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# Figurational sociology and masculine embodiment in Male Physical Education

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The purpose of this chapter is to critically discuss masculine embodiment in Male Physical Education (MPE) drawing on the work of other figurational sociologists, such as Dunning and Sheard (1973; 1979), Dunning and Maguire (1996) and Atkinson (2002; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2012b). The chapter starts by discussing broader literature on masculinity and physical education (PE) and then outlines the key principles of figurational sociology. We then discuss ethnographic data from a school in the North-East of England, which we call Colbeck High School (CHS), applying figurational concepts to demonstrate, a) how young males internalize their gendered behavior and b) the role of MPE teachers in these processes. In doing so we focus on understanding the tension balances involved in managing young peoples gendered identities in MPE. Finally, we critically appraise the use of a figurational framework for understanding young males' masculine embodiment from a long-term developmental and relational perspective.

## **Masculinity and Secondary Physical Education**

In order to contextualise this study we briefly summarise seminal and contemporary research on masculinity in PE. We start with Connell's (1989) empirical work which identified the relationship between PE and masculinity by arguing that PE is a 'gender regime' for reproducing masculine ideology and legitimising patriarchy. This study tested her pioneering theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), which has since been applied

in multiple studies on masculinity in PE (see Davidson, 2000; Parker & Curtner-Smith, 2012; Silva, Botelho-Gomes & Goellner, 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity has been used extensively as a way of discussing gendered embodiment in PE. One such study focuses on those marginalized in PE, Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) noted how hegemonic masculinity in PE was socially constructed through content, pedagogies, teacher-student relationships, and peer-cultures. Young males who embodied marginalized masculinities gave examples of their internalization of, and at times resistance against, oppressive practices in MPE, whilst they provided contrasting experiences when in other sporting environments (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). These findings centred the MPE teacher in the social construction of hegemonic masculinity reflecting previous concerns regarding MPE teachers' teacher-training courses. For example, Skelton (1993) found hegemonic masculinity was part of the informal culture of training to become a MPE teacher despite contrasting institutional-based pedagogies being advised. Similarly, Brown (2005) noted how trainee MPE teachers used their gendered backgrounds to shift their teaching identities towards complicity and reproduction of hegemonic forms of masculinity and patriarchy in PE and school sport.

Whilst many researchers have applied hegemonic masculinity, others have adopted more post structural theories. Light and Kirk's (2000, p. 174) study of rugby within schools found that, "a class specific form of masculinity connected to ideals of physical domination, competitiveness, toughness, teamwork and self-restraint continued to be produced and reproduced". However, in line with broader socio-cultural gender and educational changes, rugby's hegemony had been contested and forced to adapt (Light & Kirk, 2000). In reference to these adaptations, Light and Kirk (2000) drew upon Bourdieu's (1990) corporeal and discursive regimes focused around the body and rugby's continued hegemony. Similarly, Gorley, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) applied Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus and the exchange

of physical capital to critically consider the relationship between muscularity and the social construction of gender in PE. By highlighting the central importance of muscularity and physicality for young males' masculine embodiment, Gorley, Holroyd and Kirk (2003) argued that PE can only have less binary gender-relevance and become fully inclusive if stereotypical masculinities are de-stabilized.

Other studies have adopted theories of Foucault. For example, Gerdin and Pringle (2017) explore the way young males made sense of pleasures in relation to the discourses within MPE. They found that pleasures were, "co-constitutive of discourses of fitness, health, sport and masculinity", and served to substantiate the prominence of multi-activity sport-based PE (Gerdin & Pringle, 2017, p. 209). As such, MPE was considered by those involved as, "an appropriate masculine endeavour and valued source of enjoyment" (Gerdin & Pringle, 2017, p. 194). Atkinson and Kehler (2012a, p. 56) adopted Foucault's notion of heterotopia, "a space that suspends or negates one's cultural identities, maps of meaning and physical abilities", to argue that changing rooms and other 'gym zones' were dangerous spaces where certain boys faced ritual bullying and humiliation. These behaviours were found to be induced by perceptions that these boys' bodies did not 'measure up' to their peers' masculine-based expectations, which left them feeling that they failed to embody a valued identity and fearful of entering this heterotopia.

Whilst numerous theoretical frameworks have been applied to understanding masculinity and PE there has been an acceptance that PE influences young males' development and expression of masculinity. Within the gender order there are multiple masculinities at play, which are socially constructed in a hierarchical manner in MPE. Such dynamics significantly influence young males' peer-relations and performances of masculinity. The following section introduces a figural framework, which is then applied to understanding MPE throughout the chapter.

