Figure 1. Thematic structure and outcomes of adolescent boys' perceived competency in physical activity. Note: PA is physical activity; PC is perceived competency.

traditionally viewed as masculine activities. Alex disliked ball sports but felt pressured: 'All the young boys having to do ball games, so I thought, hey, everyone says I'm a boy, I should go and do ball games too'. Adam recalled, 'I was always scared of people throwing balls at me. Things like cricket balls being thrown across a pitch still scare me a lot'. Both were identified as 'non-sporty' as children due to their dislike of ball games. Kenji said, 'I'm a bit of a snowflake. And I'm really sensitive when it comes to sport. I guess that's why I can't meet the male expectations'.

Physical contact discouraged some boys. Adam said, 'The idea about being tackled and kicked has always been something where you're just like, "Oh, I don't want to be in this situation. So, then I may just slowly walk away."' Kenji felt the same, saying, 'I just tend to get a bit less involved in sports like contact rugby or football ... which is why I'd stay at the back and just watch'. Charlie said, 'I'm not very physical to begin with. I don't really like a lot of strong challenges or anything. I don't really want to get hurt'. Boys described growing up in a culture that pressured them to play contact sports. Their unwillingness to 'get hurt' contributed to low perceived competency. Adam and Charlie found less aggressive activities they preferred, while Kenji became inactive. These accounts suggest how norms that valorise toughness and aggression may undermine boys' feelings of competency, contributing to disengagement from certain forms of PA.

Appearance and body shape also shape perceived competency. Dom said, 'I'm not really interested in like building really big muscles'. Adam stated, 'I don't care about muscles. It's really not a good use of time just to go like this (he flexes his biceps) every two seconds to prove that I've spent half my life in the gym'. While boys like Adam rejected muscular ideals, they remained aware of body hierarchies among peers and the effect it had on their peer status and popularity. Other boys opted to alter their physique through gym training, which enhanced their perceived competency in PA. Jake showed a photo of himself weight training (Figure 2) and said, 'My friends definitely do it for body image because they're always in class and just start flexing and stuff'.

Lucas said, 'One of the reasons I started at the gym was not to be skinny anymore. Since then, I've done it because it's fun, but that has been one of the main reasons'. John weight trains for 'Looks, you know, physique', viewing his calloused hands as signs of accomplishment: 'Those are my callouses, I've got them from the gym. Yeah, they don't ever go away'. (Figure 3). While gym participation offered John a sense of achievement and visible indicators of competence, he also revealed ongoing dissatisfaction. He explained:

To be honest, no, I don't think I'll ever be, but that's kind of the game. No one's ever happy with how they look. Some people, even after they go to the gym, they then think they have a worse physique. They get less happy with the way they look.

These reflections highlight ongoing bodily comparison and appearance evaluation, even alongside continued participation and visible markers of progress.

In summary, adolescent boys' perceived competency in PA is shaped by masculine identities and the pressure to embody dominant masculine ideals, such as strength, participation in traditionally masculine sports, and a muscular physique, which influence both their engagement and self-esteem.

2. 'It's Like a Motivation': How Perceived Competency Encourages PA Participation

This theme explores how perceived competency motivates boys to engage in PA. When boys feel capable, they are more likely to participate and persist. Ralph illustrated this through his cross-country experience, describing how seeing his collection of race bibs boosts confidence: 'I've done all these races before. So, that means I'm able to do this one. It's like a motivation'. (Figure 4). The bibs symbolise his accumulated success and reinforce his belief in his physical competency. Ralph's reflection exemplifies the SDT concept of perceived competency as a key driver of intrinsic motivation, where prior success reinforces feelings of mastery and enjoyment.

Many boys select activities in which they feel confident, thereby enhancing their motivation. Josh explains, 'I just do it a lot because I'm reasonably good at it', referring to hockey. Ralph similarly



Figure 2. Jake weight training. enhancing perceived competency in pa through body transformation.

selects cross-country and soccer because 'I'm good at them', adding, 'It is important to me. And I believe if I spend time on something, I should be good at it'. Ralph identifies as 'a runner' (Figure 5), linking perceived competency closely to self-concept.

