

GENDER STEREOTYPING OF THE NORTHERN ITALIAN
FEMALE ADOLESCENTS' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: A MALE
PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to provide an overview of the conditions of Italian female adolescents in the sphere of sport and physical activity through the perceptions and understanding of their male peers. The intention of this study is to analyze the adolescent males' viewpoint to unearth gender stereotypes and their implications on Italian female adolescents' behavior on sports and physical activity in two different environments, namely the curricular and extracurricular environment.

This study is implemented through qualitative research method. The data were collected through semi-structured interview techniques with 10 respondents. Respondents were 18/19-years-old adolescents living in the province of Vicenza, Veneto, Italy.

The results of the research highlight the condition of Italian female adolescents in the sphere of sport and physical activity and the barriers that prevent and limit girls' physical activity participation caused by gender stereotyping. Moreover, interviewees recognized a significant difference in the practice of sports and physical activity according to gender.

It is recognized that Italian adolescent females face gender stereotypes both in the curricular and extracurricular environment through the perception of the existence of different sport according to gender, namely the feminine sports and through the lack of self-esteem and low self-perception of female adolescents. Competitiveness and team-sports were also recognized as an impediment to physical activity. Common societal norms were considered the main responsible for the limitation of physical activity for female adolescents.

Based on the results, it is recommended for competent authorities to pay particular attention to the existing gender gap in the delivery of sports policies. In fact, the current degree of stereotyping in the Italian society urges in a recommendation for a closer attention to this issue, in order to prevent and to ease the practice of sport for youngest adolescent females. Moreover, research should be continued with a great care on this topic, to bring more attention on the subject, to understand the impact of stereotypes on sport behaviors, and to learn how to overcome them. Also, Italian school policies require particular attention in the delivery of the physical education classes, keeping in mind the different needs and preferences of their students.

Keywords: Physical Activity, Adolescents, Italy, Girls, Barriers, Gender Stereotypes

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1. INTRODUCTION

“My coach said I run like a girl, and I said if he could run a little faster he could too.” — Mia Hamm

Star soccer player Mia Hamm’s quote is quite self-explanatory to this study. In sport, adolescent females and women are still stereotyped, discriminated, and teased often carelessly by statements as “run like a girl” or “throw like a girl”, associating concept of weaknesses to those terms. The use of those words and other stereotypes, however, may impact the participation in sport for adolescent females and women, whose confidence, for instance, may be affected. In sport, adolescent females are therefore at a disadvantage by comparison with males, and are forced to face additional challenges and to overcome more obstacle to sport participation.

The writing of this paper is motivated to give an overview of the situation of adolescent females in sport physical activity in Italy, my home-country. However, instead of having a direct approach to the matter with adolescent females themselves, at this time adolescent females are set back, and adolescent males will instead give their perspective on the related matter. Adolescent males are asked to bring thoughts to the conditions of physical activity and sport participation of their classmates, their sisters, their girlfriends; also, adolescent males are challenged to reflect on the implications of possible gender stereotypes —when named— to female’s condition on sport and physical activity participation.

Italian adolescent females are the central figure of this paper. In greater detail stand all the different factors caused by gender stereotypes that prevent or limit their chances to generally be physically active. While gender stereotypes in sports and physical activity is already well documented in the literature, it almost only focuses on elite sport (Sullivan, 2011; Vealey, 1988) and sport media coverage (Koivula, 1999; Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988). It is then of major importance to add to the literature another point of view on the consequences of gender stereotypes in sports and physical activity.

The premise of this study is that “the practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all; every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality” (UNESCO, 1978). Physical activity and sport are rightfully intended to be invaluable booster of any persons’ health and well-being. As a matter of fact, more and more health-enhancing programs are organized everyday that adopt physical activity as a mean of health promotion. Proof of the importance of sport and physical activity to people’s health is also shown by the academic literature. The literature shows, in fact, how physical activity clearly has a significant repercussion on most of the body, regardless the age of the physical active person (Blair et al., 1989). Moreover, the literature also agrees on the physiological and behavioral benefits that physically active people can gain from sport and physical activity, that helps people live a longer and healthier life. (CDC, 2015). However, notwithstanding the acknowledgement of the importance of physical activity that can be found in researches, as well as in policies implemented by many countries, physical inactivity is to be found at one of the leading causes of global mortality (WHO, 2009).

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the conditions of Italian female adolescents in the sphere of sport and physical activity, through the perceptions and understanding of their male peers. More in details, the aim is to present a review of the girl’s physical activity situation in two different environment of sport activities: in the first place the school, during curricular physical education classes; in the second place extracurricular sport activities and leisure time physical activities. Researching the male’s point of view of female’s physical activity provides evidence of the problems that Italian females still face, and reveal society’s taboos on females and physical activity. The investigation of this topic from the adolescent males’ point of view is needed to determine the presence or the lacking of elements that prevent or limit the chances for physical activity that Italian adolescent females might face, and also to understand the role of adolescent males in accepting and strengthening the stereotypes that encircle females and physical activity.

I regard this topic as particularly significant, since it somehow reflects my own experience to the path of sport and physical activity in Italy and all the difficulties I

personally faced by being a physically active teenager and adolescent. In addition it reflects the difficulties and limitations that challenged the active lifestyle of all my closest friends, my classmates, my teammates.

The thesis altogether is structured in four main sections. The first section aims to introduce the reader to the Italian current situation of sport and physical activity through a review of the literature. The second part of the paper consists of giving a framework to this paper, that is sport and gender stereotypes in the Italian society: definitions of the terms are provided, together with a clear overall picture of the gender gap in the Italian culture, and a overview of gender stereotypes in sport in Italy. Thirdly, results are discussed and linked to the literature review. Results are structured according to the environment, that are the following: curricular physical education, and extra curricular sport activities. Lastly, based on the results of the study, conclusions, developmental ideas for future research and limitations are proposed.

2. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CULTURE IN ITALY

This chapter aims to introduce the reader to the Italian current situation of sport and physical activity through a review of the literature: here is analyzed the general significance of physical activity, the sport culture in Italy, its differences within the Italian territory and within genders, and the sport practice with a focus on sport and physical activity in curricular and extracurricular environment. The aim of the chapter is to ensure that the reader understands the significance of the researched subject in question, and that has a clear overview of the general condition of sport in Italy.

2.1. The significance of physical activity

Physical activity should be regarded as an necessity, as an indispensable component in people's everyday life. Indeed, sport and physical activity are noted supporter of individual's health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). Sport and physical activity are not only to be considered as means to prevent many noncommunicable diseases, as for example respiratory diseases, heart diseases, diabetes, or cancer (Booth & Chakravarthy, 2002). The significance of sport and physical activity are to be seen in a wider perspective: physical activity clearly has a significant repercussion on most of the body, regardless the age of the physical active person (Blair et al., 1989), as well as many physiological and behavioral benefits to physically active people that helps them live a longer and healthier life. (CDC, 2015). In spite of this, the World Health Organization (2009) recognizes physical activity as of the leading causes of global mortality, only preceded by high blood pressure and glucose, tobacco use, and overweight and obesity (WHO, 2009).

2.2. Physical activity from childhood through adolescence

Physical activity should be part of our lives right from the beginning. Many studies agree on the necessity of engaging in physical activity from childhood (Martens & Seefeldt, 1979; Anderssen et al., 2005; Boreham et al., 2004) from many different perspectives and for many different reasons. For instance, the literature shows a positive correlation between physical activity and youth sport practiced in childhood and its consequence during adulthood: being physically active during childhood could lead to an improvement in general health in maturity age (Kari et al., 2016); it could also significantly increase the time that adults will spend on leisure time physical activity (Kjønniksen, Anderssen & Wold, 2009); additionally, a physically active child, in comparison to their inactive peers, is believed to have more self-esteem, less chances to incur adiposity, and low metabolic risk factors (Smith et al., 2014).

However, numbers highlight how physical activity can be considered a priority according to different European countries. For instance when looked at the differences between a Northern and Southern European countries, respectively Finland and Italy: from the Key Findings Factsheet of Physical Activity released by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), the cross-national difference in the engagement in physical activity between 11-years-olds in Finland, and Italy is quite impressive. Less than nine percent (8.5 %) of 11-years-old Italians (7 % females, 10 % males) children report at least one hour of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily, in contrast to 36.5 % of 11-years-old Finns. The analysis in the sport practice discrepancy between countries — in this case southern and northern countries— is complicated, since it needs to take into consideration several factors, as sport policies, national economic situation, social meaning of sport and physical activity, sport infrastructure availability, and sport and health education of each country.

Whereas the role of physical activity in different European countries is diverse and contrasting (e.g. the position of physical activity in Finland compared to Italy), the path through which individuals relate to physical activity from childhood to adulthood is quite analogous. Notwithstanding the methodological differences present in many international studies on the field of physical activity, researchers agree on one thing:

physical activity is neither a consistent nor stable variable in the life span of any person. As a matter of fact, it changes according to the age: physical activity peaks in childhood, where it is mostly consumed in playgrounds through movement and play. When individuals reach the period of adolescence and young adulthood, physical activity levels suddenly decrease (Pietrantonio & Ria, 2001). The literature reports the decrease of demand of competitive games with age (Telama & Yang, 2000), the increase of time spent on other leisure time activities (Laakso & Telama, 1996), and the arise of new interests (Bassett et al., 2015) as factors that could negatively influence the sport drop-outs.

Thus, this trend can also be found in the Italian attitudes towards sport and physical activity. According to the 2013 data from the Italian National Statistic Institute (ISTAT – Istituto Nazionale di Statistica), physical activity in Italy is a typically juvenile free-time activity: the highest percentages of daily sportive people are found between the age-range of 6-17 years-old, in particular between males of 11-14 years-old, that is 61.6 %. As a trend present in many other European countries, with the increasing of age, the interest for sport decreases. This shrink presents some gender differences: 25.8 % of adult men are more likely to engage in regular physical activity, compared to only 17.1 % of adult women (ISTAT, 2013)

Physical activity during adolescence is an issue that has been well covered in the academic literature. That proves that physically active adolescents can have more chances to be more physically and mentally healthy and more chance to have higher academic and cognitive performance, compared to their inactive peers (Allison et al., 2007; Boyer, 2007; Ortega et al., 2008). It is widely recognized that when people are building positive physical activity attitudes from childhood, they are also maintaining those good habits during adolescence, then they are more likely to carry them through adulthood (Kari et al., 2016; Telama et al., 1997); by contrast, those individuals that did not establish good physical activity during childhood and adolescence are more likely to fail to become physically active adults (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2004). However, a significant decrease in physical activity from children that are approaching adolescence can be found in both Finland and Italy. As reported from the HBSC survey (2014c) conducted in children, physical activity tends to decrease while approaching

adolescence. The dropout is tremendous: those 14.6 % of 11-years old children that met the WHO recommendation of 1 hour of physical activity daily almost halved to around eight percent (8.3 %) by the age of 15 (HBSC, 2014c).

2.3. Gender gap in sport and physical activity in Italy

The level of physical activities and sport practiced differ from countries to countries. Only in Europe, for instance, can be found profound differences in physical activity and sport. Those difference can find its extremities in the geographical representation of northern and southern European countries. Countries in northern Europe tend to participate largely in sport and physical activities (as in Finland, Sweden and Denmark), whereas southern European countries tend to adopt more sedentary habits and lifestyles. (WHO, 2010). In Europe, Romania and Italy are the countries that have the unfortunate record holding in terms of respondents that never exercise, nor play sport, respectively 63 % and 62 % (Special Eurobarometer, 2017). The Eurobarometer suggests the availability of sport facilities as an indicator for high level of sport practice, alluding to the higher opportunities for doing sport and physical activity that people living in European northern countries benefit from.

Ríos et al. (2016), analyzed the European Commission's Special Eurobarometer, in order to have a greater comprehension of the mentioned discrepancies in the physical activity levels throughout Europe. One of the most recurrent theme in this study is the presence of variables that influence, either positively or negatively, the physical activity level an individual, that are economical variable , as well as financial and educational variable. For instance, the correlation of the education level to the physical activity level of a person demonstrate how normally, people that reached an higher degree in education, are those people that are more likely to take part in sport and physical activities. In the same way, those people that are believed to be personally satisfied with their economic condition and professional profile are also more likely to take part in sport and physical activities.