## **Figurational Sociology, Gender Relations and long-term processes of change**

Figurational sociology, founded by Norbert Elias, is underpinned by a number of theoretical principles which are summarized by Malcolm and Mansfield (2013, p. 399-400) as,

- (1) Human societies can only be understood in terms of long-term processes of change;
- (2) Human life is characterised by interdependent relations which are diverse and shifting and underpinned by ever-changing balances of power;
- (3) Human societies are characterized by different degrees of, and a dynamic interplay between, internal and external social controls, with the increasing internalisation of the latter in relatively complex societies;
- 4) Human acts involve processes in which intentional action contributes to unintended or unplanned patterns of relationships;
- (5) Social life is characterised by balances and blends of emotional involvement and detachment from the contexts in which human beings find themselves.

Central to a figurational analysis is the figuration which Elias (1978, p. 261) defined as, “a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people”. This is an example of how Elias sought ways to avoid dominant and dualistic terms in sociology. The figuration does not seek to resolve but, rather, circumvent the structure-agency dualism (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). Power is a part of all social relations and figurations are always organized around the operation of power (van Krieken, 1998). The ‘figuration’ also emphasises other Eliasian concepts such as interdependencies, mutual social bonds, power relations and social processes. People are born into figurations and remain in them until their death, which means that we, “only exist in and through our relations with others” (van Krieken, 1998, p.6), people *are always*

interdependent with others (Elias, 1978), and that all social relations are enabling and constraining. Power must be understood as part of all social relations (van Krieken, 1998).

Elias's approach is best illustrated in *On the Processes of Civilization* which describes the process by which people come to view themselves as more civilized than others. Elias was not making a moral judgement in this regard and his comparative approach clearly emphasized that there is more than one way of being civilized. Rather, Elias was fundamentally interested in *how people come to regard themselves* as 'civilized' relative to others. In particular, Elias outlined how manners regulating bodily functions, food consumption, sexual relations and expressions of violence have changed over time. He concluded that these aspects of social life have been increasingly regulated first through external social controls and latterly through internal self-regulation. In this respect social etiquette comes to exert greater influence on social status. But, crucially for Elias, such *psychogenesis* is inherently linked to *sociogenesis*. Thus, in *On the Processes of Civilization*, Elias links such behavioural change to the way that nation states have become more extensive and complex, aided through their development of the mutually supporting monopolies over physical force and taxation. Elias's point in highlighting these processes was to stress how, over time, people come to perceive and evaluate similar acts in different ways and elicit differing emotional responses. In doing so, he was able to demonstrate that humans are not fixed mental and physical entities passing through changing social worlds but they are themselves dynamically created through such social experiences.

A long-term developmental view of masculine embodiment, according to Dunning and Maguire (1996), emphasises that males and females are fundamentally interdependent due to reproductive and sexual purposes. In providing an overview of long-term changes in gender relations, Dunning (2013) noted that throughout the majority of human history and in nearly all societies, men have held significant power advantages over women. This has enabled men to monopolise violence, economic, political and ideological resources (Dunning, 2013).

Equalizing shifts in favour of females can be understood as being related to the gradual depreciation of males' physical capacities. This was due in part to men's diminishing ability to gain power through violent force and the de-valuing of male strength through rises in the use of technology for warfare or industrial purposes (Dunning, 2013).

In taking a long-term perspective on gender relations in sport and PE we draw on Elias and Dunning (1986) who considered how the development of modern sport emerged as a largely male preserve. In particular, they refer to modern sport as a space where people (*read predominantly males*) experience an innate need to experience pleasurable excitement. This excitement is required as modern societies have become more planned, routinized and mundane compared to pre-modern societies (Mennell, 1998). Referring to its cathartic properties, Elias and Dunning (1986, p. 96) noted how many sports contain de-routinized and tension balances through, "a controlled and enjoyable decontrolling of restraints on emotions". Of course, modern sport is not the only spare-time leisure activity that enables pleasurable excitement. However, it is one which was formed by and for men, and therefore has a predominantly masculine character and that predominantly embodies male values (Dunning & Maguire, 1996).

Dunning (2013) emphasised modern sport's important representational function in masculine identity formation by referring to its key characteristics, namely mock battles and mock duels, that permit aggression and violence which are unobtainable legally elsewhere or without evoking feelings of shame or repugnance. Focusing on gender identity, Dunning (2013) referred to modern sport as one of the last bastions of traditional forms of masculinity. Dunning and Maguire (1996) argued that modern sport spaces provided a 'masculinity-validating' experience for males which was crucial in their attempts to counter fears of emasculation/feminization which is perceived to have been an outcome of functional democratization. Modern sport therefore provided a socially approved site for the "inculcation,

expressions and perpetuation of masculine habituses, identities, behaviour and ideals” (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 226). This process involved, amongst other things, the legitimate expression of aggressive masculinity and the subordination of females.

The role of modern sport in forming gendered identities meant that it became a source of ‘hero image’ for men and aspirational young males (Dunning & Maguire, 1996). The importance of modern sport’s excitement and representational function means that generations of males in England have had to “grow to develop an internalised adjustment to it” (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 297), irrespective of their preference towards it. Of course, not all males like or demonstrate physical competence in sport, however, given its long-standing status in young males’ construction of masculinity (Connell, 2008), Dunning and Maguire (1996) referred to processes where ‘deviant’ males displaying an ‘anti-sport’ attitude are viewed as effeminate or homosexual.

