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A figurational analysis of gendered peer group dynamics in secondary PE: ethnographic insights into banter, bullying and changing room processes

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own, expect where work which has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

The work in Chapter Seven of this thesis has appeared in publication as follows:

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I was responsible for the literature review, methods section, empirical findings, and the theoretical analysis present within this publication. The contribution of the Mark Mierzwinski was guidance on the structure of the paper and editing of the initial and revised draft. The third author, Charlotte Haines Lyon offered annotated comments on drafts of the article.

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Abstract

Amid the United Kingdom (UK) Government's *Keeping Children Safe in Education* and *Duty of Care in Sport* reports, this thesis examines young people's gendered peer group dynamics in secondary Physical Education (PE), providing ethnographic insights into banter, bullying, and changing room processes. Empirical evidence gained from over 120 lesson observations, 14 pupil focus groups, and nine teacher interviews was thematically analysed. This analysis also involved applying the figurational concepts of figuration, established-outsider relations, identity, and gender civilised bodies to explain age-based and gendered nuances and fluctuations in pupils' peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, emotional expressions, and teacher-pupil relations within the PE figuration. Key findings reveal how policy, structure, and pedagogy enabled and constrained greater degrees of sociality, gendered identity expression, and asymmetric power relations within sex-segregated PE lessons. These figurational dynamics manifested both prosocial and conflict-based banter, variously understood as humorous, offensive and bullying, and became more heightened within changing rooms. With age, boys and girls were increasingly expected to navigate social, psychological and emotion-laden tension balances, with pupils' peer group dynamics, behavioural norms and emotional expressions becoming increasingly gendered through their five years of secondary PE. Such nuances and analysis gained by examining multiple PE platforms, year groups, and spaces provides much needed original findings, which question government endorsed changing room provision, school behavioural policies, and PE teachers' communication styles. Therefore, this thesis calls for subject-specific: (a) (in)appropriate banter awareness initiatives, (b) bullying reporting mechanisms, and (c) co-constructed and agreed teacher presence within changing rooms.

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Abbreviations

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic

DfE – Department for Education

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

HPE – Health and Physical Education

KS3 – Key Stage Three

KS4 – Key Stage Four

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning or Ace

LTS – Lord Taylors School

NCPE – National Curriculum for Physical Education

NSPCC – National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children

Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

PE – Physical Education

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

UK – United Kingdom

Chapter One - Introduction

It is essential that all staff understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviours between children that are abusive in nature. Downplaying certain behaviours, for example dismissing sexual harassment as 'just banter', 'just having a laugh', 'part of growing up', or 'boys being boys' can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours and in worst case scenarios normalise abuse leading to children accepting it as normal and not coming forward to report it (*Keeping Children Safe in Education report*, cited in Department for Education, 2023, p.12).

This extract captures increasing political concerns of how the term 'banter' is being used to excuse harm-inducing and discriminatory behaviours (Grey-Thompson, 2017). Despite being those responsible for eradicating all forms of discrimination, this extract implies that some teachers struggle to identify, differentiate and, therefore, challenge interactions between pupils that become abusive in nature. The reports age and gendered-based concerns alongside the normalising of abusive behaviours and prevailing culture of silence, have been identified within research (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Slattery, George and Kern, 2019; Smith *et al.,* 2008). Such findings are concerning given the detrimental effects of bullying and peer abuse for young people's social, physiological and emotional wellbeing (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017; Rigby, 2003; Thornberg *et al.,* 2016). Therefore, to critically discuss this issue, it is important to define bullying and banter. Whilst no legal definition exists, the United Kingdom (UK) Government define bullying as behaviour that is 'repeated, intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally, [which is] often aimed at certain groups' (GOV.UK, 2024). The government, however, do not provide a definition of banter, a term which is 'variously understood' (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Hein and O'Donohoe, 2014), described by the Anti-Bullying Alliance as 'the playful exchange of teasing remarks' (Evans, 2021, np). Despite such definitional differences, there is emerging research identifying challenges in differentiating between the two behaviours (Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Steer *et al.,* 2020; Wardman, 2021). Teachers' abilities to differentiate between playful banter and harm inducing behaviours, such as verbal bullying, may be heightened in Physical Education (PE) and school sport, given the highly social, dynamic, and often competitive nature of the subject and the increasing normalisation of banter across many sporting settings (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Adams, 2020; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Clark, 2018; Grey-Thompson, 2017; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Nichols, 2018). The *Duty in Care in Sport report*, commissioned by the UK Government, emphasises the normalisation of banter. Within this report, Grey-Thompson (2017, pp.16-17) writes:

In sport there are various levels of 'banter' which can go from mild to harsh, but for clarity, it is not the same as bullying. Banter is something that most teams engage in; bullying is not. Banter is a form of gentle ribbing by friends, colleagues and teammates; it is episodic (ie irregular), never intended to cause harm and, importantly, reciprocal. Bullying, by contrast, is subtly relentless, intentionally wounding and one-directional. Banter can never be used as an excuse for bullying behaviour and it is important to recognise that for some, banter is a route into bullying. Therefore, boundaries need to be set and upheld.

Since this report there has been a plethora of studies exploring the blurred lines between banter and bullying in educational and sporting environments (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Johannessen, 2021; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Mahmood and Rumbold, 2023; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020). Whilst useful, much of this literature is heavily focused on all-male and post-16 years or adult samples in sporting environments, particularly football clubs, and are either atheoretical or draw heavily on masculinity-centred theorising. Despite such explorations, there is a lack of empirically or theoretically grounded research exploring secondary school pupils' and teachers' perceptions and navigations of the appropriateness of banter, a gap in knowledge which is significant considering the Department for Education's (DfE) (2023) *Keeping Children Safe in Education* report.

Discussions of the blurred lines between banter and abusive behaviours centre upon how people relate with each other, their peer group dynamics. It is therefore necessary that teachers, and academics, explore and examine pupils' peer group dynamics in PE to better understand how banter and bullying may manifest and become normalised. Therefore, this thesis presents an ethnographic examination of secondary school pupils' (ages 11-16 years) peer group dynamics and behavioural norms seeking to provide a more adequate understanding of how young people and teachers identify and challenge inappropriate behaviours in PE. This exploration includes a figurational analysis of age-based and gendered norms within secondary school pupils' peer group dynamics, with a specific focus on power relations and identity (re)constructions. Pupils' perceptions and experiences of banter and bullying are presented alongside discussions of the unique characteristics of PE as a curricular subject, focusing specifically the increased opportunities for sociality and behavioural experimentation which may enable inappropriate behaviours to manifest. This chapter, therefore, starts by framing the national context of PE in England to demonstrate why PE offers fertile ground from which to explore young people's perceptions, experiences, and navigations of banter and bullying. As this thesis seeks to move away from masculine-centred theorising, this chapter also introduces the figurational sociological framework which underpinned this ethnography, whilst concluding with an overview of this thesis.

1.1 Contextualising secondary PE and school sport provision in England

The English Government mandates that all pupils (5-16 years of age) enrolled in local authority maintained schools (state schools) must be taught PE as part of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a). Although not required to follow a national curriculum, academies and public schools are legally required to provide PE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum (DfE, 2015). Under the current National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a), PE is one of five curricular subjects that must be delivered from the beginning of Key Stage One (KS1) to

the end of Key Stage Four (KS4)[1]. These statutory requirements mean that all young people in England take part in PE on a weekly basis. Within state schools, and the one central to this thesis, PE provision is guided by the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) (DfE, 2013). The NCPE has been revised several times since its inception in 1992, with the latest amendments made in 2013. For over a decade, the DfE (2013) have proposed:

> A high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities. It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness… opportunities to compete in sport and other competitive activities build character and help embed values such as fairness and respect.

Guidance specifically related to secondary PE aims to ensure that all pupils: (a) develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities, (b) are physically active for sustained periods, (c) engage in competitive sports and activities, and (d) lead healthy, active lives (DfE, 2013, p.1). Exploring these aims in greater detail, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills[2] (Ofsted, 2022) present three conceptually distinct, yet interconnected, pillars of competence development in PE: (a) motor competence, knowledge of a range of movements that become increasingly sport- and physical activity-specific, (b) rules, strategies and tactics: knowledge of the conventions of participation in different sports and physical activities, and (c) healthy participation: knowledge of safe and effective participation. The excelling in competitive sport during healthy participation underpinned by values of fairness and respect requires conductive peer group dynamics devoid of abusive or discriminatory behaviours.

The opportunity for pupils to engage in competitive sports has a remained central feature of the NCPE. This centrality is evidenced in the Government's *School Sport and Activity Action Plan* (GOV.UK, 2023a), which stresses the need to make competitive sport available to all pupils to enable them to learn about 'fairness, respect and develop their social skills and resilience when coping with winning and losing' (p.13). Furthermore, 'playing sport as part of a team or representing a school in individual sports can be rewarding for pupils and builds a special cultural connection to the school', positively impacting pupils' behaviours during compulsory schooling (GOV.UK, 2023a, p.13). Such sentiments represent decades of affiliation

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[1] The National Curriculum is organised into blocks of years called 'key stages' (KS). At the end of each KS, pupils are formally assessed. The Department for Education assign pupils to each KS in accordance with their age: KS1 (ages 5-7 years), KS2 (ages 7-11 years), KS3 (ages 11-14 years), KS4 (ages 14-16 years) (DfE, 2014a).

[2] Ofsted are the main inspectorate and regulator of services that provide education and care for children and young people in England.

between competition as a primary means of 'character building' (Capel *et al.,* 2011; Herold, 2020). Inherent within such a viewpoint is the implication that PE and school sport are as much about inter- and intra-personal development, as they are about developing physical competences. This thesis aims to explore the evidence for such sentiments as well as considering the more hidden curriculum elements (see Casey, 2017; Donovan *et al.,* 2023; Kirk, 1992) present within such affiliations, and the effect they can have on peer group dynamics.