Italy, relevantly to this paper, has the unfortunate evidence of placing itself in the lowest positions, compared to other European countries, when it comes to the practice of physical activity in Europe (Special Eurobarometer, 2003; Special Eurobarometer, 2004; Special Eurobarometer, 2014; Special Eurobarometer, 2017). More specifically, Italy place itself in the lowest positions when it comes to not engaging in regular physical activity, not engaging in moderate physical activity, not engage in vigorous physical activity, never play sports, or never exercise (Special Eurobarometer, 2017)

As this thesis will investigate the physical activity path of Italian adolescent females in an northern Italian region, it is necessary to provide some preliminary observations. Italy cannot be considered as an united entity. Italy mainly diverges across its longitude, meaning that there are different disparities between the northern and the southern Italian regions. The same disparities can be found in sport activity levels of Italian people. The gap between the North and South of Italy in the engagement in physical activity is at disadvantage of the Southern regions, with only 17.5 % of active people, compared to almost 30 % in the Northern regions (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2017).

The territory gap in the engagement in physical activities is also visible when considering only children and adolescents. For instance, the Health Behavior in School Aged Children reports great discrepancies in physical activity level for children and adolescent, from north to south of Italy (HBSC 2014c). This trend of a different physical activity practice throughout Italy has also a repercussion in school sports. Sport in school, in Italian intended as physical education, is part of the mandatory curriculum in the Italian schools, that goes from elementary school until high school. Even in school sport, north and south Italy diverge. To prove the degree of interest of Italian students in physical education classes, an interesting study of Gallè et al. (2016) is presented: this research was intended to evaluate the involvement and participation of ex-high school students. The research highlighted a very diverse perception of physical activity of ex-student living in the north of Italy from ex-student living in the south of Italy, where physical education was mainly intended as a recreational moment and students were not necerrasily taking an active part in (Gallé et al., 2016), no matter the mandatory nature of this subject, only escapable by presenting to the school sport director a medical or parental excuse (MIUR, 2015). Without going into too much detail

with regard to the diverseness of the Italian territory and of the reasons that caused such inequality, this section was needed for the reader to keep in mind that sport, physical activity practice, and chances to physical activity cannot be generalized throughout the Italian territory.

Generally speaking, male's physical activity level differs from female's physical activity level, and this is unfortunately in concordance with fact in any age range of the life of a person, as for childhood, adolescent or adulthood. For instance, as the literature agrees on the withdrawal from sport activities as pupils reach adolescence (WHO, 2010; Hallal et al., 2012), this disengagement is specifically pronounced in adolescent females (Kolip & Schmidt, 1999; Grunbaum et al., 2001; Piccino & Colella, 2014). This pronounced disengagement from sport and physical activity is also present in Italian adolescents (HBSC, 2014c). Notwithstanding the importance of physical activity during the period of adolescence is of vital importance, in terms of its impact on health, its negative trend can be still found in many European countries.

2.4. Overview of sport practice in Italy

This section aims to bring evidence of the gender gap that have been analyzed by the literature concerning sport in Italy. Two main environments are to be separately analyzed. There is physical activity in the scholastic environment, which in Italy mainly consists in the curricular physical education hours, and any other extra-curricular physical activities and leisure-time physical activities. These two different environments are to be distinguished because of the different setting that may generate different types of barriers.

Evidence is provided on the gender gaps that women and young women are forced to face in sport, more specifically in two different environments: physical education in schools (scholastic environment) and physical activity in extracurricular activities (leisure-time physical activity). The basic assumption through which the theoretical framework developed itself is that "sport is not intrinsically gendered" (Engel, 1994). This consideration is essential to keep in mind throughout this writing.

2.4.1. Participation in physical education

Before advancing into detail on what could possibly limit the performance of female student in physical education, it is needed to provide a clear scenario of how physical activity is arranged in the scholastic environment in Italy.

La stampa (2017a) published an article that sums up the general situation of physical education in Italy: while schools have incomparable chance to provide adequate sport activities through curricular compulsory physical education. Physical education in school is considered as a “mysterious object” and “more like a version of a picnic than a moment of effort and exercise”, where there is little to enhance the presence of physical education in schools and in which it is not given the right value. Also, recently, the Italian minister of Health commented on Facebook on the issue of teen physical inactivity. She announced the urgency to increase the scholastic hours dedicated to physical education, so that it will no longer be considered “the cinderella” of the scholastic subjects, an Italian saying that beautifully describe physical education being unjustly overlooked by any other subjects and deprived of its authority and presence in the scholastic calendar (Orizzonte Scuola, 2018a).

Piccinno and Colella (2013) gathered valuable data on personal experiences on physical education during high school of first-year college students. While this study does not provide separate information for personal physical education experience according to gender, it still provides a scenario of how physical education is perceived around students: 34.8 % of students living in Northern Italy perceived physical education as a recreational moment, compared to only 15.8 % that perceived physical education as a moment of well-being and acquisition of knowledge (correspondingly to the South: 51.3 % that recognize the main aim of physical education as a recreation moment; 19.1 % that recognize the main aim of physical education as a moment for well-being).

As for physical education experiences according to gender, the literature (Avery, Girolami and Humbert, 1998; Valley, 2013) shows how female students are highly more

not interested in physical education compared to their peers. Generally speaking, international studies show how competitiveness, favoritism from the teachers, too intense activities, derogatory comments are the most common reasons for the repulsion of physical education to adolescent females (Avery, Girolami and Humbert, 1998). During physical education hours, adolescent females feel the need of “proving themselves to the adolescent males” they are expected to "do girly things and adolescent males are supposed to do boy-ee things”, while “there’s a risk of being embarrassed” (Valley, 2013). For female students to have the same chances to be active and to ensure the same learning during physical education classes, it is essential that the condition of the class are clear from gender expectation (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001)

A factor to consider that is either preventing or supporting an active lifestyle in physical education classes (and not only) for the adolescents, particularly to adolescent females, is the (perceived) confidence and self-esteem. When it comes to self-perceptions in physical activity involvement and participations, there are clear gender differences: adolescent males had greater self-perception values compared to adolescent females (Hayes et al., 1999) .Whitehead and Corbin (1997) also demonstrate how the increase in self-esteem level in adolescents students is strictly correlated with the quality of physical activity to which adolescents are subjected: the more self-esteem a student show, a better behavior he or she will enhance in the sport environment. A study conducted in the Veneto region (provinces of Vicenza and Treviso) once again highlight the gender gap in self-esteem, at disfavor to females. The study researched the levels of self-esteem, global self-worth and self-perception in relation to motor activity in adolescent students: the most significant difference concerns the variable sex with lower scores for the females. The most significant differences are related to the physical aspect, to athletic competence, to the overall value of oneself (Bertollo & Pellizzari, 2001).

Generally speaking, the academic reviews give a rough idea of the general perception of physical education in Italy, proven to be considered a recreational moment for students and a poorly considered subject within the curriculum. It is needed for this study to delineate the general perception fo physical education in Italy given by the literature in order to compare it to the following statement of the interviewees. It is also

needed for the reader to have a broader comprehension of the environment in which young Italian adolescents live.

2.4.2. Participation in extracurricular sport activities

While physical education is nowadays a compulsory subject, ensuring that all children and adolescents engage at least in two hours physical activity a week, extracurricular physical activity and leisure-time physical activity is not regulated, therefore is a personal choice of the individuals.

While numbers of sport practice in Italy shows that between 2013 and 2016 the practice of sport increases in all age groups, the gender gap still persists, and reaches its greater distance between 18-years old and 19 yers-old (I numeri della pratica sportive in Italia, 2017).

As part of the extracurricular sport activities, memberships in sports clubs is the most common channel of sport practice for adolescents. Sport clubs in Italy are organized by the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI — Comitato Olympic Nazionale Italiano). The CONI is responsible for the development and management of sports activity in Italy. Within Italy, CONI recognizes 45 national sports federations (FSN) and 16 associate sports disciplines. The FSN membership recruitment of the past years (trends from 2009 to 2015) shows positive trends, with a total of 4,291,201 athletes that have approached federal sports. Table 1. reports the sport associations that count the highest number of memberships, and therefore the most widespread sports in Italy (I numeri dello Sport, 2015).

Table 1. National sport federation with the highest number of registered athletes in Italy in 2015. I numeri dello Sport (2015).

Ranking	National sport federation		Number of members	% of registered athletes
#1	FIGC	Italian Soccer Federation/ Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio	1.099.455	25,6%
#2	FIPAV	Italian Volleyball Federation/ Federazione Italiana Pallavolo	374.468	8,7%
#3	FIP	Italian Basketball Federation/ Federazione Italiana Pallacanestro	310.801	7,2%
#4	FIT	Italian Tennis Federation/ Federazione Italiana Tennis	306.862	7,2%

Not surprisingly, in Italy the most popular sport is soccer, with 1.099.455 registered players. However, what is interesting in all these data, and what is relevant for this paper, is the gender division through the federations (see Figure 1.). The largest concentration of male athletes is evident in as many as 37 federations. Only six are sports where the percentage of female athletes is greater than the male percentages. Among all male athletes, more than one in three is a soccer player. In second and third position, respectively, is found basketball and tennis. The podium of the most practiced sports by female registered athletes, in absolute values, sees volleyball in first place, where one female athletes in four is a volleyball player; in the second and third place are found, respectively, gymnastics and tennis (I numeri dello sport, 2015).

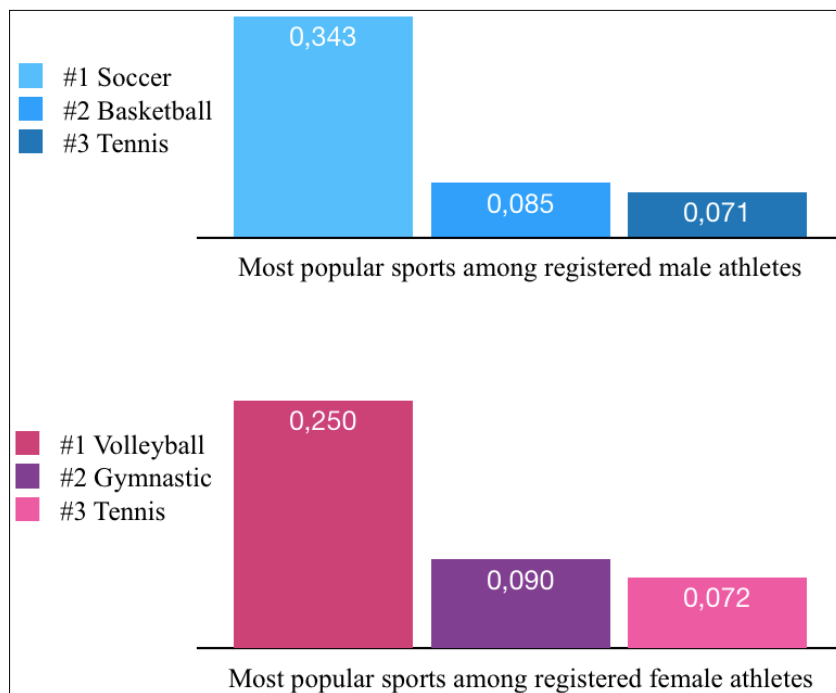


Figure 1. Most popular sports among registered male and female athletes in Italy in 2015. I numeri dello Sport (2015).

Clearly, males are much more involved in sport clubs than females, both in terms of number of memberships in total, as well as the concentration in different sport federations. Also, clearly, these imbalances in the concentration in different sport federation are promoting an unequal sport system, through which federations encourage different opportunities and different recognition in sport according to gender.

With regard to the low level of physical activity for Italian females, and above all Italian adolescent females, the literature provided academic research in consideration to the factors that could either cause or enhance the proven low level of physical activity in the extracurricular environment.

Time- constraints is recognized to be a big barrier to sport and physical activity proposed out of the scholastic environment. Researches agrees on the negative implication of tight schedule on the physical activity level of adolescent girls, and it is perceived to be the dominant cause of physical inactivity for young women (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2003, Tappe et al., 1989). Notwithstanding the fact that young women perceive time-constraints a barrier to extra-curricular physical activity, those mentioned studies also address that the same participants reported long hours spent in front of the television. Therefore, it needs to be mentioned that young women may not manage

their time correctly and may prioritize more sedentary activity other than a more active time (Trost & Loprinzi, 2011). While Neumark-Sztained (et al., 2003) introduced time-constraints as the most dependable factor associated with change in physical activity, a series of different personal factors were also found to significantly impact the females' sport behavior.