In contrast, Adam recalled low perceived competency during childhood, particularly in PE and traditional team sports: 'I had no sports that I really knew I wanted to do'. At age 14, he discovered sailing through a local course, which provided a new sense of mastery: 'Sailing kind of clicked for me and I feel it's a lifelong thing'. Describing his photograph (Figure 6), Adam elaborated: 'I do love the idea of being in a boat, those moments where you get a massive gust of wind and feel the boat desperately tugging against you. It feels so liberating'. Sailing offered Adam a context in which his abilities could develop, enhancing perceived competency and reshaping his relationship



Figure 3. John's Callused hands – a visual marker of effort giving John increased perceived competency in weight training.

with PA. These contrasting experiences highlight how perceived competency, whether developed early or discovered later, can encourage motivation and ongoing engagement in PA.

3. 'I Choose Them Because I'm Good at Them': Perceived Competency

This theme focuses on boys' personal experiences of competency in PA and how these experiences affect their motivation. The theme highlights how past experiences, feelings of perceived competency, and personal enjoyment shape adolescent boys' PA choices and participation. Many boys described seeking out activities where they felt safe, capable, and confident, while avoiding those that triggered anxiety, fear, or a sense of failure.

Boys' perceived competency in PA was established in early childhood. Adam recalled:

As a child, I was always scared of people throwing balls at me. For example, with basketball, it was a very easy ball but the idea of having a chest pass did scare me quite a lot because I'd think 'Aaaah, there's a ball being thrown at me!'

This fear was a deeply emotional response to the physical sensations and perceived threat. Similarly, Alex identified as 'non-sporty', reflecting a psychological self-assessment: 'They never did pass the ball to me, and I'll touch the ball like once a match'.

For other boys, their perceived competency in PA had changed during adolescence. Josh described his changing relationship with cricket, noting,



Figure 4. Ralph's crumpled running bibs in his sports bag – visual cues that reinforce perceived competency in his running ability.

I sort of excelled when it's like was softball. And then it was like the semi-hardball. I did really well on that. But I stopped playing cricket because I just found it a bit daunting with the hard ball. I just feel a bit nervous in my stomach.

His nervousness and withdrawal were emotional responses to the increasing challenge. Lucas, by contrast, expressed a sense of personal agency and confidence talking about his running and gym workouts: 'I know what I'm good at, so those are the sports I go for'. This statement demonstrates a psychological belief that associates effort with competency, illustrating how boys choose activities that align with their skills and identity. The findings show that perceived competency is subjective and may change during adolescence, directing boys toward activities that support confidence and enjoyment, and away from those associated with anxiety or diminished competence.

4. 'Everyone's Shouting at Me': How Context and Competition Shape Boys' Participation in PA

The last theme explores how external social, environmental, and institutional factors influence boys' perceptions of competency and their engagement in PA. Peer pressure, competitiveness, and formal evaluations created contexts where competency was judged publicly and often felt precarious. Alex vividly described the pressure of team sports: 'Everyone's shouting at me, and I've got to make sure I make a good choice and not miss otherwise I get yelled at ... Team games are stressful'. This quote highlights how social scrutiny and the fear of negative judgment impacted his



Figure 5. Ralph identifies as a runner: wearing a muddy English national cross country top reinforces his personal identity and supports identified regulation (SDT).

engagement, situating competency as a relational, performative experience rather than a solely personal feeling. Through a SDT lens, we can see how a controlling motivational climate undermines boys' autonomy and perceived competency, thereby reducing intrinsic motivation. The expectation to perform in ways that align with valued practices in team sport contexts (e.g. competitiveness and physical dominance) may undermine boys' engagement when they feel unable to meet these expectations.

School sport structures further shaped participation. Aaron explained, 'In my school, you need to be really good at football to be in the football team. And they really only focus on the main one (A-Team)'. Khalid shared a similar exclusion: 'I'm not good enough to sort of play for the school's top team. So, if you're not good enough for the team, you're not playing matches'. These institutional pressures reinforced a narrow definition of competency, marginalising boys who did not meet competitive standards.