Considering how the aims of the National Curriculum should be achieved, the DfE (2018, p.3) recommend that 'schools should not generally separate pupils by reference to protected characteristics such as sex, race, or faith'. However, guided by Section 195 of the Equality Act 2010 (GOV.UK, 2015), schools are permitted to sex-segregate pupils for PE and school sport, which are labelled 'gender-affected activities' (DfE, 2018, p.5). The term 'gender-affected' is used to denote a 'sport, game or other competitive physical activity whereby the strength, physique, or stamina of the average girl (or boy) would put him (or her) at a disadvantage' (DfE, 2018, p.5). Despite calls for co-educational, that is mixed-sexed, PE (Hills and Croston, 2012; Scraton, 2017; Wright, 1997), provisions of PE continue to be predominately delivered to single-sex classes in English secondary schools (Wilkinson and Penney, 2023). Gendered practices often extend to the range of sports and physical activities which boys and girls are taught as part of their core (compulsory) PE provision (Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Kirk, 2002; Stride *et al.,* 2022) and extracurricular (voluntary) school sport provisions (Flintoff, 2008; Smith *et al.,* 2007; Wilkinson and Penney, 2016). Subsequently, PE has a long-standing history of being viewed as a heavily gendered school subject, which perpetuates gender stereotypes (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Stride *et al.,* 2022; Wright, 1997). Acknowledging and seeking to address gender inequalities in PE, the UK Government recently recommended that all schools should be delivering a minimum of two hours weekly PE for all pupils, stressing that girls and boys have equal access and opportunities to participate in PE and sport (GOV.UK, 2023a). The heavily gendered nature of secondary PE in England demonstrates the importance within this thesis of differentiating between both female and male PE when seeking to better understand gendered peer group dynamics and possible gendered differences in banter and bullying, a differentiation lacking in the aforementioned literature.

The requirement to change into subject-specific attire provides a relatively unique aspect of PE as a subject delivered under the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a). The School Premises Regulations (DfE, 2014b) mandates that all state schools in England must provide suitable changing accommodation and shower facilities for children who are aged 11 or over at the beginning of the academic year. The DfE (2023) also declare that changing rooms, and toilets, should be single-sex spaces. These statutory requirements are based upon biological sex in binary categories of 'girl' and 'boy', as in England children cannot obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate, meaning their legal sex is judged upon their biological sex (DfE, 2023). Amid growing concerns of equitable provisions of PE to all pupils, particularly those whose gender identity differs from their birth assigned sex (Greey, 2023; Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Kjaran, 2019), the DfE (2023) recently

recommended that schools may consider alternative changing facilities for gender questioning children, placing onus on schools to accommodate requests on a case-by-case basis. As spaces where young people temporarily reveal their semi-naked bodies in preparation for PE, the presence of adult teachers within the school changing rooms is questioned (Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Gimbert and Sawyer, 2015). Providing guidance for secondary teachers, the DfE (2023) draw upon recommendations offered by the NSPCC[3] (2022), who suggest 'it should not be necessary for adults to remain in the changing room in order to maintain good behaviour; being in close proximity and students being aware of this should be enough' (p.3). The requirement to change into subject-specific attire in sex-segregated spaces, often outside of a teacher's gaze, offers unique opportunities for sociality to secondary pupils whereby homosocial relationships may develop and where gendered behavioural norms may be manifested (Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Gerdin, 2017a; Niven, Henretty and Fawkner, 2014). Whilst there is some evidence of the socio-psycho-emotional laden consequences of changing attire for PE (Fisette, 2011; Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Herrick and Duncan, 2023; Kjaran, 2019), to date there is little knowledge of school changing room processes or how young people navigate such anxiety-inducing practices. Therefore, this thesis seeks to provide more adequate understandings of PE changing room processes and explore the extent to which pupils' peer relations, behaviours, and emotional expressions within the changing room fluctuate across five years of secondary a school.

1.2 Theoretical framework and research questions

This thesis adopts figurational sociology to examine girls' and boys' gendered peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and identity developments across the secondary school education cycle. Whilst detailed thoroughly in Chapter Three, my application of figurational sociology was initially inspired by the work of Mierzwinski (see Mierzwinski, Cock and Velija, 2019; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a, 2020b; Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm, 2014), Bloyce (see Bloyce, 2004; Bloyce and Murphy, 2007; Fry and Bloyce, 2017; Law and Bloyce, 2019), and Green (see Green, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2014), all of whom played a role in my theoretical understanding prior to commencing this research study, and, importantly, all of whom have developed key concepts of figurational sociology. Furthermore, during the early stages of this research project, the work of PE scholars Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing (2016), Nielsen and Thing (2019a, 2019b), as well as other sociologists of sport and education, including Mansfield (2007), Slater, Jones and Procter (2018), and Velija and Hughes (2019), shaped my decision to adopt a figurational sociological approach.

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[3] The NSPCC are a leading children's charity in the United Kingdom who specialise in child protection.

This thesis utilises the following figurational concepts; figuration, independence and power relations, established-outsider relations, identity and habitus, gendered civilised bodies and emotions. In doing so, pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms are understood by exploring the complex and ever-changing networks of interconnected and interdependent relationships which form the figurations within which they are inescapably enmeshed (Green, 2000). By locating pupils and PE teachers within their various figurations, this thesis examines the enabling and constraining interdependent relationships which influence gendered peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and identity expressions within secondary PE. Previously used to examine disparate power relations between men and women within sporting figurations (see Liston, 2005; Velija, 2012; Velija and Flynn, 2010), Elias and Scotson's (1994 [1965]) model of established-outsider relations is used to analyse power relations between groups of boys and girls in single-sex PE lessons and extracurricular school sport activities. Central to such power relation is identity, therefore, Elias's (1978, 2001) personal pronoun model is used to explain any age-based similarities or differences in how young people embody 'I'- 'we'- 'they'- identities within and across the PE figuration. Finally, Elias's (2000) writings on civilising processes and figurational sociologists' developments of gendered civilised bodies (see Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018; Thing, 2001; Velija and Hughes, 2019) will be drawn upon to explore secondary school pupils' gendered changing room etiquettes and navigations of the PE changing process.

When utilising any theoretical framework, it is important not to simply apply but to explore its advocacy in relation to analysing empirical data (Dunning and Hughes, 2019). Therefore, the adequacy of Elias and Scotson's (1994) framework of established-outsider relations will be explored, examining the extent to which power disparities arise within, as well as across, social groups (Velija, 2012). The usefulness of Elias's (1978, 2001) personal pronoun model will also be extended by following Nielsen and Thing (2019a, 2019b) in demonstrating how young people's identities fluctuate across five years of secondary school and across differing PE figurations. However, seeking to build upon the work of Velija (2012) and Nielsen and Thing (2019a, 2019b), this thesis focuses on how these concepts enable the verbal and symbolic relevancy within asymmetric power relations within physical and often competitive PE environments. The figurational concept of (gendered) civilised bodies (Elias, 2000; Thing, 2001; Velija and Hughes, 2019) is also developed by examining how normalised educational processes, teacher-pupil relations, and pupils' peer group dynamics contribute to young people learning lessons of shame and embarrassment in gendered ways. Subsequently, this thesis is guided by a desire to better understand and enhance knowledge rather than uphold analytical approaches which predicated this project. Overall, the sociological quandary at the centre of this thesis is to analyse how gendered peer relations, behavioural norms, and identity (re)constructions impact upon young people's experiences in secondary PE and school sport. Given the social, psychological, and emotion-laden natures of banter, bullying, and changing room processes, exploration of these subject matters will provide

more adequate understandings of young people's gendered peer group dynamics in PE and youth sport settings. As such, the research questions this thesis aims to address are:

- How do girls and boys make sense of their peer- and teacher-pupil relations in secondary PE?
- How does age and gender impact upon young people's experiences and navigations of banter in secondary PE?
- How does age and gender impact upon young people's experiences and navigations of bullying in secondary PE?
- How do changing room processes and practices impact upon young people's identities and emotional expressions in secondary PE?

In seeking to address these research questions, this thesis provides several key contributions to knowledge. Firstly, previous PE-based ethnographies have tended to focus on either boys or girls PE, discussing PE in the round as one form of provision. This thesis includes ethnographic research examining girls' and boys' experiences of secondary PE across multiple year groups, providing unique and complex insights into the age-based and gendered differences in young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms, key findings which map across multiple forms of PE provision (core PE, assessment PE, and extracurricular school sport). This approach provides more sophisticated understandings of how ever-changing networks of interdependence impact upon young people's experiences in secondary PE, considering the processual nature of young people's peer group dynamics. Overall, this ethnography demonstrates the importance of considering and exploring the situational (i.e., pupil age and gender) and contextual (i.e., form of PE) nuances when seeking to explain secondary school pupils' perceptions, experiences, and navigations of banter, bullying, and changing room processes.

1.3 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter Two reviews existing literature relating to boys' and girls' gendered peer group dynamics and gender embodiment in PE, before thematically exploring literature relating to banter, bullying, and issues associated with changing rooms in PE and broader sporting settings. The literature review offers a critical assessment of the methodological and empirical adequacy of existing explorations, highlighting several gaps in knowledge which this thesis seeks to address. Chapter Three details the theoretical framework of figurational sociology and explains how and why this theoretical perspective proves useful for exploring young people's gendered peer group dynamics in secondary PE. More specifically, the sensitising concepts of figuration, interdependence, and power relations, established-outsider relations, identity and habitus, gendered civilised bodies and emotions are introduced and framed within the context of this thesis. Chapter Four begins by explaining how a figurational sociological approach guided the

crafting of this thesis, informing the rationale and process for conducting ethnographic research. Then, the research process is outlined from the research setting to how participant observations, focus groups, and individual interviews were conducted and how data was thematically analysed. The chapter concludes by presenting reflexive thoughts on how appropriate blends of involvement and detachment were maintained throughout the ethnographic process. Chapters Five to Eight present the main findings and discussions developed from this ethnography. The following paragraphs further detail the central focus of each results and discussion chapters.