Another factor that is believed to be a barrier to physical activity engagement and sport drop-out in Italian adolescents is **smoking** behavior. Generally speaking, tobacco smoke is the most common form of substance abuse in the world (Madera & Fasoli, 2006) and it has been clearly demonstrated that cigarette smoke exerts harmful and lethal effects on the human body in many different ways (Boyle, 1997). In a study conducted by the HBSC (2014b), which is repeated at regular intervals of four years, is shown the relationship between Italian adolescence and smoke: the latest research published in 2014 showed that as many as twenty percent of 15-year-old Italian adolescents smoke and often start doing so at an even younger age. Numbers in Italian adolescents are so high that the relationship between smoking behavior and sport behavior can be questioned. Donato (et al., 1997) showed through self-administered anonymous questionnaires given to high-school students a negative association with the regular practice of sports among 17 and 18-year-old students that had a smoking behavior. While there is the need to consider that this study had been conducted more than twenty years ago and therefore it may limit the reliability, some trends may still ensure the validity of the past study: in Italy, most adult smokers started smoking before the age of 18, and tobacco use in the younger age is a continuously increasing phenomenon (Doxa, 2012). However, one could argue that this phenomenon may be applied to both males and females; in fact, there is almost no existing difference between the percentages of smoking males and females in Italy. However, in some age ranges, and for instance, females are confirmed to smoke more than their male peers: this occurs for instance in the adolescence age range; also, according to the distribution by geographical area, the highest prevalence of female smokers occurs in the northern Italian regions (Pacifci et al., 2017).

Another important element that could affect physical activity behavior is the **body perception** of female adolescents, also strictly linked with confidence and self-esteem

and body satisfaction and dissatisfaction. HBSC (2014a) study provided once again data of the situation of Italian 11-, 13-, and 15-years-old on their perceived body health. At the question “Do you think your body is too fat?”, 49.5 % of 15 years-old adolescent females stated that they perceive their body either “a bit too fat, much too fat”, whereas less than a half of they male peers consider themselves a bit/too much fat (22.9 %). Body image and body perception is a double-edged sword to physical activity and sport: while it is believed that frequent sports activities to be a determinant to a more positive body image perception (Maria & Horea, 2017), a negative body image and body perception is deemed to be a great impediment to physical activity and sport (Merdinoglu et al, 2017), and this is more the case for adolescent females (Brennan et al, 2010).

As mentioned already, that needs to be taken into consideration when mentioning gender difference in physical activity in adolescence is body satisfaction and body dissatisfaction and their impact on sport and physical activity. While the majority of those that do practice regularly demonstrate a positive relation to body satisfaction (Kruger et al., 2008), body dissatisfaction plays a different role in the practice of physical activity (Mintz & Betz, 1998). Adolescence period maximize the perception of body dissatisfaction for adolescent females. Young women perceive their body more negatively not only compared to young men, but also compared to mature women (Tiggemann & Williamson, 2000). When it comes to adolescent females participation in physical activity, body dissatisfaction can be considered a consistent barrier to it (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011).

With regards to the above-mentioned arguments for a lower level of physical activity of Italian females and Italian adolescent females, this chapter was needed to ensure the reader to get acquainted with the imbalance between the two genders in the extracurricular sport environment. Most relevantly, the information of this chapter that is significant to this paper, is not only that male adolescents practice more physical activity compared to their female peers. In fact, also the amount of sport of male dominance is very high, and this need to be noted when considering reasons for hindrances of females in sport activities.

3. GENDER STEREOTYPES IN SPORT

In this chapter I analyze gender stereotypes in sport that could translate in a barrier to physical activity to women, always keeping in consideration the critical age of adolescent females. To ensure a better understanding on the subject, I firstly introduce the concept of gender and gender discrimination. It follows a chapter aimed to give a broad overview on the degree of the impact that gender has in the Italian society, and a clear vision of the discrepancy between Norther and Souther Italian regions and its reflections on the condition of Italian women.

Because of the persistent tight link between stereotypes in sport and the Italian society, I therefore decided not to bring evidence of international studies, but to only focus on the Italian literature proposed. However, there is very poor literature proof on this matter. While it is very common to step into articles that cover the topic of gender stereotypes in the Italian society, it is very hard to find academic relevance on the matter. Furthermore, when researching existing evinced on gender stereotypes and sport in the Italian culture, it is almost non-existing, demonstrating an apparent research gap in the Italian literature. The prevailing articles available in fact focuses either on the impact of gender stereotyping in the elite sport (Sullivan, 2011; Jo Kane, LaVoi, and Fink, 2013; Cooky, Messner, and Musto, 2015), on the differences in sport media coverage of professional athletes (Koivula, 1999; Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988), or on the sport stereotypes through cultural integration (Elling, 2004; De Knop, Knoppers, Elling, 2001).

Only few articles are found that relates to this subject. One academic article addresses gender differences on an empirical research on gender stereotypes in reading subsidiaries for primary schools (Scierra, 2015). As results showed, in the Italian society gender stereotyping in games and sports is hardly questioned. Instead, Italians tend to assume that there is a masculine and feminine sports and games, as if it were something inherent in human nature. In greater detail, from the revealing data it emerges that males are dedicated almost exclusively to football, while females seem to have more variety, although the most recurrent sports are running, volleyball, and dance. The issue of

proposing to children and adolescents different sport according to gender is also brought up by another study: Crespi (2015) insists that “truth is they are all just sports”, while fighting the presence of societal standards that imposes to children and adolescents the better suitable sport activities according to gender.

3.1. Definition of gender and gender discrimination

Before exploring the gender discrimination in sport and physical activity in the Italian it is needed a clarification of the term gender and gender discrimination. According to the WHO (2018) definition, gender “refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men - such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. ...they [people] are taught appropriate norms and behaviors - including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places”. Therefore in this paper I will mainly refer to gender as all aspects, personalities, components and behaviors that a society define as masculine or feminine.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2018) defines gender discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of the marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”. Therefore in this paper I will mainly refer to gender discrimination (or sex discrimination) to any circumstances to which someone, in this case adolescent females, are treated less favorably than others, in this case their peer.

3.2. Gender discrimination in the Italian society

Since the main topic of this paper is the situation of female and sport, I believe it is important in this paper to at least briefly provide an overview of the role of the woman and the consequent gender discrimination in the Italian society. While the social position of the woman in the Italian society may not directly impact their physical activity behavior, it is still needed to frame the environment and the conditions in which women generally lives.

The most important factors that delineates the role of women in the society is the women's employment rate. In the Italian society, the labour force participation rate of female for ages 15-64 is 47.8 %, while men's ratio is 66.5 % (OECD, 2015). The female's unemployment rate is higher compared to unemployed Italian men (ISTAT, 2005). In the parliament women do not even make up a third of the seats (Women in National Parliaments, 2018). The main reason for women unemployment and inactivity rate is often pregnancies, where it could be an imposed choice, being fired or put in a position to leave the work because of the pregnancies (ISTAT, 2010). As stated in "The Policy on Gender Equality in Italy", an official document requested by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality that analyze the implication of the European policies on gender equality in the Italian setting, "Italy is still far from reaching satisfactory results, in spite of relevant progress under the pressure of women's movement, civil society and European legislation" (Policy on Gender Equality in Italy, 2014).

Without going into deep in the societal studies of gender inequality, this paragraph was needed to better frame the environment in which the interviews have been conducted. In this sense, I wanted to prevent the reader to consider Italy as a whole. For instance, if this study were to be conducted in a Southern region of Italy, I believe the outcome will be different. The justification for this statement lies in the discrepancy between north and south. As already proposed in the literature review of this study, Italy is a very diverse country: the reader can assume the South of Italy to be regressive compared to the North, which in turn can be viewed as the engine of Italy. This diversity is also therefore found in the role of the woman in our working society. La stampa

(2017b) describes the nowadays situation, in which females living in the south still find very hard to access the labor market compare to females working in the northern regions.

Generally speaking, in Italy there has been a constant and steady increase in the women's participation in the labor market, due, for example, to the rising of the educational level. However, despite the general improvement in the female employment rate, there is still a profound discrepancy in the territory, for what concern the access to the labor market. The ISTAT also propose data for the employment rate of women, according to the Northern or Southern regions in which they live and work: in 2017, the employment rate of female working in the northern regions reaches almost 60 % percent (58,2 %), which is close to the European average, while in the southern ones the proportion of women employed remains behind, by 33.7 % (ISTAT 2018).

As regards the gender gap in income, Italian women working in Italian souther regions are under the most unfavorable condition. Worldwide men earn more than women (UN Women, 2018) without distinction of areas, sectors, ages or qualifications. This trend also is find in Italy, The situation in Italy also proves it equal: Italy is still found in the fourth place among the 35 developed countries by percentage of employed women (OECD Italy, 2018). And in the South, the situation is even more unfavorable, when're a women that has graduated for four years working in the south has a net monthly average income of 300 euros less than that of a man (Il Mattino, 2018).

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

The following chapter presents an overview of how I implemented this study, in terms of collection and interpretation of data. Firstly, research questions are once again proposed. It follows an a discussion about the choice for applying a qualitative research approach for the data gathering, providing arguments that support suitability of the chosen study technique. Then the interviews' choice is argued, as well as a description of interviewees profiles and the role of the researcher are demonstrated. Lastly, the validity and reliability of this study is clarified.

4.1. Research questions

The research question that articulate this study is the following: How do adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females' physical activity behavior?

The main question is then articulated in two sub questions that are:

- A. What are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in curricular physical activities?
- B. What are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in extra-curricular sport activities?

The reason for the two subquestion lies under the choice of trying to tackle more environments possible through which adolescent males and females may interact in the practice of sport. Therefore, the scholastic environment is provided, with curricular and compulsory physical education, and the extra-curricular environment is provided.

4.2. Interviews

A qualitative research method was implemented in this study. I chose to utilize qualitative research methodology to ensure a more accurate outcome as possible. Since the literature shows little knowledge of the phenomenon studied, I try to consider all possible dimensions that portrays this phenomenon, and also I try to be opened to new dimensions that were not initially considered.

Qualitative data was collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews of 10 respondents. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ensure to address fixed issues and topics, but also granted me the freedom to vary the direction the interviews, at the base of the given answers. I also decided to gather data through semi-structured interviews because of the issue of sensibility that arise with topic of this thesis. Using a qualitative method in this research allowed a more sensitive approach to investigating the motivational factors influencing the topic. Semi-structured interview were chosen to gather the research as they allowed participants to express their true feeling in more detail. It is not simple to discuss any issue that concerns gender differences in the first place. The semi-structured interviews also allowed me to ensure that all participants could freely express themselves and their real perception over this topic, even when it meant to gather contradictory answers. The interviews were conducted during the Christmas holidays (from the 20/12/2017 until the 22/01/2018). Since I am currently living in Finland, I took advantage of the Christmas break to fly back to my home-town and conduct the interviews.

In this study, **10 semi-structured** interviews are analyzed. The number of the interviews has been changed and increased as I was conducting the first 3-4 interviews. The reasons underneath the choice of contacting more interviewees during the data collection is because I realized I was not getting enough valuable data from some of the interviewees. Some adolescent males were either reluctant of answering some questions, or either very confused about formulating an opinion on the subject. Therefore, to ensure a better quality of the study, I decided to include more interviewees in this study. Main part of my interviews (six out of ten) have been conducted int my family business location. The business, an American Pub, only operates during the nighttime, therefore I

conducted interviews in the afternoon to ensure that no-one and nothing would interrupt the interviews, and also to prevent that the interviewees would feel judged by their answers and thereby reluctant to give me honest answers. The rest of the interviews (four out of ten) have been conducted in a school in the province of Vicenza: due to the scarcity of volunteers for my study, I had to contact a religion teacher that I have been previously working for, that allowed me to interview 4 of his students during his religion classes. In this case, the interviews have been conducted in a empty classroom of the school that was available close to the religion classroom, and the last 2 interviews have been conducted in the school hall, because no empty classroom in proximity to the religion class were available. However, the hall was quite since all students were attending other classes, and it did not compromise the quality of the interviews. Moreover, all interviews were taken in a very quite and relaxed atmosphere. The reader can find the set of interview questions, as well as the Information Sheet and the Consent Form, respectively in the Appendices 1, 2 and 3. For the ease of the reader, a table (Table 2.) is proposed that highlights which specific interview questions will provide an answer to the proposed research question. As the reader will notice while reading the result and discussion chapters of this paper, valuable data can be found in many different interview questions. However, for the sake of a clear reading and understanding of this study, in the following figure is reported only the interview questions that unearthed the most useful and relevant data.