Competition was experienced differently by participants. Some, like Alex and Dom, avoided competitive settings: 'I was never interested in the competitiveness ... I kind of just did it for fun', and 'I never wanted to play (tennis) matches ... every time my parents or the coach talked about matches, I was like, "I don't want to do that."' Aaron described stepping away from rugby due to its intensity: 'It was like the intensity of it ... a lot of shouting ... I just didn't find it really fun'. Others found competition motivating within supportive contexts. Ralph stated, 'I like winning!' and Josh, showing a hockey medal (Figure 7), said, 'I like winning, as I guess most people do. It's enjoyable!' Yet some prioritised fun over winning. Charlie commented, 'Never really like makes or breaks my weekend,



Figure 6. Adam sailing – finding new perceived competency through non-traditional, self-directed PA.

whether I win or lose’, and Kai added, ‘I feel much more enjoyment when I’m playing, and I just have a good, fun match’. These contrasting experiences suggest that when competitive PA supports feelings of mastery and belonging, it enhances autonomous motivation; but when it evokes fear or comparison, it can become controlled regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Formal performance assessments also influenced participation. Adam said about school PE teachers, ‘They’re always measuring you ... You always feel a lot more pressured in that situation’. Kenji, who disengaged from sport, reflected, ‘Generally, I’m not that competitive ... I think it’s just become the fact that I really don’t care about sport’, and described athletics events as ‘the ones that matter’, which felt daunting. Together, these experiences show how social context, competitiveness, and institutional pressures shaped boys’ engagement by influencing where and how they felt competent or exposed to failure.

Discussion

This study offers new insights into how adolescent boys’ perceived competency in PA changes over time, shaped by emotional factors (e.g. fear of injury), developmental changes (e.g. puberty), and social contexts (e.g. peer comparison). Grounded in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and masculinity theory (Connell, 2005), the analysis highlights how perceived competency supports or undermines motivation and engagement in PA. Our PEI-based findings examine how masculine norms and peer dynamics intersect to influence boys’ confidence in PA. The findings extend Messner’s (1992) work on sociocultural expectations in sport by illustrating how boys’ perceived competency in PA is shaped by enduring ideals linking masculinity and athletic ability.

Building on existing research (De Meester et al., 2016; Estevan et al., 2022), our findings highlight a strong link between perceived competency and motivation to engage in PA. Boys with high perceived competency showed intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation, driven by self-set goals and personal achievement (Burton et al., 2023). In contrast, those with low perceived



Figure 7. Josh winning a medal in hockey – competition and winning increase perceived competency in PA.

competency reported anxiety and avoidance, especially in competitive settings, influenced by physical ability, perceived pressure, fear of judgement, and limited choice. PE settings are key spaces where male peer hierarchies are established, privileging boys with high sporting competency and dominant body ideals (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Magrath et al., 2020). Two rounds of PEIs gave participants time to reflect on complex feelings about their bodies, masculine identities, and experiences in different PA spaces. These insights deepen understanding of how competency intertwines with masculine norms and situational dynamics in PA, supporting earlier arguments that boys' confidence is co-constructed through interactions with teachers, peers, and cultural expectations (Drummond, 2003; Gard & Meyenn, 2000).

Crucially, our study illustrates that perceived competency in PA is formed early in life, with childhood experiences leaving enduring emotional impressions. Negative memories, such as being hit by a ball, losing races, or feeling excluded, contribute to long-term disengagement. In line with Findlay and Bowker (2009), we demonstrate how these early encounters influence boys' motivation and participation years later. While some boys maintain a strong sense of PA competency into adolescence, our findings show that perceived competency remains vulnerable to change during this period, particularly in response to biological and developmental changes, including puberty and brain maturation. Boys who mature more slowly report feeling left behind, both physically and socially, echoing findings from Roche et al. (2021) on how developmental differences shape boys' PA

experiences. Our findings highlight adolescence as a critical time when perceived competency can shift, emphasising the need for adults, educators, coaches, and parents to recognise these changes early and foster supportive environments that help boys sustain motivation and engagement in PA.