Chapter Five provides ethnographic insights into the age-based and gendered nuances of PE provisions at Lord Taylors School (LTS – pseudonym used throughout for the research setting), paying specific attention to everyday procedures, practices, and relationships. Viewing girls PE, boys PE, and extracurricular school sport as distinct, yet interconnected figurations (Elias, 1978), the enabling and constraining aspects of the NCPE (DfE, 2013) and other governmental policies (DfE, 2014a, 2018, 2019) are considered to illuminate how PE provision is influenced by multiple and complex networks of interdependency. In doing so, this chapter provides much needed empirical insights into how secondary PE is structured, delivered, and experienced in a multitude of ways, moving beyond descriptions of PE as one all-encompassing curricular subject. There is also an analysis of the complexities and nuances of teacher-pupil relations and pupils' peer group dynamics within and across the PE figuration at LTS, which proves useful in explaining gendered nuances in everyday procedures, processes, and practices. This chapter lays an important foundation from which ethnographic insights into banter, bullying, and changing room processes can be examined.

Chapter Six provides much needed empirical insights into how banter is socially constructed, manifested, and navigated within secondary PE, seeking a move beyond views of banter as an inherently masculine behaviour. Pupils' and teachers' conceptualisations of banter are provided, alongside much needed empirical insights into how banter manifests within boys PE and girls PE, shedding light on the gendered nuances in young people's and PE teachers' engagements in reciprocated forms of humour within PE and school sport settings. Offering necessary similarities, Chapter Seven provides pupils' and teachers' conceptualisations of bullying, and ethnographic insights into how and why bullying is manifested within and across the PE figuration at LTS, before detailing how pupils navigate bullying in PE. These insights are examined using Elias and Scotson's (1994) model of established-outsider relations to analyse the structural (i.e., delivery of PE), relational (i.e., pupils' peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations) and situational (i.e., PE-specific behavioural norms) social processes which give rise to unequal power relations across the PE figuration. When combined, these two chapters shed light on several unintended social consequences of some pupils engaging in numerous forms of PE and how complex chains of interdependency with PE teachers can be perceived as favouritism. In Chapter Eight, the final results and discussion chapter, an ethnographic examination of changing room processes, procedures and practices is provided. These findings are analysed

using the figurational concept of civilised bodies and emotions to demonstrate how many aspects within changing room practices are indicative of long-term civilising processes. The findings and discussions presented in this chapter not only address gaps identified within the literature review, but also provide useful insights which may inform future policies and practices for changing rooms in secondary schools and broader youth-based settings.

Finally, Chapter Nine provides concluding remarks regarding secondary school pupils' gendered peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within secondary PE and school sport settings, presenting specific answers to the research questions posed and highlighting the empirical gaps this thesis fills. The adequacy of these key findings is discussed alongside key contributions to knowledge, theory, and practice this thesis offers. After presenting the implications of the key findings, some thoughts on the direction in which future research could explore are offered.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature on young people's gendered peer group dynamics within PE and school sport, with specific attention paid to findings concerning banter, bullying, and changing rooms. For cultural specificity purposes, where possible priority is given to peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that have examined young people's experiences in PE within English secondary schools. However, given a lack of empirical evidence available in some areas, particularly in relation to banter, evidence is also presented from broader educational and sport-based studies. Aligned with the research questions, this chapter is divided into four sections. To begin, boys' and girls' peer group dynamics and gendered identity embodiment in PE are synthesised. From here, literature relating to young people's experiences of banter and bullying in PE and youth sport settings is reviewed, focusing on the prevalence and navigations of these behaviours. Finally, young people's perceptions and experiences of school changing room processes are detailed. This chapter also highlights some empirical gaps to demonstrate how this thesis can provide new and important empirical insights. To begin, however, it is important to acknowledge PE's gendered history.

Conscious that sociological examinations of contemporary issues can benefit from more detached long-term perspectives (Elias, 2000; Green, 2008), this section provides a concise review of the literature pertaining to the gendered history of PE in England and Wales. Whilst it is not possible to detail all developments in PE provisions, the extent to which PE has been gendered across the past century is mapped, beginning with the emergence of modern forms of PE in late 1800s. Since its emergence as a curricular subject in the 1880s when mass schooling began in Britain, PE has developed a gendered legacy with strong associations with stereotypical views about the activities that are appropriate for girls and boys, often formed around singular forms of femininity and masculinity (Hargreaves, 1994; Kirk, 2002). Invented by Per Henrick Ling, Swedish (or Ling) gymnastics were the hallmark of PE in the nineteenth century, involving free-standing exercises, intricate flexions and extensions (Kirk, 2002). Alongside educational and Olympic gymnastics, Swedish gymnastics had strong associations with gender, as women were expected to be dainty, flexible and nimble, whereas men were required to be strong and powerful (Kirk, 2002).

Coinciding with the second wave of feminism in Britain, early debates into gender and PE during the 1970s predominately focused on issues of access and requests for equal sporting opportunities for girls (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994). Central to such concerns was differences in activities taught during single-sex PE provisions, fostering a societal shift towards mixed-sex groupings (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Green, 2008; Kirk, 2002). During the late 1970s and 1980s, mixed-sex groups were perceived to be an equitable method of enabling girls to have the same access to curriculum activities as boys, particularly in PE which, by this period, had a long-gendered history of curriculum differentiation (Kirk, 1992). Whilst shifts to mixed-sexed PE provided equal access for girls and boys in certain sporting activities, such practical shifts only

partly removed gendered inequalities as traditionally 'male' sports were delivered, activities which girls tended to have less experience and skill (Talbot, 2017). Consequently, gendered stereotypes of male dominance and female femininity were not only largely unchallenged, but often reinforced by PE curricula dominated by competitive, physically vigorous games (Green, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994).

The introduction of the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in 1992, and revisions in 1995, 1999, did not completely address concerns of sex differentiated PE curricula nor gendered inequalities during single- or mixed-sex provisions (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Penney, 2002). Penney (2002) argued that the flexibility inherent within the NCPE policy, combined with prevailing attitudes towards gender-appropriate sports, did little to address gendered PE provisions. Indeed, whilst all pupils were required to participate in invasion, net and striking field games, PE provisions continued to be dominated by differing games for boys (i.e., cricket, football and rugby) and girls (i.e., netball, rounders) often in sex-segregated classes (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005). Moreover, when girls and boys were taught the same activities (i.e., outdoor and adventurous activities and health related fitness), physical educators often delivered gendered versions, reinforcing gendered stereotypes (Green, 2008; Hargreaves, 1994; Harris and Penney, 2002). Since the latest revision of the NCPE in 2013 (DfE, 2013), English secondary schools PE has been dominated by sex-segregated provisions (Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Ofsted, 2023; Wilkinson and Penney, 2016, 2023), a trend associated with concerns about pupil safety, quality of student experience, teacher preference, and resources (DfE, 2018; Preece and Bullingham, 2022; Scraton, 2017; Kirk, 2019; Wilkinson and Penney, 2022). Whilst there is some evidence that girls and boys have similar access and opportunities to PE in terms of activity provision in core PE and extra-curricular sport (Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Stride *et al.,* 2022), the UK Government's recent calls for gender equality in PE provisions suggests that gender inequalities remain (GOV.UK, 2023a). Such gendered structures of secondary PE enable pupils and PE teachers to form homosocial relations, enact gendered behaviours, and embody gendered identities (Anderson, 2012; Fisette, 2011; Hill, 2015; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Roberts, Grey and Camacho Miñano, 2020; Stewart *et al.,* 2020; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud, 2017). Given PE's gendered history, literature pertaining to boys' PE and girls' PE are presented separately, before reviewing existing explanations of young people's peer group dynamics and gendered identity embodiment.

2.1 Gendered peer group dynamics in secondary PE

Chapter One revealed that secondary PE is often considered the most gender-affected subject delivered under the National Curriculum (DfE, 2018), often involving single-sex class formations, gendered pedagogical practices, and activity provisions (GOV.UK, 2023a; Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Wilkinson and Penney, 2023). Such gendered structures of secondary PE enable pupils and PE teachers to form homosocial relations, enact gendered behaviours, and embody gendered identities (Anderson, 2012; Fisette, 2011; Hill, 2015;

Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Roberts, Grey and Camacho Miñano, 2020; Stewart *et al.,* 2020; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud, 2017). Given this, literature relating to boys PE and girls PE are presented separately, before overviewing the gendered nuances of existing explanations of young peoples' peer group dynamics and gendered identity embodiment.

Boys' peer relations in PE

Since the introduction of the NCPE in 1992, boys' gender embodiment and peer relations in secondary PE have been explored through a variety of research methods and explained through a range of theoretical perspectives, with a selection of the key UK-based studies now reviewed in chronological order. Conducting ethnographic research in a multi-ethnic secondary school in England, Parker (1996) discovered that hegemonic masculine ideals of aggressiveness, commitment to sport, showing a high pain threshold, and loyalty were central features of boys' masculine embodiment in PE. Discussing peer group dynamics, Parker (1996, p.147) depicted three distinguishable social groups, the 'hard boys', the 'conformists', and the 'victims'. The 'hard boys' were understood to manipulate and control the social ordering of the PE class, implicitly and explicitly dominating 'victims' through their superior physicality, while the 'conformists' accepted the 'hard boys' aggressive and domineering behaviours (Parker, 1996). Comparable findings were presented by Bramham (2003), who conducted focus groups with boys (aged 15 years) from four multi-ethnic secondary schools in north-east England. Bramham (2003) reported that many boys sought to embody hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1998), yet in contrast to Parker's (1996) findings, it was the 'sportsmen', the boys who were highly competent and competitive, who possessed the most social power across the four PE settings. Bramham (2003) explained how this dynamic was influenced by boys and male PE teachers, who collectively valued sporting competence and participation in school sport.

More recently, Campbell *et al.* (2018) conducted interviews to explore young males (ages 16-17 years) identity construction and peer group dynamics within certificated PE in a Scottish upper secondary school. These older boys qualified masculinity in relation to strength over others and displays of a high pain threshold, revealing traits traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). Discussing students' peer relations, Campbell *et al.* (2018) found friendliness and generosity were highly valued traits, contrasting to orthodox and hegemonic masculine ideals (Connell, 2005; Swain, 2006), whereby popularity and social status was elevated by being 'kind', 'nice', and 'friendly'. This finding demonstrated that boys could gain popularity in PE through embodying more inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009), as well as orthodox or hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005; Swain, 2006), revealing the 'complex and fluid nature of masculine identity construction in PE' (Campbell *et al.,* 2018, p.227). Stewart *et al.* (2020) also discovered how multiple masculinities co-existed in boys PE in a Scottish secondary school explained how boys' understandings and constructions of masculine identities shifted as they progressed through school, with competition and sporting

success more central and valued parts of older boys' (ages 15-16 years) masculine embodiment, findings similar to those presented by Parker (1996) and Bramham (2003). In contrast, younger boys (ages 11-12 years) were observed to be more focused on skill development, rarely valuing peer competition, and often rewarding and praising peers for non-sporting acts (i.e., having an innovative idea) (Stewart *et al.*, 2020). Showing further age-based nuance, the authors discovered that younger boys associated popularity with behaviours such as showing empathy, being supportive, thus creating an inclusive climate, demonstrating the inclusive to hegemonic shift in masculinities that took place amongst male peer groups in PE (Stewart *et al.*, 2020).