Females increasing participation in sport has led to the emergence of modern sport as a battle ground over gender identities, both between and within the sexes (Liston, 2008). Not only does females’ involvement potential invalidate modern sports ‘masculinity-validating’ potential, but it challenges gendered ideologies (*a key power resource*) of what constitutes masculine/feminine habituses/identities and their social acceptability (Dunning, 2013). This de-stabilisation of modern sports’ representational function for males partially explains why there has been much resistance to the perceived female encroachment on previous male preserves (for examples see Liston, 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2008; 2014; & Velija & Malcom, 2009; Velija & Flynn, 2010; Velija, 2015, Velija & Hughes, 2017). Despite females increased entry into modern sport and the subsequent challenge to conceptions of traditional masculinity, it is necessary to re-iterate that sport is still deemed in many Western societies as a prime developer and measurer of young males’ masculine embodiment (Connell, 2008) and this has implications for understanding MPE.

### *A long-term developmental view of the MPE figuration*

Dunning and Sheard (1979) illustrated PE's gendered origins linked to masculine embodiment. Influenced by social reformers such as Charles Kingsley's fears of 'social feminization' Muscular Christianity emerged and was prominent in English public schools during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Dunning & Maguire, 1996). This coincided with early developments of what we now call rugby and football, which was introduced by headmasters such as Thomas Arnold to reform what they perceived as a brutal prefect-fagging system and re-establish teachers' monopoly of power over young males (Dunning & Sheard, 1979). These sporting activities were used to civilize young males' bodies and inculcate manliness and independence (Dunning & Sheard, 1979). The socially acceptable aggressiveness in team contact sports caused tensions with notions of gentlemanly behaviour and fair play (Dunning & Sheard, 1979). However, into the 20<sup>th</sup> century developing manly character was embraced as a military need dictated PE's role of developing (*read male*) 'warriors' through drill and 'leaders' through games (Dunning & Maguire, 1996). Whilst there were numerous nuanced alterations to PE policy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, games largely remained a constant and had a gendered theme.

MPE in England in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues to illustrate its gendered sociological inheritance through the maintenance of single-sex classes and continued gendered interpretation of the curriculum. Green (2008) noted how since its inclusion in the National Curriculum in 1992 PE has changed in relation to various processes which include, amongst other things, inter-related processes of politicization, marketization, professionalization, sportization, academicization and healthization. These denote how the MPE figuration is constrained to some degree by school and political figurations. Such constraints affect socialization (Roberts, 2001) which takes place in PE, namely developing physical and moral citizens (NCPE, 2013). Like Connell (2008), we argue that because of its synonymy with sport

and its unique design and figural dynamics, MPE provides an intense space for the “inculcation, expressions and perpetuation of masculine habituses, identities, behaviour and ideals” (Dunning & Maguire, 1996, p. 226) during an impressionable phase of young males’ habitus/identity development.

### *Young Males Masculine Habitus*

Young males enter MPE with a gender/masculine habitus/identity that are influenced by their figurations within and outside of school. In figural sociology identity is conceived as an inherently human process. This means people do not go through abstract phases of identity as they change so do their conceptions of ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ identities (Mennell, 1998). This processual approach explains why a seventy year-old person may not recognise or identify with the person they were 50 years ago (Elias, 2001). People’s identities change throughout their life-course depending on the figurations which they continue to be involved in or new figurations they become a part of (Elias, 2001). Whilst sharing many similarities, figural conceptions of identity and habitus differ in at least three respects, most notably levels of consciousness, autonomy and speed of change. Mennell (1998) noted how habitus operates at a deeper more unconscious level in comparison with a more consciously-informed identity. Individuals therefore have less autonomy to determine their habitus compared with their ability to present a certain identity (Mennell, 1998). As a result, a person’s habitus changes at a slower rate than their identity. Gender provides an example in this regard. From infancy young people adopt habitual behaviours and ingrained attitudes that are gendered. Whilst this means that relatively unconscious self-restrained behaviour is gendered, this is not fixed and can change if alternative gendered behaviours become habitual and form part of a person’s second nature. Whilst from infancy young people develop some degree of self-conception of gender identity, this becomes more intensified as they enter secondary school, enter more figurations, mature

and develop a greater understanding of biological and social differences between the sexes. Because of its social and relational components, young people's gendered identity formation is strongly influenced by the gender dynamics of the figurations in which they reside. These ideas are often drawn from dominant ideas about difference between male and females based on how at birth people are assigned a biological sex, nearly always male or female (Connell, 2005).