Our research highlights the complex relationship between masculinity, muscularity, and perceived competency. We found that boys feel judged not only by their ability but also by their body appearance. Some embraced muscular ideals, others rejected them; yet all experienced pressure to conform to hegemonic masculine norms (Connell, 2005). While the influence of masculine norms on boys' PA engagement is established (Anderson, 2009; Drummond, 2003), our findings demonstrate how these norms are actively negotiated and embodied in specific PA contexts. Using PEIs, we captured subtle, often unspoken experiences as boys interpreted their bodies and social roles in PA settings. Boys both conform to and resist hegemonic ideals, expressing multiple masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2025) that challenge dominant notions of muscularity and physical dominance.

The prevalence of contact sports in the school PE curriculum, such as football (soccer), rugby, and hockey, often exacerbates these pressures. Many boys who described fear of injury and intimidation when asked to participate in such activities identified the psychological toll of aggressive, high-risk sports on boys with lower perceived competency (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Light & Kirk, 2000; Tischler, 2011). Consistent with prior research (Anderson, 2009; Drummond, 2003), our findings demonstrate how competitive and physically dominant forms of participation continue to be positioned as normative within school PE, shaping boys' motivation through their perceived competency. Many boys in our study were drawn to alternative forms of PA, such as sailing and mountain biking, which aligned better with their interests, skills, and social comfort. These activities provided opportunities to experience competency without the emotional strain of combative team sports (Symons Down et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2019; Wheaton, 2013). Muscularity, as a marker of masculine capital, remains central to perceptions of PA success (Campbell et al., 2016; Drummond, 2003). However, the boys in our study demonstrated that multiple bodily expressions of masculinity, including lean, flexible, or less visibly muscular physiques, can coexist and be valued, particularly in environments where choice, cultural recognition, and support are present (Anderson, 2009; Stewart et al., 2019).

A novel contribution of this study is the use of visual methods, including both researcher- and participant-led photo-elicitation, which helped capture how boys interpret and navigate PA environments. These tools enabled a more nuanced understanding of how boys' experiences are shaped not only by perceived feelings of competency but also by their social perceptions and positions. This methodological approach offered rich insights into the factors underpinning motivation, self-perception, and participation, areas that are underexplored in quantitative studies (De Meester et al., 2016; Findlay & Bowker, 2009). By using PEIs, this study extends existing research on masculinity and PA (Drummond, 2003; Messner, 1992), providing richer detail on how boys construct meaning about their perceived competency through interaction with peers and PA environments.

Our findings suggest that schools and PA providers must move beyond a narrow focus on competitive sports and masculine ideals to support sustained participation among all boys. Compulsory PE with limited activity choices can reinforce feelings of failure and exclusion, especially for boys with lower perceived competency. Grounded in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy-supportive environments that enable boys to choose activities, set goals, and develop skills in non-judgmental settings are crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation. Educators and coaches must challenge dominant masculine norms and promote diverse, inclusive expressions of male physicality and identity.

This study advances understanding of adolescent boys' perceived competency by emphasising the role of gender expectations and identity. Drawing on masculinity theory (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005), recognising the diversity of boys' experiences is essential to challenge restrictive norms about masculinity and physical ability. A cultural shift toward inclusive gender expressions, valuing varied physical capabilities, and accommodating diverse ways of engaging in PA is needed to ensure every boy feels recognised, supported, and motivated to participate.

Limitations and future studies

PEIs with individual participants produced rich, nuanced accounts, allowing boys to reflect without the influence of peer dynamics. However, group-based approaches, such as focus groups (Hill, 2015), may have uncovered shared experiences and social pressures around masculinity and belonging. While this study foregrounds gender and age through attention to puberty, physical development, and changing social expectations across male adolescence, future research could extend this analysis through an explicit intersectional lens that considers how identities such as race and sexuality intersect with masculinities to shape boys' perceived competency in PA.