The social significance of competitive behaviours and sporting competence to boys' peer group dynamics in PE is not limited to UK-based secondary schools, with some evidence of these findings in other Western nations. Drawing upon observational and focus group data captured from two middle schools (pupil ages 11-14 years) in Midwestern United States, Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) discovered that boys who demonstrated athleticism, fitness, and strength were viewed as doing 'boy right'. Doing 'boy right' was often rewarded by PE teachers whose pedagogical practices and content delivery impacted social hierarchies amongst the boys (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). This process involved male PE teachers privileging boys whose skills and values aligned to elite sporting performance, competition, and aggressiveness, whilst subordinating boys who failed to embody such hegemonic ideals (Connell, 2005; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). The impact of male PE teachers' pedagogical practices on boys peer group dynamics was also discussed by Jachyra (2016), who presented ethnographic insights from a Canadian secondary school. Jachyra (2016) discovered that school cultures, academic curricular programmes, and curricular practices reflected and reproduced disparate power relations within the field of health and physical education (HPE). Boys who were fit, fast, muscular, and demonstrated warrior-type mentalities were lauded by male PE teachers, whilst other boys were offered reduced empathy (Jachyra, 2016). Presenting similar findings, Gerdin's (2017a, 2017b) visual ethnography of boys PE in New Zealand revealed how the structure of PE catered towards the sporty, highly proficient boys rather than those aspiring to be sporty, or non-sporty boys. Drawing upon the same ethnographic data, in a later article Gerdin and Larsson (2018) explained how participation and excellence in sport and PE became an important source of bodily pleasure even though performances of gender were largely dependent on boys treating their bodies as machines subjected to regimes of discipline and training (Gerdin and Larsson, 2018). Gerdin and Larsson (2018) also drew attention to how discursive practices within PE, such as team selection, presented public opportunities to evaluate and scale boys' gendered bodies, as captains selected peers aiming to secure the best team possible.

Taken collectively, these studies reveal that displaying high levels of sporting competence and embodiment of masculine hegemonic ideals (Connell, 1998, 2005) are often central to boys' peer group dynamics in secondary PE, with sporty and athletic boys often positioned at the top of social hierarchies. Although there

is some evidence of how teachers' practices partly influence boys' gendered peer group dynamics, only Stewart *et al.* (2020) that detail how boys' peer group dynamics develop throughout five years of secondary school, an empirical area this thesis further explores through the focus of banter, bullying and changing rooms processes.

Girls' peer relations in PE

Sociological explorations of girls' peer group dynamics and gender embodiment in secondary PE reveal both similarities and differences to the male-based studies synthesised above. Hills (2007) examined girls' (ages 12-13 years) embodied dynamics within secondary PE in the UK. Presenting comparable findings to Bramham (2003), Tischler and McCaughtry (2011), and Stewart *et al.* (2020), Hills (2007) discovered that girls who embodied sporting skills attained desirable positions within the field of PE. In contrast, girls failing to display such competencies often experienced feelings of stress and embarrassment, citing concerns of peer teasing (Hills, 2007). As noted by Gerdin and Larsson (2018), team selection processes in girls PE encouraged the 'scaling of bodies' and served as a public show of competence-based inclusion or exclusion (Hills, 2007). Hills (2007) also drew attention to the importance of friendships to girls' experiences in secondary PE, explaining how friendships provided an alternative form of capital that could alleviate competence-based marginalisation. O'Donovan and Kirk (2008) also discussed the importance of friendships when examining the factors that motivated girls to engage in secondary PE. Presenting ethnographic data, O'Donovan and Kirk (2008) discovered that physical and sporting competence were highly valued by some girls, whilst avoided by others for whom sporting ability was unimportant. Despite such contrasting views, many girls expressed concerns about displaying a lack of sporting ability, citing apprehensions around peer gaze and judgement (O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008). Discussing girls' peer group dynamics, O'Donovan and Kirk (2008) discovered that appearance served as a form of physical capital, specifically being attractive and wearing fashionable clothing were important aspects of popularity. During PE lessons girls were conscious to develop and maintain friendships to achieve high social status and avoid being ostracised by popular peers (O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008). Shedding light on the social significance of perceived popularity in girls PE, O'Donovan and Kirk (2008) concluded that, in comparison to other curricular subjects, PE provides substantially more socialising opportunities, partly explaining the importance placed on friendships.

More recently, Hill (2015) presented observational, interview, and photo diary data when discussing girls' (ages 13-14 years) navigations of gender identities and discourses of femininity in single-sex and co-educational PE lessons within an ethnically diverse English secondary school. Hill (2015) discovered that some girls' identities contrasted with idealised understandings of femininity, as girls often regulated their sporting performances to avoid being labelled as 'masculine', adjusting their performances in PE to perform idealised femininity (Butler, 1990; Hill, 2015). Girls navigated their performances of gender when shifting

from co-educational to single-sex PE through self-regulation, internalising peers' gaze self-regulating their feminine embodiment. One example of this concerned some Asian girls wearing additional clothing to avoid tanning, demonstrating the significance of appearance to girls' reproductions of gendered and ethnic discourses (Hill, 2015). The importance of aesthetics and discourses associated with femininity in girls PE were also discussed by Roberts, Grey and Camacho Miñano (2020), whose UK-based ethnographic findings captured how binary views of male/female and strength/weakness became organisational categories of team membership in PE. This process was often centred on dominant perceptions of masculine bodies as strong, active, and sweaty, and female bodies as feminine, aesthetic, and non-aggressive, perceptions which served as policing and constraining agents (Roberts, Grey and Camacho Miñano, 2020).

Discussions of the social significance of peer judgement, surveillance, friendship, and embodiment of perceived feminine ideals within girls PE are also presented in non-English contexts. Azzarito (2009) explored girls' gender embodiment in ninth grade (ages 14-15 years) PE in the United States, discovering that ideals of femininity were not only embodied through body size and shape, but also appearance and popularity. During interviews girls echoed dominant discourses of idealised female bodies, those that are most desired by males (Azzarito, 2009). Azzarito (2009) explained that girls engaged in self-surveillance and gradually internalised dominant discourses of the female body, often disciplining themselves to these normalised ideals of femininity. Reiterating this process, Fisette's (2011) research within a middle school in north-eastern United States discovered that girls' self-perceptions of their gendered identities were influenced by their beliefs of how other individuals, including their peers, parents and teachers, perceived them. Perceptions of how others judged their bodies affected girls' levels of self-acceptance, self-consciousness, and desires to be accepted by others (Fisette, 2011). Fisette (2011) also emphasised the significance of the physical body to girls' embodied identities in PE, identities often based on socially constructed ideals of femininity and the female body, findings which appear to map across cultural borders (Azzarito, 2009; Hill, 2015; Roberts, Grey and Camacho Miñano, 2020). Significantly, Fisette (2011) reported that the public domain of PE enabled girls to survey and judge each other's bodies, with bodily exposure heavily influencing acceptance, success, or exclusion within girls' peer groups. Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud (2017) further emphasised the significance of surveillance and the physical body to girls' (age 15 years) identity constructions in PE within a Norwegian secondary school. Presenting observational and interview data, Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud (2017) reported that many girls viewed PE as a social setting in which their bodies were persistently observed and judged by peers, with some girls adopting avoidance tactics and hiding techniques to avoid peer gaze during PE.

Taken collectively, the evidence presented here demonstrates that girls may place increased importance on performative aesthetics than their male peers, with peer gaze and concerns of how others may judge their feminine bodies impacting upon girls' experiences in secondary PE. Evidence reveals a series of gendered

nuances in the social and identity-based factors which underpin boys' and girls' peer group dynamics in secondary PE. Sporting competence and embodiment of hegemonic ideals are important distinguishing characteristics within boys PE, with boys who embody hegemonic masculinities and demonstrate high sporting competence often lauded and valorised by their peers and male PE teachers. There is some evidence, however, of how alternative forms of more inclusive masculinities may be valued within boys PE, with age also understood to influence peer group dynamics. In girls PE, sporting competence again appears important to peer group dynamics, however friendships appear more socially significant for girls than their male peers. One reason friendships may appear central to girls' peer relations in secondary PE is the increased opportunities for the scaling of gendered bodies and widespread concerns of peer judgement. The extent to which such gendered dynamics impact upon gendered peer group dynamics, how these may differ across different ages, and how they may manifest in forms of banter or bullying is explored in this thesis.

2.2 The functions of banter in PE and sport

Since the *Duty of Care in Sport* report (Grey-Thompson, 2017) was published there has been a plethora of examinations of where the metaphorical 'line of acceptability' between banter and bullying is situated in educational and sporting environment (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Johannessen, 2021; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Mahmood and Rumbold, 2023; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020). Whilst there has been growing academic interest in the gendered nature and the (in)appropriateness of banter in sporting environments, to date, there has been a lack of empirically or theoretically grounded research exploring young people's perceptions, experiences, and navigations of banter in PE and school sport settings. Much of the literature presented in this section, therefore, is drawn from broader sport-based studies, the majority of which have adult male samples. Despite a lack of evidence explaining banter in secondary PE, the aim of this section is to demonstrate how banter may serve positive and negative functions in sporting environments, demystifying often trivialised understandings of banter, and shedding light on how banter may influence young people's peer group dynamics.