In the following section we discuss the data from a six-month ethnographic study completed in 2015 within a Catholic secondary school we call Colbeck High School (CHS). The data was collected from 83 lesson observations, nine pupil focus groups and four interviews with MPE teachers and is presented using pseudonyms. This section is organised around four themes; the gendered MPE figuration, identity, the quest for (gendered) excitement, and discussions about increasing self-restraint.

### *The gendered MPE figuration*

PE teachers professional and adult-status ensures power advantages over pupils and also allows them a degree of autonomy over how they implement the NCPE (Green, 2003). Not surprisingly given previous research, fun and enjoyment were central to MPE teachers' philosophies on PE, as Mr Glover stated:

Let them have a bit of fun, there is a lot of pressure on kids, I wouldn't want to be a kid now honestly. There is a lot of pressure on them from that age all the way through...the whole character you know what I mean? There is more to it than academic success. It's not the fault of the school it is just the environment we are in [Personal Interview 10 July 2015]

Mr Hatton emphasised how MPE is different from other school subjects as young males, "can play hard, have a laugh with each other and get a bit of escapism, if you are 100% serious and

that all the time, that is (*in MPE*) when some people can be characters” [Personal Interview 2 June 2015]. These comments illustrated the de-routinizing nature of PE at CHS as it enabled physical movement and a space away from the more constraining classroom-environment. This ‘academic’ escapism from non-MPE subjects was regularly observed, as demonstrated in the following lesson observation, “as year sevens enter the pool area from the changing room, one young male gives way to a peer and comments “*ladies first*”, to the peer offers little reaction except from a smirk” [Field note 5 February 2015]. Such use of gendered language highlighted how communication drew on gendered stereotypes which demonstrate a form of playfulness and gendered terminology. Later on in the same lesson:

Whilst completing a timed length, words of encouragement from team-mates escalated into screaming, particularly when there was a close race. Amongst the rising decibels, some young males sang “*Olé, Olé, Olé*”, whilst others clapped their hands above their head and chanted “*easy, easy, easy*” if their team was ahead of others. During one race, a young males’ accusation of a peer cheating is met with chants of “*cheat, cheat, cheat*” from several males...These series of competitive races aroused much emotion and young males would rejoice in their team winning by jumping up and down or clenching their fists and punching the air in delight...At the end of the lesson, Mr Copeland hands out young males’ towels and jokes with some young males. For instance, he said to one male “*ask your grandma if she wants her curtain back*”, which caused much amusement [Field note 5 February 2015]

As well as demonstrating an enabling of gendered play and gendered humour, this example illustrated the role of Mr Copeland in a space in which different behavioural expectations are permitted compared to more structured school activities. MPE teachers were all too aware of

MPE's gendered figurational uniqueness within the broader school figuration, as noted by Mr Hatton:

I think when they (*young males*) come to PE and it is more of a natural environment. I think the main thing is just the all-boys bit you know. If all boys are together they tend to work a lot better than when it is girls and boys mixed. (*When asked why, he replied*) They get to this age when they start maybe liking girls a bit, I think that affects their confidence in a classroom because they do not want to look stupid. (*When asked for an example, he replied*) There was a lad the other day, he comes into PE he is absolutely fine with us, he goes into a mixed class because he has some friends, theatre girls, there and another couple of lad friends, he starts showing off in front of them you know to try and look big and hard...I think there is a certain friendship bond that you can build up through sport if you are playing for a certain team. I have got my year 9 class, they are to me like a team, and I will call them 'team', I will say 'or morning team' or whatever team, and they act like a team [Personal Interview 2 June 2015]

Here CHS was assumed as a heteronormative environment (Connell, 2008) and young males needed to portray traditional notions of masculine identity to avoid embarrassment. Equally, there was a belief that MPE was a space for single-sex activity to strengthen male relations rather than being a site where young males and young females could work together as part of a team.

From a figurational perspective, habitus operates at an individual and shared level (Mennell, 1998). Individual habitus refers to, "the learned emotional and behavioural dispositions which are specific to a particular person" (Dunning & Rojek, 1992, p. 87). Shared habitus denotes the feelings and modes of behaviour and tastes that permeate among group members and reflect their deeply ingrained subconscious character (Mennell, 1994). Elias

(2001, p. 182-183) referred to how the two are linked through social habitus, which he described as the, “idea that the individual bears in himself or herself the habitus of a group”. Habitus is formed across multiple levels such as local, regional, national, class, gender and ethnic which make up people’s individual habitus. A figurational conception of identity centralises the social and pluralistic nature of self, as Elias (1978, p. 128) noted:

one’s self conception as a separate person, one’s sense of personal identity is closely connected with the ‘we’ and ‘they’ relationships of one’s group, and one’s position within these units of which one speaks as ‘we’ and ‘they’.