Table 2. List of interview questions that answer research questions

How do adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females' physical activity behavior?	
What are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in <u>curricular physical activities</u> ?	“How do your male classmates feel about mixed physical education classes?”
	“How do your female classmates feel about mixed physical education classes?”
What are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in <u>extra-curricular physical activities</u> ?	“What are the sports girls choose and why?”
	“Imagine it is a Sunday afternoon, and you would like to play outside with your friends. Who would you call? Where would you go? What would you play? What would a girl do?”
	“What are the main reasons for physical inactivity for your male and female friends of your age? Do you think guys have any role in limiting adolescent females' physical activity?”

4.3. Interviewees

Respondents are **Italian adolescent males** that are currently living in the province of Vicenza, situated in the northwest region of Veneto (Italy). The simple reason for conducting this research in this specific geographical area of Italy was precisely because I was born there, therefore I was facilitated in contacting some of the interviewees, and contacting some teachers that could have let me interviews their students.

The profile of the interviewees is the following: interviewees needed to be **male**, aged between **18-19 years old**, living in the province of Vicenza, and of Italian nationality. The decision to interview only males was directly dictated by the object of my study; I chose to interview adolescents because adolescence is recognized to be the most critical age in which youngster are more likely to drop out of sport and physical activity (Pietrantonio & Ria, 2001).

I chose not to interview minors because of the complexity of privacy issues: the adolescent males needed to be at least 18- years old, to be able to sign the documents needed (namely the consent form and the information sheet) directly before the interview took place and without the consent of their parents. This allowed me a smoother and a faster approach to my interviewees.

The interviewees are currently studying in **high-school** or finished within one year. I was firstly interested of getting to know the perspective on the matter of only 18-19 years old students, meaning males enrolled in the last year of high-school. However, the scarcity of 18-19 years old students willing to take part in this study and or willing to be recorded during the interview forced me to incorporate in this study 18-19 years old males that already got an high-school diploma. The interviewees also have different scholastic backgrounds, meaning they are enrolled in different schools.

I did not select the participants based on their physical activity level, nor on their participance of organized sport (i.e memberships in sport clubs), but rather randomly, trying to ensure that both active and inactive students take part in the interviews, to have a greater comprehension on the subject. However, all ten of my interviewees considered themselves from sufficiently active to active. The following is a table that introduces the interviewees that took part in this study. Some of the interviewees' names are fictional, since some of the interviewees did not agree to provide their real name.

Table 3. List of interviewees

Name	Age, profession	Home-town	Hobbies
Riccardo	18, student in a technical institute	Grumolo, province of Vicenza	Riccardo considers himself as a sufficiently active person. In his free-time he enjoys playing soccer with his friends and he is also a member of a soccer team in Grumolo.
Marco	18, student in a technical institute	Carmignano Vicentino, province of Vicenza	Marco considers himself as quite active person. He stated that in his free-time he practice s table tennis, and he is also a member of a table-tennis club in Vicenza.
Salmet	19, student in a computer science institute	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	In his free-time, Salmet likes to read and to be physically active. Now he is currently running and he is also a member of a gym. He believes his level of physical activity is above the average of his peers.
Jacopo	18, student in a technical institute	Vicenza	Jacopo enjoys going out with his friends, spending time with his girlfriends, and playing with the playstation. As for his physical activity level, he consider himself average. He is not enrolled in any sport clubs, but he stated he enjoys playing soccer and volleyball with friends.
Alberto	18, student in a technical institute	Monticello Conte Otto, province of Vicenza	Alberto considers himself a very active person. He enjoys spending time outdoor, with his friends or girlfriend. He is currently member of a gym.
Andrea	18, worker, concluded last year a professional school	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	He considers himself an active person, even though, because of a tight schedule at work, he finds it hard to keep some time to dedicate to physical activity.
Pietro	19, student in a commerce high school	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	Pietro thinks he is an active person. He is playing hockey for his hometown' s club. In his free-time, he likes playing soccer, hockey, or basketball with friends.
Nicolò	19, university student, concluded last year a technical institute	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	He consider himself a very active student. He enjoys spending time with others, and he is now enrolled in the university team of Ultimate frisbee.
Stefano	18, student in a scientific high school	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	He believes he is a very active person: he is currently playing in his hometown' s hockey club, and also enjoys going for a run from time to time.
Lorenzo	18, unemployed, concluded last year a professional institute	Montecchio Precalcino, province of Vicenza	He believes he is a rather active person. He is a member of a gym, and enjoyed spending time outdoor walking his dog.

4.4. Registration of data, transcription, and translation

Before the beginning and the recording of the actual interview, I ensured that the interviewees had time to read the information sheet regarding the study and the content form which then they agreed to participate in this study and allowed me to record the registration, together with the consent form and information sheet. Furthermore, the participants were reminded of the voluntary based of their participation, and of their right to withdraw at any time during the interview, without any personal consequences.

All interviews have been conducted in Italian, obviously for ensuring a better understanding and communication between the interviewees and I. Therefore, the interview questions had been beforehand translated from the approved English version, to Italian. The transcription and translation of the data happened in three different moments. The first transcription happened as I was conducting the interviews, where I tried to note non-verbal communication. Then I tried to transcribe the text as soon as the interview was over, to give the right interpretation to high or low voice volume, hesitations, or pauses. In a second moment, all interviews have been translated from Italian to English. I myself translated all interviews. In total, the interviews lasted an average of 30-40 minutes per interviewee.

The data has been analyzed in different ways. First, I divided the interview questions into different themes; then, I tried to highlight the most recurring topics that the interviewees would bring up. Lastly, I would link the themes of the interview questions to the most recurrent topics that the interviewees would bring up, decide whether those topics were relevant to the to my paper or not, and then analyze them in greater details.

4.5. Role of the researcher

In order to frame this study, it is crucial to discuss the role of the researcher. For instance, one of the issue that arise related to the role of researcher, is, by all means, a

gender issue. I had indeed noted that my position of researched could have been a barrier to an active conversation: I am the researcher of this study, a sportive Italian 24 years old woman, asking 18-19 years old Italian males questions concerning gender discrimination in sport, that is per se very limiting to gather data in a non-biased way. However, while I cannot guarantee the straightforwardness and honesty of the interviewees' answer, I can assure that all condition for a safe, pleasant and relaxed dialogue between the interviews and I were well set and maintained during all interviews.

5. MALE PERSPECTIVE ON FEMALES' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The following chapter is structured in a way that the two different environment of physical activity — physical education and leisure-time physical activities — are proposed. Each environments will be analyzed through the perception of adolescent males on such matter, by bringing to surface their own beliefs and and understanding. For each environments, possible gender stereotypes will be highlighted. Due to a redundancy of some answers, not all ten answers for each interviewee are going to be inserted and analyzed, but rather the most meaningful answers that unearth the most recurrent topics.

5.1. Male adolescents' perspective of physical education

This section will focus on the boy's perspective on Italian adolescent females during physical education classes. The structure of this section is the following: firstly, a general overview of how do adolescent males perceive physical education is classes is provided; then, the point in question of mixed gender physical education classes is supported; consequently, adolescent males were asked to step into their male classmates and female classmates to have an overall examination of the curricular environment for physical activity for female students.

5.1.1. General perceptions of physical education

In this subchapter, general perception of physical education classes is revealed. The interviewees were asked what they generally thought about physical education classes. This part of the interview was meant to give freedom to the answers of the

respondents, without going too much in detail with the issues that arise with mixed gender in physical education.

Then, interviewees were asked to name particular reasons that could make them either like or dislike physical education classes. The aim of these last two questions was to slowly introduce the topic of sport in scholastic environments, but also to see if any interviewees could on their own name some issues that arise by practicing physical education together with their female classmates, either as an advantage or disadvantage.

Surprisingly, none of the interviewees could name at this stage any upsides or downsides concerning mixed gender sports. Generally, participants showed a positive interest in the hours of physical education:

Nicolò (19): *“I love it. We don’t do normal physical education, like playing soccer or playing volleyball, those regular sport activities. We do cool stuff, like bio-intensive therapies, somethings useful. We do practical stuff, but also we need to study some theory. It goes up against the classical concept of physical education, that is: I [physical education teacher] through the ball in the field, and that’s it.”*

Stefano (18): *”...who doesn’t like physical education?”*

Many recognize the role of the school in providing physical education classes as an health enhancing tool in ensuring that students move for at least 2 hours a week, while noticing the low-level of physical activity of many of their classmates:

Jacopo (18): *“Physical education is very useful, because there are so many people that do not do any physical activities, therefore those two hours can be very usefully exploited. They can move, and run around. It is also useful for those that are lazy. I cannot find any downsides to it, is super useful. It is good for the bodies, but also for socialization, in tying people up with team sports.”*

Salmet (19): *“I believe it [physical education] is very useful, since it may help as to break from the study. Also, it can also help those that don’t do nothing [sport related].*

Pietro (19): *“It [physical education] gives the chance to move for many, in particular for those couch potatoes that stay inside at home all day. School gives us the chance to improve physically, but also socially and interpersonally.”*

However, either because of the scarcity of the hours dedicated in the curriculum or because of the structure of the lessons in terms of activities proposed, physical education classes were mainly perceived as a breathing time of the day, a recreational moment from other curricular subjects:

Stefano (18): *“The way I see it, physical education consists in two hours just for fun, since we do whatever we want to do.”*

Pietro (19): *“The downsides, however, are the little time dedicated to it, and how that little time is structured. We always need to warm up, and then it’s free play: we play always the same things, either volley-ball or soccer. I would like to have more variety in the activities proposed.”*

As regards the general perception of physical education, interviewees did not bring up any gender stereotypes, since females were not nominated in this part of the interview. For the most part, interviewees had a positive interest in physical education. Some recognized the essential nature of physical education in schools, while some others recognized physical education either as an health-enhancing tool for students or as a recreational moment.

5.1.2. General perceptions of mixed physical education

Next, since no respondents brought up issues (positive or negative) of gender-mixed physical education in the first set of questions, they were directly asked to reflect upon practicing mixed gender in physical education. At this point of the interview the answers are quite consistent. Since mixed-gender physical education has been part of the scholastic curriculum from the elementary school, many respondents don't perceive it as a problem:

Salmet (19): *"It's alright [laughing], I mean... I don't know. Yes, it's normal. I mean, in this way there is gender equality. But, I mean, it is from the elementary school that we do physical education together so..."*

Stefano (18): *"It is very right. It would make no sense in separating boys from girls in physical education classes, so the first thing that comes in my mind is definitely positive."*

Lorenzo (18): *"I think it is normal to play with girls, in a sense that it is meaningless to have the class desegregated according to gender. Some exercise can be done by both girls and boys."*

Other also perceive it as an advantage. The advantage is recognized in terms of being able to share different experiences and different games' knowledge:

Alberto (18): *"It is a positive experience because you get to know other sports and you get to spread your knowledge about them."*

Also, the advantage is recognized in terms of establishing a gender-equal atmosphere in the classroom:

Andrea (18): *“I really cannot have anything against this. It is nice to mix with the opposite gender. There are two different viewpoints. Of course, there is the exchange of two different characters, which can only lead to a better functioning of the group. It's nice to share a result, both with the boys but also with the girls, because in fact there are different points of view.”*

However, some interviewees introduced already some concepts that could be linked with gender stereotypes, as for example, the impossibility to play certain sports, introducing the idea of the existence of sports that are either better suitable for adolescent females, and that whatever sport or game adolescent females can play, then adolescent males will be consequently be able to play it as well, alluding to the poor physical activity level of adolescent females:

Alberto (18): *“If girls needs to play as well, then we can't do the usual sports. For example, boys rotated around soccer, but if girls need to play then we would do volleyball, or maybe other sports that now I can't remember. Girls play sports that anyone can play.”*

Moreover, interviewees recognized the natural disposition of mixed physical education, and had a positive interest of mixed physical education in school. However, Alberto brought up two different issues related to gender stereotypes. Firstly, he perceived mixed classes as an impossibility of playing certain sports, that is the perception of existence of **different sport according to gender** (*“If girls needs to play as well, then we can't do the usual sports [...] if girls need to play then we would do volleyball.”*). Secondly, by stating that *“girls play sports that anyone can play.”*, he implicitly generalized the fact that adolescent females' sports are easier than what adolescent males practice, therefore gender stereotyping adolescent females in physical education through the perception of **lower skills needed when playing the perceived feminine sports**.