There is currently no universally accepted definition of banter, with scholars considering the term to be 'quite elastic', incorporating notions of insults, teasing, mockery, care, and friendships (Hein and O'Donohoe, 2014, p.1303). Baroness Tanni-Grey Thompson (2017, p.17) explains that 'banter is a form of gentle ribbing by friends, colleagues and teammates; it is episodic in nature (ie irregular), never intended to cause harm and, importantly, reciprocal'. This definition captures general understandings of the term banter, as a growing body of evidence associates banter with humorously framed insults or jovial remarks which are reciprocally exchanged between friends (Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Dynel, 2008; Pang and Samp, 2023; Nichols, 2018; Rivers and Ross, 2021; Steer *et al.,* 2020). Seeking to explore young people's understandings of banter, Steer *et al.*

(2020) conducted focus groups with 28 young people (ages 11-15 years) recruited from two English secondary schools. The authors explain how pupils generally labelled banter as a 'harmless exchange of social interactions between friends which involves teasing or mocking either on a one-to-one basis or more commonly on a friendship group basis' (Steer *et al.,* 2020, p.4). Qualifying this conceptualisation, pupils expressed that the strength of friendships underpin the foundations of banter (Steer *et al.,* 2020). However, this study was not without limitations, as the authors acknowledge the gender imbalance within their sample (8 males, 20 females), whilst no references to gendered nuances within pupils' conceptions of banter were provided. This omission seems significant given the reported gendered nature of banter discussed above, however the study does provide a generalisable understanding of how young people conceive banter. The generalisability of Steer *et al.'s* (2020) findings are strengthened by Booth, Cope and Rhind's (2023) examination of boys' (n=8, ages 15-16 years) perceptions of banter within a community football setting. Booth, Cope and Rhind (2023, p.9) reported how boys viewed banter as 'non-harmful' and 'prosocial joking', predominately verbal, but occasionally manifested in physical forms. Whilst the phrase 'a bit of a joke' is provided to capture the nature of verbal banter (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023, p.9), no examples are provided to explain how physical banter is manifested, leaving questions regarding what constitutes physical banter. To my knowledge these two studies are alone in seeking to understand how young people, of secondary school age (11-16 years), conceptualise banter, which is problematic given the identified limitations, and is an empirical shortage that this thesis addresses.

Research conducted with undergraduate university students in England sheds further light on how young people conceptualise banter. In a two-part study, Buglass *et al.* (2020) sought to understand how university students define banter, also seeking their perceptions of banter. Through surveying 190 psychology students, mostly female (n=166), the authors discovered that most students understood banter as friendly forms of joking or teasing behaviours that occurred between individuals with close social ties (i.e., friends, family, peers) (Buglass *et al.,* 2020). Study two involved focus group discussions with 21 students (15 females, 5 males, 1 non-binary), revealing a shared perception amongst the students that banter requires reciprocity, humour, and social closeness (Buglass *et al.,* 2020). The students explained that before engaging in banter it is important to consider the 'social rules of engagement', recognising that humour styles and boundaries are subjective (Buglass *et al.,* 2020). Abell *et al.* (2023) build upon Buglass *et al.'s* (2020) findings, presenting focus group data collected from 24 undergraduate students (ages 18-23 years) seeking to explore students experiences of banter within university sport clubs and societies. Although no definitive conceptualisation was provided, Abell *et al.* (2023) explained that the word 'banter' was used as a 'catch all' term, used to euphemistically label and excuse more problematic behaviours, including hazing and misogynistic sexual behaviours. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the lack of a universally accepted definition, there is sparse quantitative evidence available pertaining to the prevalence of banter in educational or sporting environments.

Despite a lack of quantified evidence, qualitative research reveals that banter is a near ever-present form of communication within English sporting cultures (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Clark, 2018; Duncan, 2019; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Nichols, 2018), particularly prevalent within male football cultures (Adams, 2020; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Hague and Law, 2023; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). Beginning with education-based explorations, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) discovered that banter was a regular and important aspect of boys' (ages 11-14 years) peer relations and teacher-pupil relations in male PE. The authors explained how PE provided male teachers and boys with increased opportunities for sociality, opportunities not available in other curricular subjects, with banter, a form of gendered play, becoming more prevalent through the years of secondary school (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b). Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b, p.129) also discovered that male PE teachers actively involved themselves in banter, often utilising 'gender-informed banter' to embarrass, cajole or gender-shame boys. In university sports clubs and societies, Abell *et al.* (2023) discovered that banter was socially accepted, expected, and normalised, with students citing the '24/7' nature of banter, whereby humorous exchanges continued via online means once participation in sports had ceased (Abell *et al.,* 2023).

Given the lack of literature exploring the prevalence of banter in PE, broader sports literature is drawn upon to explore the commonality of banter. Conducting ethnographic research at one amateur rugby union club in the north-east of England, Nichols (2018) interviewed 20 adult male players and observed players and club members, predominately but not exclusively males, everyday interactions. 'Laddish behaviours' and 'lad cultures' were prominent within the rugby union club, with banter identified as a central component of laddism, with engagement in banter cited as an expected behaviour within sporting practices (Nichols, 2018, p.77). The centrality of banter within male sporting cultures was further demonstrated by Lawless and Magrath (2021), who conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 adult male amateur cricketers from one cricket club in south-east of England. The cricketers articulated that banter was an ever-present feature within the cricket club, occurring both on and off the field of play (Lawless and Magrath, 2021).

Whilst banter is found to be highly prevalent within male-based sports clubs, there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that banter is socially embedded within English football cultures, across multiple generations. Booth, Cope and Rhind (2023) discussed the widespread incorporation of banter within the adolescent community football culture. The players and coaches interviewed shared the perception that banter was an important and highly common form of communication at Community FC, the research setting, also sharing the perception that banter is normalised within broader football cultures (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023). Support for this finding is provided by Hague and Law (2023), who conducted interviews with male academy players and academy graduates (ages 16-19 years). The young footballers revealed that banter was an ever-present feature of their subcultures, following them from the football academy into education-based environments (Hague and Law, 2023). Further evidence of the normalisation of banter across all levels of footballing cultures is

provided by Hickey and Roderick (2022) who draw on interview data provided by 10 male professional footballers. The English Premier League footballers, those who play in the highest domestic league in England, described banter as a part of everyday life in football, sharing a perception that banter was a key element of being a professional footballer (Hickey and Roderick, 2022). Similar findings were presented by Newman, Warburton and Russell (2022) who also interviewed professional male footballers (n=18) in England. Despite focusing on the blurred lines between banter and bullying, the authors discovered an expectation that 'banter' must be accepted in professional football cultures (Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). Collectively, these findings reveal how banter is a highly prevalent, normalised, and expected form of communication within male sporting cultures in England, yet questions remain regarding the extent to which these findings map to boys PE, or even girls PE.

Whilst understood to be normalised and expected amongst males, there is significantly less evidence exploring the prevalence of banter in female sporting environments. Clark (2018) conducted one of few studies exploring females' experiences of banter in sporting environments, drawing upon observational and interview data to make sense of women's experience of sexist humour within an English gym culture. Clark (2018) discovered that sexist humour and banterous 'jokes' were normalised within the mixed-sexed gym, however such comments were often voiced by males and rarely verbally reciprocated by females. The author also explained that some female gym users began reciprocating, rather than challenging, gendered comments when navigating sexist humour within the gym floor space (Clark, 2018). Comparable findings were presented by McGinty-Minister *et al.* (2024) who adapted the Everyday Sexism Survey (McDonald, Mayes and Laundon, 2016) to explore women's experiences of sexism in sporting organisations. The authors discovered that males' sexist comments were often brushed off as banter within sporting cultures, associating such dismissals with a broader acceptance of banter within society (McGinty-Minister *et al.,* 2024). Whilst useful, these studies do not explore females' experiences of banter within single sex sporting environments, revealing a gap in knowledge which this thesis seeks to address.

Taken collectively, the studies reviewed support Grey-Thompson's (2017, p.16) claim that 'banter is something that most teams engage in'. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the prevalence of banter in secondary PE, and in female sport more broadly. Given the predominately sex-segregated nature of secondary PE and many traditional team sports, this gap in knowledge seems significant when trying to understand young people's peer group dynamics and gendered behavioural norms. Furthermore, there is lack of knowledge explaining how banter is manifested in PE and youth sport settings, leaving questions regarding what sparks banter and how humorously framed comments are delivered, received, and navigated, empirical gaps which this thesis seeks to address.

Having discovered that banter is a highly prevalent feature within male sporting cultures, a synthesis of the functions of banter in sporting environments is now provided. Here, the term 'function' is used to explore the social, psychological, and emotion-laden consequences that engagement in banter is understood to provide. Although the intended role of banter is debated within linguistic studies (Hein and O'Donohoe, 2014; Pang and Samp, 2023; Kotthoff, 2006; Plester and Sayers, 2007), this section focuses on the three key themes that emerge from sports-based literature, specifically embodiment of gendered identities, social bonding opportunities, and provision of cathartic experiences. Given the aims of this thesis, particular attention is paid to how banter influences peer group dynamics and homosocial relations.

Explorations of the functions of banter within educational and sporting environments reveal that banter often provides males with an opportunity to embody desirable forms of masculinity (Adams, 2020; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Nichols, 2018; Whittle, Edler-Vass and Lumsden, 2019). Beginning with youth-based studies, Whittle, Elder-Vass and Lumsden (2019) reported that boys (ages 11-16 years) use of banter via social network sites (i.e., Facebook) enable them to perform and embody dominant forms of masculinity. However, the social rewards of embodying forms of masculinity when bantering, were dependent on boys masking their emotions if offended, angered, or upset by a peer's jibe (Whittle, Elder-Vass and Lumsden, 2019). Adams (2020) explained how boys' and male football coaches' use of banter within an all-boys football academy in England involved coaches openly referencing 'girly' or 'feminine' performances when addressing the boys, imparting their perceptions of what constitutes masculine poise and performance onto the boys. Adams (2020) concluded that male football coaches' use of banter contributed to the reconstruction of a hidden masculinist curriculum within the academy, recommending that coaches should reflect upon their use of humour to create more inclusive environments. Similar findings were presented by Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) in their examination of banter in male PE. The authors discovered that male PE teachers utilised gendered slurs as a form of shaming and reinforcing hegemonic ideals of emotional self-restraint, resilience, and mental toughness (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b).