Conclusion

In this study, we investigate how masculine identities and societal expectations influence adolescent boys' perceived competency in PA. By employing innovative visual methods, we uncover how dominant gender norms and early exposure to rigid masculine ideals in sports shape boys' experiences and engagement. Our findings indicate that key transitions during adolescence, such as the onset of puberty and the associated physical and emotional changes, intersect with shifts in PA environments, particularly the rise in competitiveness and aggression in sports. When combined with the increasing cultural association of muscularity with masculinity, these factors can contribute to heightened body dissatisfaction, diminished self-esteem, and reduced motivation to participate in PA for some adolescent boys.

Importantly, our findings demonstrate that competitive team sports are not experienced uniformly by adolescent boys and that the emphasis on competitive and physically dominant forms of participation within many PA contexts can undermine perceived competency and motivation for some boys. Instead, many boys actively avoid dominant masculine sports, finding them alienating and harmful to their perceived competency and self-esteem. Furthermore, boys' perceived competency is influenced by both their physical abilities and aesthetic judgments of their bodies, which can undermine their confidence and deter PA engagement. This study enhances our understanding of the interplay between masculinity and boys' perceived competency in PA, emphasising the need to provide alternatives for boys who do not conform to the archetype of dominant masculine expectations and who experience alienation from conventional male sports.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), Brunel University London. Code: 36480-MHR-Sep/2022- 41626-3.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Amelia Beddoe  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1203-8159>

Rebecca Hings  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2371-2070>

Charlotte Kerner  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7387-3625>

References

Amin, A., Kågesten, A., Adebayo, E., & Chandra-Mouli, V. (2018). Addressing gender socialization and masculinity norms among adolescent boys: Policy and programmatic implications. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(3), S3–S5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.06.022>