5.1.3 Males' perceptions of mixed physical education

All interviewees were then asked to contract out from their own personal experiences, and to put themselves in the shoes of their classmates. Again, the same topic is asked, that is the perception of their male's classmates of mixed physical education. The reasons for the switch of perspective in the interview question was needed to make the interviewee alienate from the answers, in order to have the most realistic description of this environment. As expected, adolescent males' perceptions slightly changed when asked to bring up their classmates' perceptions: from a mainly general positive experience, the relationship between adolescent males and adolescent females during physical education classes started to bring to surface some more issues connected to gender stereotyping. In this case, only two interviewees maintained a positive or neutral feeling:

Lorenzo (18): *"Well, then, there was for sure a positive attitude about it. We were joking...there was always a pretty calm and relaxed atmosphere.*

Salmet (19): *"Well, I don't know. It is positive, that is for sure. But why, I wouldn't know. Let's say we are playing volleyball, and one girl is really not that good, then maybe...but no, because there could be some that are good at it...I don't know. I really don't know".*

The most recurrent perception adolescent males have on adolescent females during physical education that surfaced at this point in the interview is that of an impediment to certain sports and activities:

Stefano (18): *"I guess they could say something like: oh crap now I can't play soccer but I need to to some kind of activities that could somehow get them involved, may that be volleyball, or another sport. Maybe that happens in the hours in which we can get to decide what we want to play. It is a sort of limitation in the [sport] activities.*

[...] To bring a concrete example, a downside is that we are not allowed to do an overtly masculine sport, just like they [adolescent females] can't do an overtly feminine sport, whereas a upside is that we consolidate and strengthen the class' spirit.

Alberto (18): *"Well if is I have to say something on impulse i would say negative because they [adolescent males] just please themselves and think of themselves: they would want to do a certain sport that of course girls don't want to play.*

Also, a determinate image of adolescent females during physical education starts to get delineate, as of someone that is reluctant to get actively involved in the class:

Pietro (19): *" I believe for the boys there are no problem, except for the fact that many girls prefer to stay on their corner and do nothing and look at us, instead of putting themselves out there and getting themselves involved in the activities. Many [adolescent females] do it with the following excuses: i don't have the stuff [sport clothing], it's that time of the month—that is an excuse, in my opinion—and never want to get involved, expect when forced by the [physical education] professor; or except when we play a feminine sport, just like volleyball. And sometimes, they won't play not even then."*

Alberto (18): *"There are certain girls that really didn't want to do any sport, and if they were doing it, it was only because to make up the numbers for the teams, and then you will see that they were not getting on with it! It could be annoying, and then some of us could say something like: oh look at that one, she's so bad at it. And then you [girl] get hurt, and it is not nice."*

Once again, the natural disposition of mixed physical education is recognized, together with a positive interest in the curricular subject.

Moreover, the most valuable data —leading to gender stereotyping— that should be noticed at this part of the interview are as follows. Firstly, as previously noticed from the preceding interview questions, respondents perceive the existence of **different**

sports according to gender, (*“oh crap now I can’t play soccer but I need to to some kind of activities that could somehow get them involved, may that be volleyball, or another sport.”*, Stefano) that often arise as a limitation of possible sports available for adolescent males.

Also, the perception of **general unwillingness to play of female student** came to surface (*“There are certain girls that really didn’t want to do any sport.”*, Alberto; *“Many girls prefer to stay on their corner and do nothing and look at us.”*, Pietro), as a generalization of the conception that it is not in the adolescent females’ nature to do sports.

5.1.4 Female’s perceptions of mixed physical activity

The most valuable data for this environment were found when interviewees were asked to reflect on their female classmates perception of mixed physical education. As expected, gender stereotypes assuringly came to surface, while respondents were trying to step into the shoes of their female’s classmates. Moreover, almost all respondents noted mainly difficulties and problems that arise when a girl does physical education. In this case, the understandings of the interviewees on how do female students perceive physical education were mainly negative. Many are the reasons for female students’ dissatisfaction of physical education enjoyment, according to the interviewees. The most recurring theme, that already came to surface from the previous questions, was the perception of existence of different sports according to gender. Interviewees once again agree on the presence of sports that are only or better suitable for girl. Since in physical education classes the types of sport activities are quite limited and standard, when the sport proposed is considered masculine, than this is recognized as an issue for female’s physical activity and its enjoyment:

Andrea (18): *“I believe that, if i need to step into a girl’s shoes... well, she would not have the same concept of sport that a guy has, so to speak. A guy can do ok, a girl, it is already more difficult. She’s more on volleyball, why...I don’t know. I think that sport*

in general was born for males. Some sports are actually for girls, like gymnastic for example, or dance. Other sports were made for boys, such as hockey.”

Lorenzo (18): *“Mmm, a guy...no wait...a girl, oh god, it is not that she doesn't do sport, but a guy would rather play basketball, while a girl would be keener on playing volleyball, for example. These kinds of distinctions are always present.*

Stefano (18): *“Boys for sure loves to do sports that are more masculine, so naturally soccer, while girls like to do more stuff...i don't know, like gymnastic. I mean, boys enjoy do more male stuff...”*

Salmet (19): *”Boys for sure loves to do sports that are more masculine, so naturally soccer, while girls like to do more stuff...i don't know, like gymnastic. I mean, boys enjoy do more male stuff...but i don't really know how to explain it better.”*

Jacopo (18): *“I think that girls are more uncomfortable with this, because I believe girls tend to better relate with girls, I mean, better with girls than with us guys. That's why they only play volleyball, that is a sport more about females. I mean, they might be better off with girls, than playing with guys. Why? I don't really know...let's say that they restrain themselves more.”*

Many interviewees also perceive being a female as a disadvantages to sport, in terms of physicality:

Riccardo (18): *“Girls are disadvantaged in sports. Males are physically stronger, and therefore predominate. I am thinking now in sports such as basketball, for example, or soccer. Maybe on volleyball they can manage to call it even. Maybe we scare them. Maybe those girls that are good at volleyball, maybe they could be good at playing other sports. [...] but others may be embarrassed, since they can't play, they have greater difficulties”;*

Disadvantages are also perceived in terms of the intensity of sports:

Lorenzo (18): *“Guys do sports in which the level is more elevated, let’s say, while girls maybe they do more relaxed stuff.”*

Lastly, disadvantaged are perceived in terms of confidence and self-esteem:

Marco (18): *“I guess girls might have more trouble in showing off, in practicing with boys. Because a girl thinks that boys are better at sports, and then they kind of back out and they don’t give what they could actually give.”*

Nicolò (19): *“Mmm, maybe girl could have been living it differently, more in a negative way. Maybe they see that they can’t do some stuff. I mean, if you [girl] are not as easy-going, as strong, as athletic as your male classmates, then if they could group up only with ladies it could be better, for them. Like, that situation would be much better for example for a shy girl.”*

The gender differences in physical education are so stark and in favor of the males, that adolescent males see themselves as aims for girl’s physical activity: they assume the physical activity enjoyment of their females classmates derives and depends to a continuous confront with their male peers, so that when a girl can actually reach out to the adolescent males, she’s content.

Nicolò (19): *“They were more prodded and encouraged to do better when playing with boys, it can be useful so that you can learn better the game itself”.*

Alberto (18): *“Well, it could be either positive or negative. Negative, when a girl knows she has no talent for sport, and she might be scared to be targeted with offenses and stuff like that. But it can actually be also positive, when a girl sees that she’s at the same level of her classmates, same strengths and stuff like that. She feels satisfied, she’s happy.”*

Once again, some interviewees believe adolescent females to be themselves a barrier to physical activity, as they just don't want to play.

Pietro (19): *"I don't think there are any problems in most cases, because we are still in the scholastic environment, where you can grow and improve yourself, without always being about who's the bigger man. However, they don't always want to play, and I don't believe that the reason is that us guys limit them, but mostly because they are not forced into play, and they much rather be in their corner. There are girls that always play, as well as girls that always stay in their corner. I think that boys most of the time are like: ok, let's do whatever we need to do so then we can play soccer. For us guys, even though we are sleepy, sport makes us happy, it's fun, it makes us come together as a group, there are no problems. For girls, on the other hand, there is this thing that they don't even try. Its could happen for us guys to say: I don't feel like it [to play sport] but it is very rare. Even though guys don't have their stuff [sport clothing] with them, they will still be playing wearing jeans. Girls are more reluctant, while boys are more willing to move around."*

Competitiveness, aggressiveness, and teams sports are also considered main barriers to physical education in classes.

Stefano (18): *"Ok, let's see. So, one positive thing is that of course we share that hour just like any other scholastic hour. Maybe, as a downside, boys are more competitive let's say, and girls can get scared from our wild-way of playing, and girls are not used to be in a team , they might feel a little bit more discomfort from that."*

Nicolò (19): *"Us boys are used to play basketball in a quite aggressive way, and that itself could be a risky thing for girls: it happened more than once that they get hurt because we were either careless or distracted."*

As one can understand, the general perception of mixed physical education in the end is definitely negative. Once again, there is the perception of existence of **different sports according to gender** (“*I think that sport in general was born for males. Some sports are actually for girls, like gymnastic for example, or dance. Other sports were made for boys, such as hockey.*”, Andrea).

Then it is introduced another aspect of physical activity that is the perception of disadvantages for female students in physical education. The disadvantages recognized result from adolescent females’ **lack of physicality** (“*Girls are disadvantaged in sports. Males are physically stronger, and therefore predominate.*”, Riccardo), adolescent females’ **dissatisfaction of intensity of games** (“*Guys do sports in which the level is more elevated, let’s say, while girls maybe they do more relaxed stuff.*”, Lorenzo), and adolescent females’ **lack of confidence and self-esteem**. (“*I guess girls might have more trouble in showing off, in practicing with boys. Because a girl thinks that boys are better at sports.*”, Marco). Also, interviewees recognized a **general unwillingness to play** of female students (“*Girls are more reluctant, while boys are more willing to move around.*”, Pietro), and a **general reluctancy to competitiveness** (*boys are more competitive let’s say, and girls can get scared from our wild-way of playing.*”, Stefano) and **team-sports** (“*girls are not used to be in a team.*”, Stefano).

5.2. Males' perspectives of extracurricular sport activities

This section will focus on the boy's perspective on Italian adolescent females in extracurricular sport activities. In more details, this section aims to unravel the substantial differences when it comes to extracurricular sport activities according to gender. The structure of this section follow the coming chapters: firstly is analyzed the difference in extracurricular sport activity (meaning, the differences and the reasons for the enjoyment of different sports according to gender); it follows a chapters on the differences in leisure-time physical activity (meaning, the differences in chances for leisure-time physical according to gender); lastly , the limitations to physical activity are analyzed (meaning, the reasoning that supports the different limitations to physical activity according to gender).

5.2.1 Differences in extracurricular sport activities

Since the greatest barrier for physical activity in schools seems to be the activities suggested, the interviewees were asked what kind of sport activities their classmates were more keen on playing during their free-time.

The top picks of sports for adolescent males, respectively in order of the most practiced, are: soccer , basketball, swimming, volleyball, tennis, track and field, baseball, and rugby. The top picks of sport for adolescent females, respectively in order of the most practiced, are: volleyball, gymnastic, dance, tennis, and gym. Valuable data is presented when interviewees were asked to reflect upon the choice of determinate sports over others. For instance, some interviewees could hardly propose five different sport that women practice the most, while wondering if those activities could be even considered sports.