The relationship between sex and gender means part of infants’ individual civilizing process involves embodying gendered social expectations and developing a gendered sense of self. Involvement in MPE is at a particular time in young males’ gendered habitus development is at its most rapid and impressionable phase due to the hardwiring, functioning and plasticity of the human brain during childhood (Elias, 2001). During this period, young people’s formation of their individual *gendered* habitus is strongly influenced by shared and social *gendered* habitus, which reside in their figurations, most notable family, but given the time spent at school the school figuration has a strong influence. Individuals’ conceptions of gender are part of their *gendered* sociological inheritance alongside dominant conceptions of gender.

Enabling and celebrating young males ‘traditional’ masculine expression in MPE, Mr Parker noted:

My current year 10 boys GCSE class, I love them. Good characters, some kids who would you know around school struggling with a few issues, but it is the for the first time ever we have kept the football team together and you know they get on with each other, they have been there through you know tough emotional times on the football pitch and they all get on well. I find it is fantastic, you know the lads,

proper lads' lads, but you have good discussions and yeah I think they are great

[Personal Interview 8 July 2015]

There was a perceived shared masculine habitus between teachers and young males based around a dominant 'we' masculine identity, which included supporting each other emotionally. Mr Parker's reference to 'proper lads' lads' suggested that there were those who were not considered proper perhaps because they did not share a similar masculine habitus. Young males gendered habitus begins to be formed during infancy and becomes deeply embedded within their psyche, which also means it can often defy memory and feel unlearned and innate (Mennell, 1998). Furthermore, the earliness of these social constructions lead to biological essentialist views of young males, which inform phrases and excuses for their behaviour such as 'boys will be boys'. The deep-level *gendered* consciousness that young males develop from infancy is internalised through an embodiment of *gendered* social habitus. As infants grow older their shared gendered habitus with peers can influence their relations with those peers whose individual gendered habitus is not aligned to their shared gendered habitus. Young males learn from a young age what is acceptable or not and may regulate their behaviour and that of others accordingly (Gabriel, 2017). Habitus is not fixed, it is susceptible to change, particularly during impressionable phases or as they grow older and enter more diverse figurations in ways that support autonomy and they reflect upon their gendered sense of self (Mennell, 1998).

In this section we have highlighted how young males' masculine embodiment has more of an identity performance element. Throughout childhood young people develop and negotiate I-We-They identities which are relational and therefore cannot exist independently, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Mennell, 1998). For instance, infants embodied learning involves developing from a 'Me-Mine' to an 'I-We' world view, from which they gradually seek greater autonomy from their 'we' identity and learn to think of themselves as an 'I' identity, which can differ in places from the 'we' (Dunning, 2013). In this sense, young

males reach a certain stage of their individual civilizing process whereby they have developed more autonomy to determine their own feelings and thoughts on matters such as gender identity (Dunning, 2013). The malleability and higher degree of consciousness involved in young males' expression of masculine embodiment can involve tension-balances between the self and the social. For instance, their ability to express masculine embodiment is largely determined by the enabling and constraining elements within the figuration in which the expression is made. The main point here is that from infancy young males embody masculinity via internalising shared and social gendered habituses. This provides the foundation for the development of their individual gendered habitus and subsequent expression of their masculine identity.

#### *A gendered quest for excitement*

Sociability is considered by Elias and Dunning (1986) as a key element of activities which enable de-controlling of emotional controls. In MPE this involved 'banter' (*humour, joking, ridicule, mocking*), which was not just observed between young males but also used by MPE teachers as a teaching strategy, as Mr South recalled:

I teach citizenship once a week for 45 minutes. Being in a classroom is almost like a novelty for me... So for my citizenship (*classes*), I try and make it as fun as I can, I am actually quite stupid in there, erm (short pause), and the year sevens that left last week said 'oh can we have citizenship with you every week'. Well that's only because it is 45 minutes and I am not teaching them a core subject where there is pressure of grades, it is just nice to teach them and sort of take the mickey out of them, but I think PE teachers have that that personality where they are more sarcastic sometimes and you give it and take it a bit, whereas other teachers have

the pressure of academic rigour where they have got to teach a certain concept in assessments [Personal Interview 15 July 2015]

There was a perception of different teacher-pupil relations in MPE at CHS compared with those in non-PE subjects. This was partly due to the use of banter within MPE teachers' individual and occupational habitus, which Mr South believed year sevens responded to. In the focus groups it appeared older males (year nine and above) tended to use and value banter more than their young peers. During a year nine focus group Chris recalled how, "If like there is a fun teacher, like Mr South, he will just go along with the banter". Daniel responded to this comment by claiming, "He called me Ginger him, I swear down", to which Colin commented, "You won't expect the teacher to say something like that, (*When probed about his views on this he added*) well you just think that they are a cool guy and just go along with it. Whilst aware of expected teacher practice, Chris and Colin's reference to Mr South as 'fun' and 'cool' suggested a de-controlling element of MPE which involved different behavioural, attitudinal and relational expectations. MPE is a social construction and within the figuration MPE teachers had a power advantage which meant that they played a significant role in the extent and type of homosocial bonding and gendered play.