- Anderson, E. (2009). The maintenance of masculinity among the stakeholders of sport. *Sport Management Review*, 12(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2008.09.003>
- Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2018). Inclusive Masculinity Theory: overview, reflection and refinement. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(5), 547–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1245605>
- Baceviciene, M., Jankauskiene, R., & Trinkuniene, L. (2022). Associations between self-objectification and lifestyle habits in a large sample of adolescents. *Children*, 9(7), 1022–1033. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9071022>
- Barbierik, L., Bacikova-Sleskova, M., & Petrovova, V. (2023). The role of social appearance comparison in body dissatisfaction of adolescent boys and girls. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 19(3), 244–258. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.6443>
- Barker, D., Varea, V., Bergentoft, H., & Schubring, A. (2022). Body image in physical education: A narrative review. *Sport, Education and Society*, 28(7), 824–841. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2022.2076665>
- Beal, B. (1996). Alternative masculinity and its effects on gender relations in the subculture of skateboarding. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 19(3), 204–220.
- Beddoe, A., Hings, R., & Kerner, C. (2023). Adolescent males' motivations to be physically active: A qualitative systematic review framed by Self Determination Theory. *American Journal of Health Education*, 54(6), 439–450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19325037.2023.2253875>
- Blackbeard, D., & Lindegger, G. (2015). The value of participatory visual methods in young masculinity research. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 165, 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.12.608>
- Bramham, P. (2003). Boys, masculinities and PE. *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1357332032000050060>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Burton, A. M., Cowburn, I., Thompson, F., Eisenmann, J. C., Nicholson, B., & Till, K. (2023). Associations between motor competence and physical activity, physical fitness and psychosocial characteristics in adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Sports Medicine*, 53(11), 2191–2256. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-023-01886-1>
- Cale, L., Harris, J., & Chen, M. H. (2014). Monitoring health, activity and fitness in physical education: Its current and future state of health. *Sport, Education and Society*, 19(4), 376–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2012.681298>
- Campbell, D., Gray, S., Kelly, J., & MacIsaac, S. (2016). Inclusive and exclusive masculinities in physical education: A Scottish case study. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(3), 216–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2016.1167680>
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities*. 2nd edition. University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Crocket, H. (2013). 'This is men's ultimate': (Re)creating multiple masculinities in elite open Ultimate Frisbee. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(3), 318–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690211435185>
- De Meester, A., Maes, J., Stodden, D. F., Cardon, G., Goodway, J. D., Lenoir, M., & Haerens, L. (2016). Identifying profiles of actual and perceived motor competence among adolescents: Associations with motivation, physical activity, and sports participation. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 34(21), 2027–2037. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2016.1149608>
- Drummond, M. J. N. (2003). The meaning of boys' bodies in physical education. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11(2), 131–143. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1102.131>
- Estevan, I., Bardid, F., Utesch, T., Menescardi, C., Barnett, L. M., & Castillo, I. (2022). Examining early adolescents' motivation for physical education: Associations with actual and perceived motor competence. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 26(4), 359–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2020.1806995>
- Estevan, I., De Meester, A., & Barnett, L. M. (2023). Advancing the understanding in the association between actual/perceived motor competence and health-related factors among children and adolescents. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 67(3), 102420. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2023.102420>
- Findlay, L., & Bowker, A. (2009). The link between competitive sport participation and self-concept in early adolescence: A consideration of gender and sport orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(1), 29–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-007-9244-9>
- Fraguela-Vale, R., Varela-Garrote, L., Carretero-García, M., & Peralbo-Rubio, E. M. (2020). Basic psychological needs, physical self-concept, and physical activity among adolescents: Autonomy in focus. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(491), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00491>
- Gard, M., & Meyenn, R. (2000). Boys, bodies, pleasure and pain: Interrogating contact sports in schools. *Sport, Education and Society*, 5(1), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135733200114415>
- Gattario, K. H., Frisén, A., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., Ricciardelli, L. A., Diedrichs, P. C., Yager, Z., Franko, D. L., & Smolak, L. (2015). How is men's conformity to masculine norms related to their body image? Masculinity and muscularity across Western countries. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 16(3), 337–347. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038494>
- Grogan, S. (2016). Body image. In *Routledge eBooks*.
- Guthold, R., Stevens, G. A., Riley, L., & Bull, F. (2020). Global trends in insufficient physical activity among adolescents: A pooled analysis of 298 population-based surveys with 1.6 million participants. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(1), 23–35. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(19\)30323-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(19)30323-2)