Lorenzo (18): *“Volleyball... and...well, artistic gymnastic. I can't think about anything else.”*

Stefano (18): *"Figure skating, gymnastic...is that even a sport?"*

Alberto (18): *"I don't know. My sister is in dance class, for example. If that's considered a sport."*

On the other hand, many surprisingly recognized some gender stereotypes that could eventually prevent adolescent females in engaging in determinate sports.

The most recurring stereotypes is, once again, the perception of existence of different sports according to gender. However, in this section respondents took a step forward in trying to identify the responsible of this conceit.

Two interviewees blamed the parents are a major impediment for a free choice for sports:

Pietro (19): *"Maybe we have this thought about masculine and feminine games, that's the general, conventional thought. There is this barrier. Parents divide the space up: masculine sports and feminine sports. And we have a problem already."*

Salmet (19) *"Well, I think that girls are pushed from parents to do those kind of sports from the beginning. Maybe, if they let a young girl decide for herself what she really wants like to play, maybe we will have also girls playing soccer; instead of always choosing dance or figure skating."*

Jacopo, Stefano, and Alberto blamed, consciously or unconsciously, the society with its standards as a restriction in the choice for alternative sports:

Stefano: *"It is the today's society that directed them toward those kind of games, because if you think about a girls playing soccer she may get judgey looks from her classmates. Therefore I believe this is a thing that society set up, maybe unintentionally, to people. So it's ok for a guy to play soccer, it's ok for a girl to do gymnastic...I believe*

girls decide to practice those sports because they don't think they could actually do masculine sports because they are addressed by society."

Alberto (18): *Girls' sports are more easy, maybe without body contact, just like dance, or gymnastic. Boys do more team-sports, while girls do more individualistic stuff. I think girls are more good at those stuff, and many boys are ashamed to practice those sports and they don't want to do it. And the same goes for the girls that don't play soccer because they are scared to be considered tomboys, while they could totally do it. Maybe they feel criticized, i don't know...from society."*

Jacopo (18): *"There are sports that are common for both boys and girls, for example volleyball. But then, there are sports that girls choose the most. Honestly, I don't know why. I know guys that do gymnastic and that are also quite good, so in the end, there should be no such thing as sport for boys or girls. In the end, it is just about majorities: it is normal to think about a guy playing soccer, rather than dance. But I don't think it is right, because it should not be wrong to see a guy dancing. And the same goes for a girl playing soccer. "*

One interviewee thought that girls sports are more self-conscious and body-conscious than adolescent males, so that they will choose the sport activity based on the need of their body. Also, he brought up once again an issue that was already introduced, that is the perception of girls being reluctant to team-sports.

Nicolò (19): *"I think feminine sports tend more to focus on improving the body, instead of having fun with friends: girls run, they go to the gym to improve your body, to improve the idea that they have of themselves. They do stuff based on how they perceive their body: they go to the gym aiming for a tight butt and...i don't know...I'd say girls are more shy don't choose team-sports because they would have to meet many new people, and they get embarrassed...but I'm not so sure about this, because boys may have the same problem, to throw themselves to people they don't know. Maybe, let's say, maybe girls are more shy, but I'm not sure at all. "*

This chapter is relevant since it considers the differences in extra-curricular sport activities. In one hand, interviewees named some determinants that were already previously named, as the presence of **different sports according to gender** (“*We have this though about masculine and feminine games, that’s the general, conventional thought.*”, Pietro) and the **general reluctance to team-sports** (“*I’d say girls are more shy don’t choose team-sports because they would have to meet many new people, and they get embarrassed.*”, Nicolò) as gender stereotypes. However, some interviewees brought up other considerations. Altogether, interviewees believe that differences in extra-curricular sports are enhanced by: **parents** (“*Girls are pushed from parents to do those kind of sports from the beginning.*”, Salmè); **common societal rules** (“*I believe girls decide to practice those sports because they don’t think they could actually do masculine sports because they are addressed by society*”, Stefano); **adolescent females’ low self-perception** (“*girls run, they go to the gym to improve your body, to improve the idea that they have of themselves.*”, Nicolò).

5.2.2. Differences in leisure-time physical activity

To have a broader view of the possibilities to be active, adolescent males were asked to imagine themselves in the following situation: “*imagine it is a Sunday afternoon, and you would like to play outside with your friends. Who would you call? Where would you go? What would you play?*”. All interviewees were comfortable in answering the question, naming various sports and physical activities that adolescent males were able to in their free-time. The main sports that interviewees named were soccer, basketball, volleyball and running. Also, adolescent males state that they spend the majority of time of their free-time in playing sports with other adolescent males. The promptness of the answers can be interpreted on how accessible is leisure-time physical activity and on the chance of being active in the free-time for adolescent males.

Nicolò (19): *“I would play frisbee, if I’m going out with people that know the game. If I want to do something more relaxed, I would play with the slack-line. Or I could bring the ball and play soccer.*

Riccardo (18): *“I would go play soccer with my male friends.”*

Salmet (19): *“I would go for a run. Or, I don’t know, I would meet up with the guys. I am a hockey player, but we can’t play hockey outside...so, I would go for basketball, or volleyball.”*

Pietro (19): *“Usually we have two main games, either basketball or soccer. Maybe a little bit more basketball. I meet up mainly with other guys, I can’t really tell you why.”*

Marco (18): *“Well, I would play volleyball, I really like it. I would go to the communal court and call my friends, mainly guys.”*

Stefano (18): *“I would go in the field behind the church and I’ll play soccer. Or I would go for a walk, if that is considered as physical activity. Or, I would go trekking in the mountains. I would call my all-time friends, those with whom we watch soccer together. Always with guys. Maybe, for the walks the girlfriends can come as well.”*

Interviewees then were asked to step once again in the shoes of their female friends, sisters, or girlfriends, and try to come up with the same situation (““try to put yourself in the shoe of a girl: imagine it is a Sunday afternoon, and you would like to play outside with your friends. Who would you call? Where would you go? What would you play?”). Then, they were asked also to reflect on the possible diversities of the two situations.

Interviewees’ answer were quite consistent. Moreover, all respondents recognized deep differences in the chances or in the ways that adolescent females can be physically activity in their free time. For instance, it required a great effort for many respondents to

imagine such situation, mainly because they could barely refer the situation to an actual practical case. Most of the answers were, in fact, guessworks and rarely related to something they had actually seen.

Nicolò (19): *“Girls...mhmm...well, I am thinking of what I actually saw. I would say volleyball. I’ve never seen girls bringing the basket ball or soccer ball. Or they would go for a walk, stuff like that. Sportive stuff on a Sunday afternoon? I have no idea.”*

Salmet (19): *“Oh mamma mia...I don’t know. Let’s see...what does my sister do? My sister does nothing. That’s the problem! Let me think...well I know one girl that always goes for a walk. And then... I don’t know. My sister does nothing. And all my other girlfriends are always at home, playing with their phone. Of course there are differences...I mean the only thing that girls suggest is to go to for a walk in the center of Vicenza to see the shop. The girls I am going out with, they don’t care about sport. Girls in general don’t do much sport in their free-time.”*

Stefano (18): *“It is really hard to step into a girl’s shoe. I don’t know, maybe they can take a bike ride. Everyone sees sports as male thing, that’s why it’s easier for me to bring example for boys. Usually girls on a Sunday afternoon might be chatting outside.”*

Marco (18): *“Maybe for a little run? Actually I said a little run because nothing else comes up to my mind.”*

All interviewees, consistently with the physical education environment, introduced very few sport activities that adolescent females could possibly do on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

The activities that brought up at least more than once are either going for a walk, or a run with friends.

Pietro (19): “ *Girls will meet up with other girls, and then they decide what to do. They could go for a walk, or play at something, but I have no idea what they could play.*”

Marco (18):” “*If I were a girl, I would probably call three-four other girls and go for a little run. So no physical activity. I would go for a little run instead of doing a specific organized sport.*”

Stefano (18): “*That’s a very good question. As I said, they can go for a walk. What else could they do?*”

Riccardo (18): “*Well, I don’t know, because they can’t play volleyball because they will need a hall or something...if it has to be outdoors then I will say a playground and try some rebounds with the volley ball... I’m just saying this because I see my cousin trying some rebounds from time to time with her sister...that’s all that comes up to my mind.*”

While interviewees mentioned only few activities that females can do in their free-time, they all posed themselves in a very negative way when it came to play together sports that they conceived as masculine from the physical education environment: the so called “masculine sports”, that are soccer and basketball. Moreover, they were consistent in mentioning that adolescent females just don’t get involved in those sport, without being able to argument their perspective on this matter.

Pietro (19): “*I’ve never seen a girl playing soccer in my town. I sincerely have no idea why, i’ve never talked with them about it. Maybe because I’ve just never seen them in my town. There are huge differences, but I don’t know why. I’ve seen a lot of girls just hanging out at the playground just chatting all day. I think that if a girl joins the guys with soccer, that her friends would say: why this, why that, why did you do it? As if it was wrong.*”

Riccardo (18): *“Guys play soccer with guys and we got used to that, there is no inclusion of girls in the game. And if there was...oh my god...well i think that in order to play there is the need of balance between the team, and if a girl were to play soccer she would cause imbalance...”*

Pietro (19): *“If it’s summer, and maybe we go to the swimming pool and there is a volleyball court, then they’ll play. But after a while they’ll say that they want just to sunbathe. But usually they never join when we are playing basketball or soccer.”*

Lastly, another occurring factor that the interviewees pointed out, is the unlikelihood for adolescent females to be able to play sports with other adolescent females in their free-time. The counterargument for this, is the difficulties for adolescent females to find other girlfriends that could actually be interested in leisure-time physical activity.

Marco (18): *“Us guys can play volleyball simply because it won’t be so hard to find out ten people willing to play. On the other hand, it is hard for girls to find ten girls willing to play to the same sport.”*

Nicolò (19): *“I think that if a girl want to do sportive stuff, then she would call a guy, because guys are more up for those kind of things... For us guys it’s easier to do sports on a Sunday, mainly because a guy has more guy friends. A guys has more chance that his friends would tell then yes, whereas a girl has less chances in that.”*

Lorenzo (18): *“For a guy, it is much easier to just go and play soccer, for instance. For girls, maybe volleyball, but usually they have different ideas of sports. I mean girls have more sports, therefore it is more difficult to just choose one that suits everybody.”*

Moreover, all interviewees recognized some differences in the way leisure-time physical activity is accessible according to gender, that adversely affect adolescent females. The different circumstances for leisure-time physical activity are enhanced by: **types of sport available outdoor** (“*Sportive stuff on a Sunday afternoon? I have no idea.*”, Nicolò); **adolescent females’ general rejection of physical activity** (“*Usually girls on a Sunday afternoon might be chatting outside.*”, Stefano); **adolescent females’ rejection of masculine sports** (“*I’ve never seen a girl playing soccer in my town.*”, Pietro); **adolescent females’ practicing sport with adolescent females only** (“*It is hard for girls to find ten girls willing to play to the same sport*”, Marco).

5.2.3. Differences in limitations to be physically active

When discussing the possible limitation to physical activity for adolescent females, interviewees named, consciously or subconsciously, different factors that could hinder female’s chances to be active. Respondents were asked to consider the reasons for physical inactivity of their peers. Also, they were asked to reflect on the role of male adolescents in the limitation of females’ physical activity. Many respondents did not see particular diversities on the possible limitation to physical activity according to gender, nor were questioning the role of adolescent males in restricting adolescent females’ chances to be physically active.

Jacopo (18): “*Laziness. First of all laziness, I am sure about it. Maybe the school, as well. Like I can’t do much sport because I have a lot to study. For girls, the same. Maybe a little bit less the school, because they are much better than us guys with studying and stuff.*”

Lorenzo (19): “*Maybe because he would like to play that particular sport but he can’t, for economic reasons. Nothing else I guess. And girls, the same reasons.*”

Riccardo (18): *“Because of school. Or, because they are just not good at sports. And the same goes for girls.”*

Salmet (19): *“Because we are slackers! Because think we are busy with other stuff. Maybe, in some cases, there could be organizational problems, like transport to the gym or stuff like that. And girls, mmmm, I guess for the same purpose.”*

Marco (18): *“Not being able to afford the sport, that’s a limitation. And also not having enough time to dedicate to sport. And that goes for girls, as well.”*

On the other hand, four respondents alluded to gender stereotypes in their reasons for limitation of physical activity. The gender stereotypes that come to the surface level at this point of the interview, had already emerged, in different contexts, from the previous interview questions. For instance, Nicolò blamed adolescent females’ low self-esteem (in terms of shyness, in this case), adversity to team-sports, as well as the Italian societal standards (also meaning what a girl can or cannot do for physical activity), as limitation to physical activity.