There were times whereby MPE teachers' actively enabled homosocial bonding rituals and gendered role play, for instance:

During their warm-up Mr Hatton asked the year seven class to perform a series of animal impersonations as alternate functional movements. Young males accompanied this action with respective animal noises and laughed at each other's impressions...Whilst a group of young males reversed their shirts, Mr Hatton made light of young males' bared chests by joking "put it away Jack, stop trying to impress the girls". Jack and his peers laughed. One young male took the opportunity to try and nipple twist a peer whilst his shirt was over his head, whilst

another placed his cold hand on a peer's naked back to shock him [Field note 18 March 2015]

These types of incidents highlighted the sociability aspects of MPE in which normal school behaviours differed and young males and teachers expressed their identities and bodies in a male 'safe space'. Here, young males could be physically intimate in ways that would not be expected or tolerated elsewhere in the school environment. In a further example the notion of masculinity is used to encourage young males' involvement:

Allowing young males to use 'real' javelins for the first time, Mr Glover reminded the year eight class of certain safety aspects and their need to be responsible. Heeding Mr Glovers' request, young males completed various components of a javelin throw. One involved them kneeling on one-knee and throwing the javelin downwards into the floor meters away from them. In explaining the rules of how the javelin needs to land, Mr Glover compared the activity to tribesmen spearing animals. Rejoicing in this example, young males went off and diligently practiced their 'spearing'. Mr Glover commented on young males' practices, which included a "well done, you would make a good tribesman". [Field note 15 April 2015]

Impressionable and in search of solid, socially acceptable and distinct gender identities, as well as seeking praise, most young males embraced this gendered role play.

Mock wrestling was perhaps the most explicit example of young males being able to explore and express traditional forms of masculine embodiment through gendered role play. For instance, after helping Mr Hatton put away the trampolines, a group of year sevens were observed spending a few minutes wrestling on the mats, in a playful and amicable way before putting them back [Field note 27 January 2015]. A month later, young males from the same class mimicked an RKO (*a popular wrestling move*) on each other [Field note 24 February 2015]. Older males also imitated wrestling moves, although this was usually rougher and often

involved an element of surprise on or demonstration of strength over a peer. For example, upon entering the changing room a group of year ten males were observed performing mock arm and choke holds [Field note 5 March 2015]. This type of playfulness usually took place at the beginning, end and during transitions or idle time in lessons. In these cases there was no MPE teacher intervention, which enabled PE spaces to be used by young males' to express their traditional notions of masculine embodiment.

This section has illustrated how MPE's design and figural dynamics provided young males with a *gendered* quest for excitement that differed to that of non-PE subjects. This was socially constructed and enabled by both MPE teachers and young males, who embraced MPE's representational function of traditional notions of masculine expression. This primarily involved shared mutual-identifications of gendered banter, homosocial bonding and gendered role play. Whilst this section focused on enabling factors within MPE, in the following section we critically consider more constraining gendered elements within the MPE figuration.

#### *Gendered social constraints in the MPE figuration*

Within the MPE figuration there were social constraints over young males' gendered performance in which MPE teachers were at times actively involved in. One theme in this regard was their use of gendered banter. For instance, during a year nine class, Mr South was observed saying "come on boys, we shall see if Hatton's group have manned up yet" [Filed note 20 May 2015]. The same teacher was observed shouting at a year ten male "come on you big girl" [Field note 5 February 2015] and suggested to a year eight group that they "man up" [28-1-15]. MPE teachers gender-informed banter in a group environment was used to embarrass, cajole or gender-shame young males. Whilst increasingly normalised and appealingly accepted by young males as 'friendly' banter, these 'jest-like' comments illustrated the gendered use of language as a way of de-masculinising young males whilst at the same time being derogatory to females.

As influential figures in the MPE figuration, MPE teachers further contributed to gendered social constraints through their expectations of, instructions for and use of punishments as deterrents for perceived unacceptable (*read gendered*) behaviour. Whilst ‘fun’ was central to MPE teachers’ philosophies, somewhat juxtaposed, so were commitment and mental toughness. One explanation for this was the differentiation between permitted gendered play during pre, post and transitional phases, and a demand for full application during core tasks. It should be noted that MPE teachers displayed an inclusive attitude towards those young males perceived to be less competitive, but showed little patience for any young males perceived lack of effort. Mental toughness and resilience were words used during instructions to young males. This figurational dynamic is perhaps best evidenced within the following lesson observations from a year seven class:

Mr Hatton explained to the class the need to pace the 800m and informed them that they will be timed. Mr Copeland’s class had already started the same activity. After half a lap a significant gulf emerged between the front and back group, and those faltering started to walk and talk. Mr Hatton became incensed, but initially shouted words of encouragement...Mr Hatton separated the class in two based on his perception of their effort and informed those he deemed not to have tried hard enough to complete the run again, whilst sending the rest of the class to play rounders. Addressing the left-behind group, Mr Hatton referred to their “*pitiful attempt*” and reminded them that they were “*men*” and not a “*bunch of girls*”, and therefore should be able to do better. Eager to join in, Mr Copeland added “*don’t be wimps*”. [Field note 14 May 2015]

Elias argued that shame is fear of social degradation whereas embarrassment refers to discomfort at perceived breach in social norms (Mierzwinski, Velija & Malcolm, 2014). He also maintained that emotions such as shame, embarrassment and disgust are affective

mechanisms for social control. Being called a bunch of girls sought to embarrass the young males but the way this was done emphasised their physical weakness along gendered lines, notably that men are physically and attitudinally different and superior to girls and women.

The following lesson with the same group demonstrated another method used to engage with young males in these values:

Opting for the 1500m and conscious of last week's effort, Mr Hatton entered the changing room with a stern exterior and informed the class of the forthcoming activity and reminded them of his expectation. Sensing Mr Hatton's unusual serious demeanour, the class listened accordingly. Whilst a young male completed the register, Mr Hatton wrote on the whiteboard "when the going gets tough, the tough get going", "Rocky" and "think of something you like and makes you smile or something you dislike and run for that". Mr Hatton then changed his disposition to one of inspiration and explained the need to work through hardships and push through the pain barrier in life. He then recalled the key messages of resilience and never say die attitude within 'Rocky' films...After completing the 1500m Mr Hatton heaped praise on the class, patted some young males on the back and reminded the class that there is no reason why they should not apply that attitude to everything they do in life [Field note 19 May 2015]

Juxtaposed to gender shaming, Mr Hatton's attempted to inculcate commitment and mental toughness through inspiration and positive reinforcement. Essentially, he tried to get young males to internalise the values of hard work by illustrating a need for young males to show self-restraint by pushing them physically. In the following section we focus on the co-constructors of the MPE figuration, young males.

*Young males' management of 'gendered' emotions*

Whilst not necessarily casual, direct or linear, there was evidence of young males' internalisation of the MPE figuration gendered social-restraints. Several examples of young males' exercising gendered-informed self-restraints were expressed during focus groups with year sevens and eights. During these focus groups young males discussed a short story regarding a changing room incident whereby 'Sam' was called gay, ran outside upset and his peers did not intervene or report it to 'Mr Sharp'. Year eight Tim reasoned that the bystander's response was, "because if they said anything then they would also be called gay with the other person", to which Connor added "because they might have felt embarrassed themselves". This fear-based self-preservation illustrated Tim and Connor's awareness of the gendered social constraints of non-traditional masculine expressions in MPE at CHS. In this instance, this gendered social constraint was based on heteronormativity, which guided their subsequent self-restraint.

Discussions from this short story also revealed young males' perceived gendered social constraints and subsequent self-restraints over expressions of perceived gendered emotions. In response to why 'Sam' ran out to cry, year seven James bemoaned how "if you show it (*tears or dismay*) then it is just giving them something else to pick on", to which Connor explained, "because he (Sam) cried in front of them, that has probably driven them and given them for a goal". Similarly, year seven Elliot reflected how showing that you are upset "is their ammo seeing you in an embarrassing moment...that is their ammo to embarrass you'. Due to this gendered social constraint, year seven David explained how "You have to hold it in, to be strong". Elaborating of his gendered perceptions of emotions, David explained "like it's crying and it is quite embarrassing when you're all around your friends and the lads and you start crying because then the lads think that you are a girl and all that". Equally, Justin thought that "He (Sam) shouldn't have cried because he should have held it in, and then they will think that he is a puff and stuff and really soft'. These examples demonstrate the narrow availability of

young males to express their disappointment or distress, whereby concealment over sensitivity was the status quo. Informed by gendered binary conceptions of emotions which socially constructed tears as weak, feminine and even homosexual, young males' self-restraints were hegemonic, in public at least. This suggests an undertheorized area for consideration around gender and the body (Mierzwinski et al., 2014).

Whilst young males' narrow emotional management largely involved masking perceived feminine emotions, older males (year nine and above) more explicitly expressed the gendered binary through perceived traditional notions of masculine emotions. During focus group year nines discussed their gendered emotions, for instance, Daniel reflected:

I have terrible anger me though, bad, my dad has anger problems (Chris interrupted with "*so does mine*")...when I get angry I like shake like and start crying and that.