These findings appear to map across into amateur youth sport as Booth, Cope and Rhind (2023, p.12) discovered that all players (boys) and male coaches understood banter as a means of embodying a 'lad figure', utilising banter, including sexist remarks, to accept and adhere to hegemonic masculine norms. When seeking to provide a more productive theorising of 'laddism' and 'laddish cultures', Nichols (2018, p.79) introduced the concept of 'mischievous masculinity' as a theoretical tool to explore the agency men have when 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Discussing the significance of banter for male rugby union players embodiment of laddish identities and adherence to club culture, Nichols (2018) explains that the ability to 'do' banter was a marker of being able to 'make it' as one of the lads, fostering acceptance into the group. Nichols (2018) proposes that the theorising of mischievous masculinities enables more nuanced

understandings of men's behaviours and gender embodiment to be ascertained, providing greater flexibility in acknowledging the myriad ways in which laddish identities are performed.

Demonstrating how banter may be used to embody non-hegemonic masculinities within an amateur cricket team, Lawless and Magrath (2021) discovered that male players' (all heterosexual) use of banter espoused positive attitudes towards homosexuality, despite the cricketers appearing to mock homosexuality for homosocial bonding purposes. Whilst Lawless and Magrath (2021) state that banter may serve 'exclusionary purposes', discussed shortly, they also explain how 'inclusionary' forms of banter provided homosocial bonding opportunities, strengthening degrees of group solidarity and friendship. In accord with these findings, a second prominent theme which emerges from the literature is that banter is often used as a prosocial behaviour, strengthening homosocial relations and developing degrees of social cohesion within sports teams (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Hugman, 2021; Johannessen, 2021; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Nichols, 2018). Discussing the social significance of banter within a male university football team in New Zealand, Hugman (2021) explains how dressing room banter indexed degrees of group solidarity, peer support and rapport. Abell *et al.* (2023) presented similar findings, stating that banter may provide a sense of group membership and establish group solidarity within university sports clubs and societies. Showing further prosocial benefits, Budden *et al.* (2022) reported how banter enabled males enrolled in a weight-loss programme a form of respite from everyday stresses and responsibilities, depicted elsewhere as providing a 'masculine breather' (Frydendal *et al.,* 2022; Nielsen *et al.,* 2014). Engagement in outwardly aggressive, yet playful, forms of banter enabled these men to develop camaraderie and overcome 'heated moments', positively effecting their peer group dynamics (Budden *et al.,* 2022), a finding shared by Lawless and Magrath (2021) who reported banter to have a cathartic nature. Collectively, these studies have demonstrated how banter manifested within higher education and sporting environments provides cathartic experiences which can strengthen degrees of social cohesion and homosocial bonds within sports teams.

Although banter is understood to serve prosocial functions, it is also associated with more disparaging, discriminatory, and damaging behaviours, serving exclusionary purposes (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Burdsey, 2011; Duncan, 2019; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Johannessen, 2021; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Mahmood and Rumbold, 2023; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020; Wardman, 2021). Lawless and Magrath (2021, p.1503) introduce the term 'exclusionary banter' to capture the negative aspects of banter, used to depict jokes that 'crossed the line', serving as banter violations (Rivers and Ross, 2021). Exclusionary, or failed forms, of banter included comments targeting an individual's personal identity, specifically any forms of gender, sexist, racist, or ethnic discrimination, all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (see GOV.UK, 2015). Exclusionary forms of sexist and misogynist banter have been discovered in education, sport, and leisure-based studies (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Clark, 2018; Nichols, 2018). Exploring manifested banter

within university sport clubs and societies, Abell *et al.* (2023) discovered that banter often contained misogynistic undertones, including references to sexual activities. The authors explain how misogynistic banter was somewhat normalised within the university sports culture, socially accepted in certain spaces such as the student bar, whilst socially less accepted in non-student venues (Abell *et al.* 2023). Abell *et al.* (2023) further discovered that students recognised that the term banter was used to label, excuse, and justify misogynistic sexual behaviours, labelling which created issues for those wishing to challenge such behaviours. The extent to which the predominately single-sex nature of university sport enabled sexist and misogynist banter to be normalised in student spaces, whilst less accepted other mixed-sex spaces (i.e., social media or social nights), remains under explored. Associations of banter with misogynist and sexualised comments are not limited to university-based studies, for example when presenting ethnographic data from a mixed-sex fitness centre, Clark (2018) discovered that some women felt a need to conform with sexist language on the gym floor, specifically when interacting with 'laddish' males. The author explains how some women adapted their linguist styles and performative behaviours to conform with laddish and masculine ideologies (Clark, 2018). Furthermore, and in a similar manner to Abell *et al.* (2023), Clark (2018) discusses the gendered nature of space segregation for female gym users' experiences of sexist banter, with women feeling empowered in the spinning room, an area of the gym housing cardiovascular equipment, which, in this study, males rarely frequented.

Racism and racial microaggressions are other social issues associated with exclusionary forms of banter in sporting environments. Exploring racial microaggressions in male English First-Class cricket, Burdsey (2011) discovered a cultural tendency to downplay the seriousness of comments that contained racist undertones as jovial and jocular, processes which served to marginalise minority ethnic players. The British Asian cricketers interviewed provided examples of racial microaggressions voiced by fellow players, forms of discrimination which were manifested during games and within the locker room (Burdsey, 2011). Associations between banter and racial microaggressions in sport were also discovered by Hylton (2018), who conducted focus groups with Black and minoritised ethnic male football coaches when seeking to explore racism in football. Hylton (2018) found that some Black coaches felt racial microaggressions delivered in jovial forms were condoned and reinforced within football cultures, whilst other coaches refused to react to blatant racism from the 'banter group'. Both Burdsey (2011) and Hylton (2018) concluded that once signs of humour are removed from comments, racial microaggressions in the form of ethnic insults, invalidations, and assaults are visible, evidencing how humour may be used as a tactic of oppressions and marginalisation.

Whilst there is some evidence that banter may blur into discriminatory behaviours, the blurring of banter into verbal bullying is a more widely discussed within education and sport-based studies. Irrespective of empirical or theoretical approaches, much of the existing literature pertaining to banter discussed how the acceptability

of banter is predicated upon a metaphorical line (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020; Wardman, 2021). Although there is limited research exploring secondary school pupils' perceptions of where the line of acceptability is or should be, Steer *et al.* (2020, p.6) demonstrate how adolescents determined online 'bad banter' as that between non-friends which caused offence. The authors also reported that imbalances of power within friendships group dynamics may lead to some young people masking their emotions when offended, seeking to avoid peer conflict or the loss of friendship (Steer *et al.,* 2020). More detailed insights into how banter and bullying are assessed upon a line of acceptability are provided by the undergraduate university students interviewed by Buglass *et al.* (2020) and Abell *et al.* (2023). Discussing how banter is dependent upon individuals navigating the rules of engagement, Buglass *et al.* (2020) discovered that banter was often moderated contextually, with students adapting the content and tone of comments to specific audiences. An understanding and appreciation of the audience's tolerance levels was considered imperative for banter to be understood as humorous, rather than hurtful (Buglass *et al.,* 2020), a finding which support Grey-Thompson's (2017) claim that banter is 'gentle ribbing'. Abell *et al.* (2023) shed further light on how the rules of engagement may be navigated within university student cultures, discovering how banter loses its humour and, therefore, becomes offensive when jokes are repeated without reciprocation. As such, outwardly humorous repeated comments that appear targeted towards one individual are not amicable and are therefore considered bullying. Abell *et al.* (2023) also discovered that while peer banter may breach a personal boundary and cause offence, students may not voice their feelings to preserve their social status. What emerges, therefore, is that although personal and/or repetitive comments may breach lines of acceptability, young people may be complicit to avoid being 'othered' which may contribute to the normalisation of offensive peer commentary (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Steer *et al.,* 2020).

Further insights of how banter can blur into bullying behaviours are provided by Booth, Cope and Rhind (2023), who discovered that both football players (boys) and coaches (adult males) believed that 'banter can be a pathway to bullying' (p.9). The coaches explained that repetition is a distinguishing feature between banter and bullying, whilst the players believed that comments could be repeated, and be considered banter, if joking took place between friends (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023). Booth, Cope and Rhind (2023) also discovered that assessments of verbal comments (i.e., bullying or banter) are centred on the recipient's reaction, rather than the orators' intent, signifying a victim-centred approach. Retaining focus on the line of acceptability within English football cultures, Newman, Warburton and Russell (2022) discovered that male professional footballers held differencing perspectives on the 'width' of divisions between banter and bullying. Despite this, players shared the perception that behavioural information, including observable body language and repeated criticism, can be used to distinguish bullying from banter (Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). The fallibility of relying on observable cues may be problematic given how emotional

suppression is normalised within football cultures (Adams, 2020; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). Exploring football coaches' perspectives, Newman *et al.* (2022) discovered that boundaries may vary depending on the victim's feelings at the time of comment, making it difficult for coaches to determine the line between banter and bullying. This was partly due to the importance coaches placed on each players personality (Newman *et al.,* 2022), signifying that the severity of a comment depends on who it is delivered towards.

Overall, this section has revealed that banter is a highly prevalent, largely normalised, and often legitimised form of communication within male sporting cultures, whereby it serves a series of prosocial functions. Despite often strengthening group cohesion and camaraderie, banter is also commonly associated with problematic harm-inducing and discriminatory behaviours. Within education and sport-based settings the often-blurred lines between banter and verbal bullying are becoming increasingly debated. Whilst there is agreement that acceptable banter is predicated upon a metaphorical line, there are a range of outlooks identifying where the line between banter and bullying is situated. Appraisals of the (in)appropriateness of banter have revealed that certain topics are considered 'banter violations', 'bad banter', or 'exclusionary banter', whereby degrees of appropriateness appear to be predicated upon the strength of relationships between those involved and the speaker's ability assess the intended recipients humour styles and tolerances. Subsequently, the (in)appropriateness of banter is dependent on peer group dynamics and the extent to which verbal interactions can strengthen or foster divisions within peer relations. In addition, the socially constructed and highly subjective nature of banter, combined with the normalisation of emotional suppression, raises questions as to whether the line of acceptability can be identified in highly social and inherently dynamic PE lessons. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore how secondary school pupils and PE teachers conceptualise, manifest, and navigate banter in PE and school sport, providing much needed empirical insights into how girls' and boys' experience banter in education and sport-based settings.