Nicolò (19): *“For boys it is just about laziness. Or because you are just not used to do sports. For girl...well, I believe girls are mutually supportive when it comes to physical inactivity. On the one hand, they support each other, saying that it is normal that us girls don’t play any sports, and there is no need to worry about it. One the other hand, there is laziness, or family reasons, in a sense that they have never been used to that. Oh, and also insecurity: maybe a team sport or an individual sport could expose them with their difficulties, with what you can’t do. And if you are already an insecure girl it could really bring you down. Maybe she could say: there you go, I’m not even good at this sport, I suck at everything! Something like that...”*

And yes, maybe, in some ways guys could somehow limit girl’s physical activity. Often, for example, a girl that plays soccer...no wait, let’s say a girl that would like to play soccer: she can’t do it, because she knows that she will be judged, not much from us guys, but from society, let’s say. It’s not really exactly popular for a girl to play a

violent sport. Like rugby: if a girl plays rugby, people would say that she is a tomboy, or something like that. When a girl may be associated with a boy, then she will not do the sport, even though she likes that sport. But again, us guys do not really hinder their chances to be physically active, but instead, what is socially accepted is. Maybe boys could limit the free choice of girls maybe by excluding them, but I don't think it is something that happens frequently. Maybe we mock them, like we could say something like: you are handicapped in running, you can't even run. A guy make fun of you, and if you are already insecure...but actually you could also be mocked by a girl."

Also another respondents, after listing possible limitations to physical activity that are valid for both genders, insisted to the role of the society, or better, to what is believed suitable for adolescent males and adolescent females, in preventing adolescent females to freely choose whatever activity to practice, without being judged or mocked.

Stefano (18): *"I guess other interests. School. Or for economic reasons. And for girls the same. Other interests. Also, I think girls studies way more than boys, so they need more time to spend on studying, and less time available for physical activity. And then, time-management, or economic problems. In the end, everyone should be free to choose the sports the he or she wants to do. I don't think there are any limitations. Guys do not limit girl's choice to play a certain sport. But society is. I mean, not only guys look at them the wrong way, but everybody really does.*

Stefano stating that *"not only guys look at them the wrong way, but everybody really does"*, implying society as the main responsible for guys' actions, may sound like a subtle way to absolve himself (or more boys in general) to the responsibility in the matter, . By saying so, Stefano may be excluding the role of boys in the society, and therefore their responsibilities in it. However, I believe that what Stefano meant, is that these sport stereotypes are so deeply root in society that he doesn't recognize any issue in the behavior of young adolescents in enforcing and promotion gender stereotypes, since that is what they have learned from a very young age, and that is what they have

been told it is right to do. While some respondents tried to stand in a position in which they recognized some stereotypes and blame them for adolescent females' physical activity's poor level, some, at this point of the interview, still enhanced those stereotypes, by stereotyping sports that are not suitable for adolescent females, or by believing boy's superiority in sports.

Pietro (19): *“Students job. School. Also, I never heard someone at 18 that starts a new sport. At 10, you might also try, but then, that's it. I can't think of anybody doing sports at 20. No no. I think that some sports are more physical, like rugby, for example. If I ever had a daughter, I would never send her to rugby. They will destroy her. And the same goes for a father, it is rare that he'll send his son to ballet.”*

Andrea (18): *“I would say mainly time. Time off of study. You get home from school, you need to study. When it's winter, it's dark, and you do nothing. As for girls, males were born in a dominant position compared to girls. Let's say that in a mixed group, the guy could be the chiefs of the girls, he has more power, for purely primitive reasons. We were born with males looming over females. Even though nowadays every generations is getting less and less dependent on this.”*

As it results, gender-based limitations to extra-curricular and leisure-time physical activity are proposed. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, limitations to physical activity are enhanced by: adolescent females' **rejection of team-sports** and **adolescent females' self perception**. Also, the role of **society as a hindrances to physical activity** is recognized (*“let's say a girl that would like to play soccer: she can't do it, because she knows that she will be judged, not much from us guys, but from society, let's say”*, Nicolò). Again, stereotyping sports that are not suitable for adolescent females are present (*“If I ever had a daughter, I would never send her to rugby. They will destroy her.”*, Pietro), or the belief of boy's superiority in sports (*“Let's say that in a mixed group, the guy could be the chiefs of the girls, he has more power, for purely primitive reasons.”*, Andrea). It is also interesting to note, the belief of sport being an exclusive business of young people (*“I can't think of anybody doing sport at*

20. *No no.*”, Pietro). However, I believe that this statement stems from the misconception of sport that young Italian adolescent have. Italians tend to misinterpret the general meaning of sport, and minimize the value of the word sport only to its organizational aspect. In other words, Italians believe sport to be organized sport, as, for example, playing in a team, or the sport that they can watch from their TVs at home. For this reasons, I don’t believe generalizing that young adolescent males (or, more generally, Italians) believe that sport is an exclusive business of young people (under 20 years old) is right. However, I agree on stating that organized sport is almost and exclusive business of young people, based on my personal experience.

6. DISCUSSION

In the discussion part, the main results will be analyzed for each environment, and key findings will be presented. Also, key findings are consequentially linked to the existing literature. Then, limitations of the study are presented, while developmental ideas for future research are suggested. The basic assumption through which the theoretical framework develop itself is that “sport is not intrinsically gendered” (Engel, 1994). This consideration is essential to keep in mind throughout this writing.

6.1. Main results

I believe this paper unravel gender stereotypes that affect Italian adolescent females’ physical activity behavior.

Before the reader dives in the discussion, it should be stressed that the aim of this thesis was not to shame any of the participants, nor in trying to put words in their mouth. Anything that was said during the interview was not directed in blaming the adolescent males for adolescent females’ poor level of physical activity, nor in blaming the adolescent males for enhancing the stereotypes. However, the point of view of male participants is relevant and needed for this paper: the intent was merely to unravel possible stereotypes through males’ experiences from their living environment, and to have an honest portrayal of the condition of adolescent females. In order to answer the research questions proposed (“what are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in curricular sport? And what are the gender-based barriers adolescent males perceive Italian adolescent females face in extra-curricular sport activities?”), this study revealed the presence of gender stereotypes in both of the analyzed environments.

As regards to the curricular environment—also meaning physical education in schools—the general perspective on the matter is quite consistent. For the most part, the interviewees had a positive interest in physical education, as well as a positive

interest of mixed physical education in school. Some recognized the essential nature of physical education in schools, while some others recognized physical education either as an health-enhancing tool for students. Similarly to the literature, the physical education environment proposed by the interviewees classes also resembles to a recreational moment.

However, interviewees did recognized a gender gap when it comes to enjoyment of the hours of physical education at the expense of their female classmates. The most recurrent stereotype that interviewees detected as a potential barrier to the enjoyment of physical education is the perception of the existence of **different sports according to the gender**. The distinction of sports that a boy or a girl should or should not in physical education classes do is a huge impediment in the curricular environment, especially when the sports offered by physical education classes are very limited, as brought up by the interviewees.

When stating the existence of difference sports according to gender, it started to delineate the kind of sports that are then suitable for the sexes. In the physical education environment, interviewees perceive soccer are a suitable game for adolescent males, whereas for adolescent females the game of volleyball should be more appropriate. The choice of these two different sports confirms the scarcity of activities provided by the schools, but it also delineates the competences and skills adolescent males believe female students have in sport. For instance, interviewees believe that adolescent females want or should be playing what they called the **feminine sports**. Adolescent males stereotyped a feminine sport to be a sport that is **accessible to everybody** (in a sense that anyone can play because of the its easiness and simplicity), a sport that **lacks of intensity**, and a sport that **lacks of competitiveness**. What I also found interesting in the delineation of the perceived feminine sport, is the presumption of sports mainly practiced by females of not being even considered sports. For instance, interviewees were very resilient do define figure skating, gymnastic and dance as a sport (*“Figure skating, gymnastic...is that even a sport?”*, Stefano; *“My sister is in dance class, for example. If that’s considered a sport”*, Alberto). This assumption and underestimation of what many interviewees consider a feminine sport firstly delineate a great ignorance on what sport is in the first place. But, most important and most relevant to this paper, it

can be also related to the underestimation of their female friends' competence and skills in sport. However, this behavior can be partially forgiven. In fact, in the Italian language, as in English, sport and physical activity have two different meaning. While physical activity is considered mainly as any type of movement that requires energy expenditure, sport takes a more organized meaning. In this sense, I believe boys in most case find it difficult to consider feminine sport as such, mainly because they cannot see the organizational constituent behind it, that maybe in sports more common as soccer can be a little more obvious.

Controversially to the game of volleyball, that many interviewees believe females play, they also stereotyped adolescent females as reluctant to be willing to play **team sports**. Again, I believe this is mostly due to the ignorance that many have in sport, most probably associating the concept of team sport with the concept of aggressiveness and physical contact with the opposing team, that is present with other most common sports, as for instance soccer.

Nonetheless, the stereotypes went beyond the sports that are considered feminine or not. Interviewees stereotyped females to be generally reluctant to sports: they perceived a **general unwillingness to play**, caused by the **lack of self-esteem** of female students during physical education, together with a **lack of interest in sport**.

However, one could argue that the named elements that adolescent females dislike in sports are not stereotypes per se, or that those stereotypes are true, since they are acquired on the basis of a direct experience. Readers need to remember that any rigidly pre-established and generalized opinion is inaccurate, inappropriate and should be considered unacceptable. In the specific case of the topic of this study, the impact of these generalizations on adolescent females' physical activity is massive: it triggers negative reactions, and definitely not contributing to changing the mentality of teachers, male classmates, and even female classmates. As reported from the interviewees, once again, these stereotypes only serve to worsen the physical activity behavior of inactive female adolescences (*"they support each other, saying that it is normal that us girls don't play any sports, and there is no need to worry about it"*, Nicolò), and worsen the chances of physically active girls to stay active (*"let's say a girl that would like to play soccer: she can't do it, because she knows that she will be judged"*, Nicolò).

The way in which interviewees portrayed physical education experiences of their female classmates suggests that female students are mainly put of the spot by themselves most of the time. For instance, female students should be pushed and motivated to get active and participate purposefully to the lecture, in a environment that is maintained free from stereotypes and inhibitions from the physical education teacher, as well from the male and female classmates.

Since the general perception of the interviewees describes how female students are stereotyped in the scholastic environment, it can be discussed, that the structure of physical education in Italy does not take into consideration issues related to gender that could hinder sport participation for the female students. One could argue that, because of the strong stereotypes that girls need to face during physical education hours, a better solution for this problem could be a gender division of the class. However there are few issues to consider. For instance, there is no academic evidence that ensure that a gender division class would desist gender stereotyping in physical education classes. Berg and Lahelma (2010) conducted a study in Finland, one of the few European countries that still in secondary school have physical education in separate group. The study researches the gender processes on physical education teacher: the consequences of practicing physical education in separate group led to a segregation in the hierarchical role of a teacher, where male and female students are respectively taught by male and female teachers. The study relieved that male teachers are believed to have higher educational skills and to be able to teach female students as well, but not the other way around, causing a discrepancy in the teaching. But most importantly, gendered physical education classes may not take place in a country as Italy for a basic reasons. There is in fact the need to consider the economic impact that would have to double the physical education teachers for each school, in a country that just underwent heavy cuts in the school sector (Orizzonte scuola, 2018b).

Not surprisingly, many stereotypes uncovered in the curricular environment were also present in the extra-curricular environment for sport activities. The behavior of physical activity of young females was altogether not so different in the two distinct environments. For instance, once again, the belief of the existence of **different sports**

according to gender is present, linked to the concept of the existence of masculine and feminine sports.