It shows my passion and that

Following this Colin reflected "I am always aggressive, if I do a little thing wrong like I don't put enough power into the ball I would just go mental, or just like smack the stick of the floor". For Colin "it's (aggression) a male thing", to which Daniel replied "girls aren't that bothered...to be fair girls don't really like it because it is not really a girls' thing is it". Colin responded "They have like less aggression", which led Chris to recall, "There was a fight the other day in school, and they (female peers) were saying 'how do you start a fight?'". Laughing, Daniel answered, "You swing don't you". These older males had developed a clear binary understanding of gendered emotions, one which appeared to position females as the weaker sex, both emotionally and physically which enabled them to align their emotional expressions accordingly. Whilst this understanding was no doubt internalised from infancy and through multiple figurations in the broader school figuration, MPE enabled a greater opportunity to polarise gendered emotions.

As part of their individual civilizing process, young males sought to develop a greater appreciation of emotions and how to manage them, as illustrated in the following year ten lesson observation:

One team opted to call themselves ‘Willy’s whimps’, in reference to their captain. Popular amongst his peers, William was tall and part of the school’s successful football team. Ten minutes into the lesson Mr Vince (*Deputy Head of School & Head of Behaviour and Well-Being*) entered the sports hall and removed William, who looked perplexed and worried. Ten minutes later William returned looking distressed...A few peers asked William what had happened, to which he muttered “*I don't know I haven't done anything wrong*”. Next to bat, William became too upset and refused despite encouragement from some of his peers...After some time, William stepped up to bat, aggressively smashed the ball and sprinted off to evade the flying tennis ball aimed at him. Whilst momentarily releasing his tension, when fielding Mr South asked William “*what’s happened?*” In trying to explain William became choked, held back tears and stood with his hands on his hips. Mr Vince re-entered and removed another male, which made William more distressed to the point that he removed himself to the back of the sports hall, wiped tears from his face and used the cricket nets bundled up as a punch bag to express his anger and frustration [23-4-15]

Mr South later confided in me that William used to have disciplinary problems and anger management issues, but that he had worked hard to address them. Evidently, William was seen on CCTV, a technological form of social constraint, entering a toilet with peers and the toilet door had been found with graffiti with a picture of a penis and testicles, which triggered an investigation. William’s reaction demonstrated the inter-relatedness and messiness in the

individual civilizing process (*becoming more rational*), internalisation of gendered social constraints and attempts at gendered self-restraints over gendered emotions.

This section further evidenced gendered social constraints in the MPE figuration at CHS, which often required young males to adopt gendered self-restraints, all be it perhaps situationally and momentarily. By focusing on emotions it was further evident that compared to more docile, regulated and stable classroom environments, the MPE figuration at CHS involved more exposure to and expression of perceived gendered/masculine emotions. It was not possible to discuss here, but it should be noted that when explaining gendered emotions both MPE teachers and young males included references of perceived biological differences between the sexes, most notably puberty and hormones. Young males' attempts to manage their emotions were gendered and appeared developmental. Whilst potentially situational to MPE, a figurational consideration is that over time the internalisation of these gendered social constraints gradually become embedded into young people's psyche (gendered habitus). In this sense, the unique figurational dynamics within MPE make it a significant contribution to young males' understanding and internalisation of gender-appropriate emotions.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter we discuss how figurational sociology offers a dynamic and relational, and inherently social and 'situational' understanding of masculine embodiment in MPE. Furthermore, the adoption of a process-orientated approach encapsulated long-term developmental trends (gendered sociological inheritance) that presented young males' masculine embodiment social constructive, malleable and dynamic nature. Adopting this set of principles enabled us to consider how, and potentially why, MPE came to and continued to provide gender representational functions for young males. Utilising the sensitising tool of the figuration helped illustrate the uniqueness as well as the inter-relatedness of the MPE figuration within broader figurations. It also emphasises the relational and in flux power dynamics within

a figuration and how they involved enabling and constraining factors which influence, in this instance, young males' masculine embodiment in MPE.

When applied in a relational and dynamic manner, it is possible to avoid generalisations and conceive the MPE figuration along situational lines and take account of multiple variables such as, in this case, age, level of group, activity, MPE teacher approaches and localised gendered habituses. The data discussed in this chapter explores the ways in which MPE offers a gendered representational function for young males in broader mixed-sex school figurations. The applied part of this chapter, demonstrated how MPE provided young males a *gendered* representational function, in which they could achieve quest(s) for excitement that had gendered significance. It also illustrated how this process is not all-inclusive and involves elements of exclusivity and gender shaming.

Figurational concepts of habitus and identity enabled masculine embodiment to be considered as inherently social, both in development and expression. In terms of development, the differentiation of degrees of consciousness within young males' gendered individual civilizing process offered a significant insight into their internalisation of gendered social constraints and subsequent self-restraints, which have the capacity to become engrained as part of their gendered habitus. In terms of expression, gendered social constraints within the MPE figuration illustrated the tension-balances at play both internally and externally. Two key aspects within this dynamic and relational process were the narrow gendered/masculine nature of both emotional management and performance of the 'sporting' body. A figurational framework can offer much theoretical value in providing sensitising concepts that aid our understanding of the relational and changing development of young males' masculine embodiment.

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