- Harding, S. N. (2022). 'Boys, when they do dance, they have to do football as well, for balance': Young men's construction of a sporting masculinity. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 57(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690220987144>
- Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345>
- Hauge, M., & Haavind, H. (2011). Boys' bodies and the constitution of adolescent masculinities. *Sport, Education and Society*, 16(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.531958>
- Hickey, C. (2008). Physical education, sport and hyper-masculinity in schools. *Sport, Education and Society*, 13(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320801957061>
- Hill, J. (2015). 'If you miss the ball, you look like a total muppet!' boys investing in their bodies in physical education and sport. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(6), 762–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2013.820695>
- Huhtiniemi, M., Sääkslahti, A., Tolvanen, A., Watt, A., & Jaakkola, T. (2022). The relationships among motivational climate, perceived competence, physical performance, and affects during physical education fitness testing lessons. *European Physical Education Review*, 28(3), 594–612. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X211063568>
- Joy, P., Zahavich, J. B. L., & Kirk, S. (2021). Gendered bodies and physical education (PE) participation: Exploring the experiences of adolescent students and PE teachers in Nova Scotia. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(6), 663–675. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1937080>
- Kelso, A., Linder, S., Reimers, A. K., Klug, S. J., Alesi, M., Scifo, L., Borrego, C. C., Monteiro, D., & Demetriou, Y. (2020). Effects of school-based interventions on motivation towards physical activity in children and adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 51(2), 101770. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101770>
- Kerner, C., Haerens, L., & Kirk, D. (2018). Body dissatisfaction, perceptions of competence, and lesson content in physical education. *Journal of School Health*, 88(8), 576–582. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12644>
- Larsson, H., Redelius, K., & Fagrell, B. (2011). Moving (in) the heterosexual matrix. On heteronormativity in secondary school physical education. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 16(1), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2010.491819>
- Leonard, M., & McKnight, M. (2015). Look and tell: Using photo-elicitation methods with teenagers. *Children's Geographies*, 13(6), 629–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2014.887812>
- Light, R., & Kirk, D. (2000). High school rugby, the body and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. *Sport, Education and Society*, 5(2), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713696032>
- MacPherson, E., Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2016). The influence of peer groups in organized sport on female adolescents' identity development. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 23, 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.10.002>
- Magrath, R., Cleland, J., & Anderson, E. (2020). The Palgrave handbook of masculinity and sport.
- Mannay, D. (2016). *Visual, narrative and creative research methods: Application, reflection and ethics* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Messerschmidt, J. W. (2016). *Masculinities in the making: From the local to the global*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Messerschmidt, J. W. (2019). The salience of "hegemonic masculinity". *Men And Masculinities*, 22(1), 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18805555>
- Messner, M. A. (1992). *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Beacon Press (MA).
- O'Neil, R. (2015). Whither critical masculinity studies? Notes on inclusive masculinity theory, postfeminism, and sexual politics. *Men And Masculinities*, 18(1), 100–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14553056>
- Parker, A. (1996). The construction of masculinity within boys' physical education [1]. *Gender and Education*, 8(2), 141–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540259650038824>
- Roche, C., Trompeter, N., Bussey, K., Mond, J., Cunningham, M. L., Murray, S. B., Lonergan, A., & Mitchison, D. (2021). Gender compatibility and drive for muscularity among adolescent boys: Examining the indirect effect of emotion regulation difficulties. *Body Image*, 39, 213–220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.08.009>
- Røset, L., Green, K., & Thurston, M. (2020). Norwegian youngsters' perceptions of physical education: Exploring the implications for mental health. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(6), 618–630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1634043>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-Determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and well-being*. Guilford Press eBooks.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Sánchez-Rodríguez, D., Salvador-García, C., Parra-Gómez, S., & Chiva-Bartoll, O. (2025). Identifying barriers and creating solutions for LGBTQIA+friendly physical education: An autoethnographic study+friendly physical education: An autoethnographic study. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2025.2589443>
- Smith, B., & Caddick, N. (2012). Qualitative methods in sport: A concise overview for guiding social scientific sport research. *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science*, 1(1), 60–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2012.701373>
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2013). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health*. Routledge.

- Stewart, S., Gray, S., Kelly, J., & MacIsaac, S. (2019). Investigating the development of masculine identities in physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(6), 590–604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1654447>
- Symons, D. D., Savage, J. S., & Dinallo, J. M. (2013). Self-determined to exercise? Leisure-time exercise behavior, exercise motivation, and exercise dependence in youth. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 10(2), 176–184. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.10.2.176>
- Thompson, K. A., & Lindo, N. A. (2024). Amplifying youth voices: Redefining qualitative research with child and adolescent co-researchers. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Counseling*, 10(2), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23727810.2024.2363130>
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Tischler, A. (2011). PE is not for me. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82(1), 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2011.10599720>
- Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M., & Soenens, B. (2020). Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes, and future directions. *Motivation and Emotion*, 44(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-019-09818-1>
- Waling, A. (2019). Rethinking masculinity studies: Feminism, masculinity, and poststructural accounts of agency and emotional reflexivity. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 27(1), 89–107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826518782980>
- Wedgwood, N., Connell, R., & Wood, J. (2023). Deploying hegemonic masculinity: A study of uses of the concept in the journal *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, 24(2), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000417>
- Wheaton, B. (2013). *The cultural politics of lifestyle sports*. Routledge.
- White, R. L., Bennie, A., Vasconcellos, D. I. C., Cinelli, R., Hilland, T. A., Owen, K., & Lonsdale, C. (2021). Self-determination theory in physical education: A systematic review of qualitative studies. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 99, 103247. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103247>
- World Health Organisation. (2019). *Global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030: More active people for a healthier world*. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241514187>.