With reference to leisure-time physical activity, all interviewees moreover recognized some differences in the way sport is accessible according to gender, affecting adversely adolescent females. In general, adolescent females are believed to practice less sport during their free-time. The majority of the interviewees believe that different circumstances for leisure-time physical activity are enhanced by the **types of sport available outdoor**, again, linked with the impossibility for adolescent females to practice any masculine sports.

Interestingly, only one interviewees mentioned the opposite issue for a limited practice of leisure-time physical activity for adolescent females, that is the **greater choices of sports available**: as showed by the literature (Scierra, 2015), and as pointed out by one of the respondents, while adolescent males might focus on soccer (both as for club participation and for leisure-time physical activity) adolescent females' variety in the dedication of sports might as well reduce the chances for adolescent females to decide jointly the sport to practice in their leisure-time physical activity (*"For a guy, it is much easier to just go and play soccer, for instance. For girls, maybe volleyball, but usually they have different ideas of sports. I mean girls have more sports, therefore it is more difficult to just choose one that suits everybody."*, Lorenzo)

The adolescent males' perception of adolescent females' **general rejection of physical activity** and, most relevant to this paper, of adolescent females' rejection of masculine sports, can be considered one of the issues that still prevents adolescent females to freely enjoy leisure-time physical activity. What is somehow different from the previous environment, is the way that interviewees tried to explain and justify for their conclusions. Their stands on the matter is quite diverse. Altogether, interviewees believe that differences in extra-curricular sports are enhanced by the **common societal norms**. According to the interviewees, the Italian society set the norms of what sport should be right and what should be wrong for adolescent females and adolescent males to play, but most importantly it accepts and enhances the discrimination of those youngster that swim against the tide of the sports "allowed".

While stereotypes in sports are found for both adolescent females and adolescent males (i.e. the impracticability of soccer for adolescent females or ballet for adolescent males), interviewees recognized the consequences for its practicability only for adolescent females. Interviewees state that adolescent females that are keen on practicing the so called masculine sports would be named tomboys and are looked down on, mainly from their girlfriends. Discriminating a adolescent females because she plays soccer and defining her as a tomboy is a stereotype from the Italian society that holds on to nothing, since the game of soccer is widely played by females all around the world. It is also very limiting, in a sense that, as shown by the literature and as supported by the interviewees, the chances to play soccer in Italy are very high, either as a leisure-time physical activity or in clubs, not to mention its incontestable acclamation in the Italian society. As mentioned before, interviewees recognized the differences of sports according to gender that societal norms enhances, but from two different point of view. Some respondents recognized and blamed the Italian society for accepting and enhancing the discrimination in sports, while others, on the other hand, accepted those discriminations in sport.

6.2. Limitations and critical evaluation

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of the conditions of Italian female adolescents in the sphere of sport and physical activity through the perceptions and understanding of their male peers, to unearth gender stereotypes and their implications on Italian female adolescents' sport behavior. The large limitation to this study is related to the subject: readers need to consider the sensibility that arise with the topic, that could have limited the straight-forwardness and sincerity of the interviewees. Also, as discussed in the role of the researcher section, my position of researched could have been a limitation to an active conversation: I am the researcher of this study, a sportive Italian 24 years old woman, asking 18-19 years old Italian males questions concerning gender discrimination in sport, that is per se very limiting to gather data in a non-biased way. However, while I cannot guarantee the straightforwardness and honesty

of the interviewees' answer, I can assure that all condition for a safe, pleasant and relaxed dialogue between the interviewees and I were well set and maintained during all interviews.

When proposing the limitation for this study, for instance, there is also the need to consider the small amount of interviewees. Also, since this study is based in a small province of the Veneto region, and because of the illustrated differences of the Italian territory, the results of the study cannot be generalized in Italy as a whole. Moreover, this study lacks of solid base of literature review: while the academic research is exhaustive when it comes to the description of sport behavior in Italy, academic evidence is almost absent when it comes to the issue of gender stereotyping in sport and adolescents in the Italian society.

I believe, the contribution of this paper is important and relevant to the societal studies of sports, and significant for any readers. While this thesis do not provide specific solutions to the issue of gender stereotyping in sport, it instead bring evidence of the domain that Italian males, in this case specifically Italian adolescent males, have on sport, in and out the wall of the school. Once again, the intent of this study is to reveal the possible impact of gender stereotyping in sport. By providing and understanding a different perspective to the point in question of physical inactivity during the adolescent years in Italy, this study can provide a different perspective of why Italy ranks low to compared to many other European countries when it comes to physical activity and education. If I were to propose guidelines to tackle this situation, I would stress two main points for each analyzed environments.

As regards to physical education in high school, I would call out the schools' policies on gender equality in classrooms, and therefore in the gym. Physical education should be a potential weapon to fight physical inactivity in the adolescent years, and therefore should beware of the situation of their female pupils, without disregarding their role in school (and gym), without leaving out of account their preferred activities, and by finding a way to encourage girls to actively participate as well. In the policy of the school, physical education should then be considered as important and vital as any other subjects. While the academic evidence on the the position of physical education in the scholastic curriculum in Italy is void, I believe that the data of this study support my

personal experience in high school. Throughout the 5 years spent in high school physical education grades were very much swinging based on the academic performance of the student, meaning that if a student had very high grades in all subjects, but did not excel in sport, then that physical education grade would be raised to amount to the other grades. It follows from this standard behavior that inactive students are discouraged to be committed and to make an effort in sport, and dissuade as well active pupils to do their best.

As regards to the extracurricular environment of sport, on the other hand, I would recognize parents as one of the vital approaches to this issue. Parents should encourage both boys and girls to be physically active from childhood, and, most importantly, choose collectively with their sons and daughters what kind of sport could be available to them and supporting their need and passion in doing what they like, without forcing them to fit senseless stereotypes.

6.3. Further research

Since gender stereotyping is a major issue on the practice of sport, there are many different positions in which future research can approach this phenomenon. For instance, since the literature stresses the importance for adolescences to be active, I support the idea that future research should prioritize younger male adolescents (age 15/16 years old) for the same set of interviews: younger adolescent males should be interviewed to have an overview of the conditions of younger Italian female adolescents in the sphere of sport and physical activity. In fact, the percentages of Italian adolescent females that drop out in sport increase after 14 years old, together with an increase in age (Van Bottenburg, Rijnen, Van Sterkenburg, 2005). Also, I suggest the conduction of a cross-national study, in order to compare the impact of gender stereotypes in sports to the sport-specific overall levels, differences and general trends in the European Union. Last, but not least, research should be widened in the Italian territory —Northern Italian regions versus Southern Italian regions, for instance — to have a comprehensive perspective on the issue of gender stereotyping.

6.5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that gender stereotyping in sport is well present in the Italian society, while it prevent and limits the possibilities and the enjoyment for a healthy sport behavior of Italian female adolescents.

The concept of “masculine sports” and “feminine sports” is one of the most recurring stereotypes in this research. This research also shows the degree to which one stereotypes can affect sport participation, both in the curricular and in the extracurricular environment.

The degree of stereotyping present in the Italian society urges in a recommendation for a closer attention to this issue, in order to prevent and to ease the practice of sport for youngest adolescent females. Moreover, research should be continued with a great care on this topic, to bring more attention on the subject, to understand the impact of stereotypes on sport behaviors, and to learn how to overcome them.

As I have spent my adolescent years in Italy —practicing physical education in the scholastic environment, being enrolled in a club in the province of Vicenza and being physically active in my free-time— most of the answers and stereotypes present in this thesis were expected, as many of those stereotypes I experienced firsthand, and had to learn how to cope with them on the hard way.

However, the knowledge gained on this subject while conducting this study made me more aware on the importance of not letting the stereotypes being accepted or even promoted, and made me realize the importance of challenging and confronting this issue, by opening discussions and by showing hard evidence defying stereotypes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Consent form

CONSENT FORM

Topic of Thesis: Boys Perceptions on Adolescent Girls' Physical Activity Behavior.

Name of Researchers: Irene Retis

Please tick the boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated
for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask
questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time
without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected.

3. I understand access to the interview transcript will be limited to Irene Retis and
academic colleagues with whom he might collaborate as part of the research process.

4. I consent to the audio taping of the interview.

5. I consent to the use of my personal identity through participation in this research.

6. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Person
taking consent.

Date

Signature

Appendix 2. Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

I am a researcher from the University of Jyväskylä, who as part of my International Masters studies, is required to conduct a research paper.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to explore the Italian boys' perceptions and attitudes to Italian girls' physical activity behaviour.

How will the study be conducted?

The research will be conducted in face-to-face interview by the researchers. Interviews will take approximately 45 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no known risks or disadvantages of taking part. You have your right to remain anonymous if you choose so. If you wish I will send you the transcript of the interview before the analysis to allow you to ensure that you have not been misrepresented.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

In taking part, you will be able to reflect on the issues and problematic that girls need to face when practicing sport and physical activity and the factors that may limit the engagement on those activity.

What happens when the research study stops?

I will publish the results for the purpose of the Masters thesis

Do I have to take part in this research?

You are under no obligation to take part in this research. You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and there will be no adverse consequences if you do so.

What if there is a problem?

Any complaint or concern about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed; please contact:

Contact details of the researcher

Researcher

Irene Retis

University of Jyväskylä

email: ireneretis@gmail.com

Phone: +39 348 663 1713

Who is organising the research?

I, the researcher has organised the research in according to the prescribed outline for the Master thesis guideline.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.

Appendix 3. Interview questions

Interview questions:

GENERAL

- Name, age, place of birth, residence and occupation?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- (If not mentioned above): do you like playing sport or doing sport activities in your free time (i.e. running, walking, skating, playing ball games...)?

BEHAVIORS IN PE

- In which grade are you in school?
- What is your favorite subject at school?
- What about physical education?
- What are the things that make you like and/or dislike PE?
- What do you think about mixed group in PE?
- How do the boys in your class feel about it (about doing PE together with girls)? Would you generally perceive it as a positive/negative experience for them?
- How do the girls in your classroom feel about (about doing PE together with boys)? Would you generally perceive it as a positive/negative experience for them?
- Please name both positive and negative situations that occurred when boys and girls are doing PE together.
- Do you think boys enjoy differently PE and in which ways do boys and girls enjoy differently PE?
- Could you propose any recommendation to improve the enjoyment of PE for both boys and girls?

BEHAVIORS IN MIXED SPORT

- Do you play any sport besides PE (i.e. in a club, or any unorganized physical activities...)?
- If no, what would you like to play and with whom?
- If yes,
- How often do you play?
- Which sport/physical activity do you play?
- Why do you do?
- How do you like it?
- Whom do you play it with?
- Can you recall the last time that you played sport with girls besides PE (if not, imagine a situation of playing sport in mixed groups or with girls)?
- Would you generally recommend it as a positive/negative experience (personally)?
- Please name both positive and negative situations that occurred when playing with girls or in mixed groups from the girls' perspective and from the boys' perspective.
- In general, what are the positive and negative effect of playing with girls or in mixed groups?
- Could you name three main sport that boys enjoy doing the most?
- Could you name three main sport that girls enjoy doing the most?
- Please reflect on the sports you chose. How do they differ? What do they have in common?

CHANCES TO BE ACTIVE

- Imagine it is a Sunday afternoon, and you would like to play (any) sport with your friend. What sport would you like to play? Where would you go? What would you need? Whom would you call to play with?
- Try to put yourself into a girl's shoes. Imagine it is a Sunday afternoon, and you would like to play (any) sport with your friend. What sport would you like to play? Where would you go? What would you need? Whom would you call to play with?
- Reflect on these two situations. How do they differ?

MOTIVATION

- What are the main benefits that sport gives or could give to you (name at least 3)?
- What are boys your age looking for when being physically active?
- What do you think the main benefits that sport gives or could give to girls (name at least 3)?
- Why do you think those benefits are different from girls and boys?
- What are girls your age looking for when being physically active?
- Do you have any sister, girlfriend, or a friend that is a girl? Would you like her to be more physically active? List three reasons why you think she should or she should not be more physically active.

LIMITATIONS

- Do you know any boys your age that are physically inactive? What are the recurrent reasons for their inactivity? (name at least 4)
- Do you know any girls your age that are physically inactive? What are the recurrent reasons for their inactivity? (name at least 4)
- In your opinion, do boys (not you, but generally) play any role in limiting the chances for girls to be active?

CONCLUSION

- Anything you would like to add?