2.3 Bullying in secondary PE

A review of the literature pertaining to secondary school pupils' peer group dynamics in PE, combined with previously provided discussions of the (in)appropriateness of banter in education and sport-based settings, reveals that bullying is a pressing issue. The severity of issues associated with school-based bullying are recognised by the UK Government, as it is now mandated that all state-funded schools in England must have a behavioural policy which outlines measures on how to prevent all forms of bullying (GOV.UK, 2024). The UK Government consider bullying to be a behaviour that is 'repeated, intended to hurt someone either physically or emotionally and is often aimed at certain groups' (GOV.UK, 2024). This definition largely maps to academic conceptualisations of school-based bullying which have been developed over the past three decades.

Seminal bullying scholar Olweus (1993, p.1174) defined school-based bullying as behaviours involving 'an imbalance of power in strength (an asymmetric power relationship) in which the student who experiences negative actions struggles to defend him/herself'. This definition has been both widely applied and modified by bullying scholars, however repetition, intent to harm, and power inequities remain central to academic conceptualisations (Goldsmid and Howie, 2014; Rigby, 2008; Vaillancourt *et al.,* 2023; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014; Volk, Veenstra and Espelage, 2017; Ybarra, Espelage and Mitchell, 2014). Most definitions, including that provided by the UK Government, identify that a behaviour must be repeated to be categorised as bullying (Olweus, 1993; GOV.UK, 2024; Vaillancourt *et al.,* 2023; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014; Ybarra, Espelage and Mitchell, 2014). However, conceptual uncertainty remains regarding what constitutes 'repetition', with some scholars arguing that isolated incidents can be labelled bullying given high degrees of harm caused (Goldsmid and Howie, 2014; Slattery, George and Kern, 2019). The criterion of intent to harm has also been questioned, with some scholars problematising the highly subjective nature of assessing intent (Goldsmid and Howie, 2014; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014). As such, some scholars have proposed that bullying should be viewed as a 'goal-directed behaviour', as opposed to intentional harm doing (Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014). This shift is considered beneficial as 'goals' are reportedly easier to measure and predict than intent, also providing insights into why young people may bully (i.e., self-promotion) (Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014; Volk, Veenstra and Espelage, 2017).

While scholars have questioned and debated repetition and intent, most academics agree that bullying involves an imbalance of power (Horton, 2020; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2008; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014). Rigby (2008) explains that power differentials may arise through physical superiority, numerical advantages, possession of superior social or manipulative skill, or having greater social status to impose on others. These power resources draw attention to dyad relationships between bullies and bully victims, whereby the perpetrator experiences a power advantage (Horton, 2011, 2020). Moving beyond dyad relationships, Rigby's (2008) explanation also sheds light on the importance of peer support and status within broader peer groups when theorising the role of power within school-based bullying, an area which remains under theorised (Horton, 2020). The lack of theorisation regarding power differentials combined with the lack of a universally accepted definition of bullying makes it difficult to determine the true extent of the issue in schools, also making it difficult to address issues associated with school-based bullying (Slattery, George and Kern, 2019; Swearer *et al.,* 2010). Subsequently, definitions of bullying have proved challenging to implement in schools as teachers are required to determine repetition (Ybarra, Espelage and Mitchell, 2014), degrees of intent (Horton, 2020), degrees of harm (Mishina, Pepler and Wiener, 2006) and the extent to which relationships are characterised by an asymmetric power balance (Horton, 2020). In practice, teachers are required to make subjective judgements when applying school produced anti-bullying policies, judgements that are likely to be inconsistent.

Exploration of the prevalence of bullying in secondary PE begins by reviewing literature drawn from quantitative research projects whereby statistical findings are presented. Here, however, it is important to note that due to a lack of UK-based literature, a combination of non-peer reviewed research reports and non-UK based peer reviewed articles are included. The *Bullying in School Sport* report (Noret *et al.,* 2015) examined the extent to which children and young people are bullied in school sport facilities in the north of England. The report presents self-report survey responses provided by 15,023 young people, including 8,868 primary and 6,155 secondary school pupils, a sample which included almost identical numbers of girls and boys. Noret *et al.* (2015, p.14) discovered that bullying becomes less prevalent with age, as 17.5% of primary and 10.7% of secondary pupils reported being a victim of bullying. Of these pupils, 16.8% of primary and 34.8% of secondary reported weight-based bullying, 18.0% of primary and 27.7% of secondary reported being bullied because of who they are friends with, and 9.7% of primary and 14.9% of secondary report being bullied due to not being good at sports (Noret *et al.,* 2015, p.15). These findings demonstrate how identity, social, and competence-based bullying manifested in school sport facilities may become more prevalent with age. The school yard and the changing rooms were identified as the most high-prevalent bullying locations by secondary school pupils (Noret *et al.,* 2015), arguably two spaces where teachers may not be present. The report also revealed that a higher proportion of boys than girls reported being bullied in school sport facilities (Noret *et al.,* 2015), suggesting that sport-based bullying in English schools may be gendered.

Quantitative data drawn from non-UK based studies provide useful insights into the issue of bullying in secondary PE. Borowiec *et al.* (2022) present quantified prevalence data relating to pupils' experiences of bullying during secondary PE lessons in Poland. Surveying 2,848 young people (ages 14-16 years, boys n=1,512, girls n=1,336), the authors discovered gendered nuances in the prevalence of bullying in PE, with 24.7% of boys and 7.1% of girls reporting being bullied (Borowiec *et al.,* 2022). The results also revealed gendered differences in the types of bullying pupils experienced in PE, as boys were twice as likely to experience verbal bullying than their female peers (Borowiec *et al.,* 2022). Irrespective of sex, pupils reported that low levels of peer support increased the likelihood of being a victim and/or a perpetrator of bullying in PE, with popularity linked to power (dis)advantages within secondary PE (Borowiec *et al.,* 2022). Whilst this study demonstrates how the prevalence and type of bullying in PE is gendered and that peer relations are significant to young people's experiences of bullying, Borowiec *et al.* (2022) acknowledge that the self-report nature of their questionnaire is a limitation, recognising that students may respond differently to how they actually experience PE. Providing similar reservations about this form of data collection, Wei and Graber's (2023) scoping review of bullying in PE discovered that 20 of 24 quantitative and mixed-methods articles used different self-report questionnaires and scales to measure bullying prevalence, also noting that all survey instruments were signed for psychological purposes, not PE per se, making it difficult to determine the true extent of the issue.

Turning attention to the most prominent risk factors to bullying within secondary PE, a review of the literature since the introduction of the NCPE in 1992 reveals consistent trends in why young people may be targeted. In the 2000s, homophobic based bullying was cited as a significant issue within secondary PE (Brackenridge, Rivers and Gough, 2007). Presenting data from a longitudinal exploration of bullying in secondary PE in England, Brackenridge, Rivers and Gough (2007) discovered that 14.7% of pupils (sample n=1,860) reported observing homophobic bullying in PE, while 2.1% reported experiencing homophobic bullying, prevalence-based statistics that again raise concerns regarding self-report methods. The authors identified the changing rooms and the sports field as the locations where pupils are most likely to experience homophobic bullying in PE (Brackenridge, Rivers and Gough 2007). Such findings were not isolated to English secondary schools, Morrow and Gill (2003) discovered that 34% of students (sample n=77) had experienced homophobic bullying during PE lessons within middle schools in the United States. In a later study, Gill *et al.* (2010) discovered that male students were more likely to experience homophobic behaviours in PE than female peers, with homophobia particularly prevalent within the changing rooms, gymnasium, and sports field. More recently, scholars have identified that LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning) pupils often homophobic and transphobic abuse within secondary schools, with PE spaces perceived as particularly unsafe (Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Müller and Böhlke, 2023). Systematically reviewing 10 studies conducted in the past 15 years, Müller and Böhlke (2023) discovered that the heteronormative structures of PE, those normalised within many Western nations, contribute to LGBTQ+ students' negative experiences during PE. The review also revealed that these students experience discrimination in PE manifested through verbal hostility, insults and mockery from peers (Müller and Böhlke, 2023). In a scoping review of PE, Herrick and Duncan (2023) found that the underlying gendered structures of PE may contribute to transphobia. The authors report how expectations of conformity to cis-gender and cis-heteronormativity contribute to transphobic abuse from pupils and teachers (Herrick and Duncan, 2023).

In addition to sexuality, real or perceived, gender identities have been strongly associated with bullying in PE over the past two decades. During this period, several scholars have discussed the significance of differing forms of gender embodiment in young people's experiences of bullying within secondary PE (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010, 2012; Gerdin, 2017a; Jachyra, 2016; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) discovered that negative peer relations were manifested and tolerated in male PE, reporting how boys who embodied non-dominant masculinities were ignored, isolated, ridiculed, and laughed at. Boys who embodied marginalised masculinities sought to avoid participation, and the accompanied embarrassment, by faking injury or illness, forgetting clothes, and positioning themselves on the margins of activity (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), a practice labelled by Lygstad, Hagen and Aune (2016) as adapting a 'suitably passive' role in PE. Similarly, Jachyra (2016) explained that non-dominant boys, those who lacked sporting competence, were regularly

picked on by their peers for 'failing to conform with the competitive logics of practice valorised in HPE' (p.129). In this study, systematic derision involved non-dominant boys being jeered, degraded and laugh at, with banter used as a method of questioning their gendered masculine identities (Jachyra, 2016).

Perceived low sporting competence and motor skill proficiency have been widely identified as risk factors for bullying in secondary PE (Bejerot, Edgar and Humble, 2011; Bejerot *et al.,* 2013; Brown and Macdonald, 2008; Hills and Croston, 2021; Hurley and Mandigo, 2010; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Jiménez *et al.,* 2020; Wei and Graber, 2023). Beginning with UK-based studies, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020a) examined bullying in male PE presenting ethnographic findings capture from a state-funded secondary school in the north-east of England. In this study, boys (ages 11-14 years) described how verbal bullying often included performance-related and gendered undertones (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Hills and Croston (2012) also conducted ethnographic research in a secondary school in the north of England seeking to explore girls' (ages 12-13 years) perceptions of PE. The girls reported that teasing in PE was often linked to their physical ability, with some girls reporting feelings of embarrassment when required to perform skills in front of their peers (Hills and Croston, 2012). Comparable gendered findings are presented by Slater and Tiggemann (2011) whose South Australian-based study found that girls reported being teased more frequently than boys, whilst girls also described feelings that their appearance was constantly surveyed and mocked in PE. Collectively, these findings suggest that during often sex-segregated PE lessons risk factors to bullying may be gendered, demonstrating the need to examine both female and male PE.

Irrespective of reported prevalence and/or risk factors to PE-based bullying, a common empirical trend is that bullying is increasingly becoming manifested in more social-relations forms, including verbal bullying, social exclusion, and gossiping (Hills and Croston, 2012; Kieffer, 2013; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Compared with physical bullying, these forms of bullying may be more difficult for PE teachers to detect within highly social and dynamic PE lessons, possibly enabling bullying to go undetected unless reported. These challenges may be heightened as evidence suggests that young people are unlikely to report instances of bullying in PE (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014). Referring to how boys navigate bullying in secondary school PE, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020a, p.1638) discovered a prevailing 'culture of silence' in which pupils seldom reported instances of bullying to their teachers due to fears of negative ramifications from their peers and reputational damage associated with being a 'sprag', a local term of being a 'snitch' or a 'grass', a finding also discovered in O'Connor and Graber's (2014) study. The culture was found to be driven by pupils' concerns of social repercussions, rather than their lack of understanding of bullying (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). These fears were partly informed by PE teachers' often abrupt and direct responses to reports of bullying driven by their zero-tolerance approach to the issue (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Such findings reveal that many young people share implicit fears of being negatively labelled as a

'snitch', that is someone who discloses information to a teacher, as the stigma attached to snitching appears more damaging to a young person's identity and peer group status than being bullied or being branded as a bully.

Given the prevailing culture of silence within secondary PE, the onus is on PE teachers to identify, challenge, and eradicate bullying during lessons. Despite having a moral and legal responsibility to protect children from harm (DfE, 2023), this responsibility is not always achieved. Indeed, O'Connor and Graber (2014, p.405) suggested that some PE teachers contributed to 'an acculturation of bullying' through their lack of knowledge of anti-bullying initiatives, flippant response to challenging bullying or legitimising verbal tormenting by participating in it themselves. Furthermore, van Daalen (2005) discovered that many girls strongly disliked having male PE teachers, describing feeling judged and ridiculed, whilst believing male teachers favoured male students. Exploring boys' experiences in HPE in Canada, Jachyra (2016) found that male PE teachers 'laissez faire' attitudes contributed to bullying being deemed as socially acceptable, evidenced by non-sporty boys being ostracised, humiliated, and excluded by PE teachers for failing to meet the hypercompetitive and meritocratic HPE culture. Such degrees of favouritism were presented by Tischler and McCaughtry (2011, p.42) who reported how non-sporty boys who embodied non-hegemonic masculinities were 'ignored, scolded, avoided, and/or mocked by [PE] teachers', with teachers favouring boys who demonstrated elite physicality and high levels of motivation for sport. The extent to which these findings are gendered can be considered through acknowledging Peterson, Puhl and Luedicke's (2012) experimental study which found female PE teachers and sport coaches were more likely to intervene in instances of weight-related bullying than their male colleagues. When concluding their systematic review Jimènez-Barbero *et al.* (2020, p.95) recommended that future studies should critically explore 'the specific dynamics and behavioural norms of PE' to understand how these impact upon bullying in PE, stating that an in-depth understanding of the issue would be useful for designing and implementing subject-specific interventions, recommendations that this thesis seeks to address.

Overall, this section highlights conceptual uncertainties and methodological limitations within explorations of bullying in secondary PE. The lack of a universally accepted definition of bullying and the variety of self-report measures utilised to assess prevalence make it difficult to determine the true extent of the issue. Determining risk-factors to bullying in secondary PE revealed shifts towards more subject-specific, rather than identity-based, triggers, with perceived low sporting competence now considered to increase a young person's likelihood of being bullied in PE. There is academic consensus that young people are unlikely to intervene in and/or report instances of bullying in PE, leaving the onus on PE teachers to eradicate bullying, which is problematic given growing evidence of some teachers neglect of or complicity in a culture of bullying. Whilst these highlights are useful, no age-based or gendered nuances in how young people

experienced and navigated bullying in secondary PE were reported. Therefore, this thesis aims to bridge these empirical gaps, by examining how boys' and girls' ages 11-16 years and PE teachers navigate bullying in secondary PE.

2.4 Changing room etiquettes in PE and sport settings

The requirement for pupils to change into subject-specific attire is a process unique to PE. The impact of this novel act upon young people's experiences in secondary PE is gaining academic attention. Indeed, school changing rooms, or locker rooms as referred to in some countries, are viewed as 'gateways' and 'critical access zones' to PE and school sport (Fusco, 2006; Herrick and Duncan, 2020; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008). Literature exploring young people's gender embodiment and navigation of gendered identities in PE, and experiences of banter and bullying within sporting environments often identify changing rooms as significant spaces (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010; Gerdin, 2017a; Kjaran, 2019). Therefore, the aim of this section is to explore the key social processes and relationships which impact upon young people's experiences within these unique PE-based school spaces.

Drawing upon ethnographic evidence gathered from an Icelandic secondary school, Kjaran (2019, p.1027) reported that changing rooms are 'produced in accordance with the logic of the heterosexual matrix, where there should be a match between one's gender, biological sex, and (hetero)sexuality'. This logic can inform the heteronormative attitudes and practices found by Atkinson and Kehler (2010, p.73), who raised concerns about practices of what they termed 'jock masculinity policing'. Within PE locker rooms, often devoid of an adult presence, boys whose bodies diverged from 'normal' were subjected to peer surveillance and subsequent peer ridicule (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012). 'Normal' here was based upon dominant codes of masculinity and practices of surveillance and ridicule served to determine and police what it means to be a boy (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012). Contrastingly, Gerdin (2017a) discovered that the changing rooms serve as a space in which boys can contradict and disrupt heavily disciplined gendered norms and behaviours, providing boys more freedom to display empathy and emotional sensitivities not expected of boys in PE. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that school changing rooms are not just spaces for changing attire for PE, but also locations in which young people's gender identities are policed and (re)constructed. Whilst useful in revealing how hegemonic and inclusive forms of masculinity can be manifested, previous examinations have failed to consider the importance of power relations that underpin boys' peer group dynamics, a gap in knowledge this thesis seeks to address.

In one of few studies to explore girls' experiences in school changing rooms, Fisette (2011) reported that many girls sought privacy and protection within the social space of the locker room. In this United States based study, Fisette (2011) explained how girls sought privacy to escape the surveying and judging peer gaze,

viewing the locker room as a space in which their bodies become publicised. Discussing how girls navigated this changing process, Fisette (2011) revealed that all girls dressed in stalls (cubicles) or behind curtains, seeking ally support to avoid peer gaze, a process that provided them some degrees of power and control in deciding which peers could survey their bodies. However, this social arrangement may not be universally available. Niven, Henretty and Fawkner (2014) conducted focus groups with 38 girls (ages 13-16 years), recruited from two state-funded secondary schools in Scotland, whereby girls reported how a lack of privacy combined with a lack of personal space negatively influenced their comfort levels. In relation to the negative emotions evoked by the changing process, Johansen *et al.* (2024) discovered that Norwegian secondary school pupils experienced feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and shame when required to reveal their (semi)naked bodies in front of their peers, feeling that were particularly heightened by the showering process. Comparable emotion-laden findings are presented by Frydendal and Thing (2020) who conducted focus groups with 64 pupils (ages 15-17 years) from two secondary schools in Denmark. Further to male and female pupils disclosing feelings of discomfort and embarrassment, Frydendal and Thing (2020) also discovered that feelings of shame were transmitted by observing peers' shame, revealing an endless chain of hidden shame within the changing room. It is necessary to note that such feelings were gendered, with boys more likely to make light of such awkward situations by exchanging jokes and laughter as a means of bypassing feelings of shame (Frydendal and Thing, 2020). When combined, these studies reveal that across many Westerns nations young people often experience feelings of shame and embarrassment when changing for PE, emotions evoked by fears of peer judgement and self-surveillance of their (semi)naked bodies.

Perhaps one reason why young people become more self-conscious, embarrassed and ashamed within school changing rooms is the prevalence of bullying and therefore possibility of being bullied within these spaces. Several scholars have identified the changing rooms as a high prevalence bullying zone, both within PE (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Forsberg, Horton and Thornberg, 2024; Gerdin, 2017b; Herrick and Duncan, 2023; Jachyra, 2016; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Noret *et al.,* 2015; O'Connor and Graber, 2014), and within broader youth sport settings (Aguilar *et al.,* 2021; Kerr, Battaglia and Stirling, 2019; Nery *et al.,* 2019). One widely cited reason for PE-based bullying within changing rooms is a lack of adult supervision within such spaces (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Jachyra, 2016; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014). This reason was cited by academics, such as Jachyra's (2016) claim that unregulated changing rooms serve as a 'volatile and humiliating space' for boys who fail to embody masculine norms, and pupils who bemoaned how teachers were seldom there to witness such behaviours (O'Connor and Graber, 2014). Whilst there is some evidence that PE teachers are aware that bullying takes place within school changing rooms (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a), it appears that many physical educators are reluctant to enter changing rooms due to growing child protection measures and taboos attached to public nudity (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Discussing the significance of teachers not supervising

school changing rooms, Gimbert and Sawyer (2015) suggest that locker rooms should be viewed as an extension of the gymnasium, the classroom of PE, and therefore should be always supervised. However, such recommendations are at odds with UK changing room policy, whereby it is recommended that adults should not be present whilst pupils change attire (DfE, 2023; NSPCC, 2022). The reviewed academic explorations of school changing rooms highlight some unintended consequences of government policy (i.e., prevalence of bullying), raising questions about the extent to which PE teachers can protect children and young people from peer abuse if seldom present to observe pupils' behaviours.

Although much changing-room based literature contains many negative connotations, there is some evidence that these unique spaces may provide opportunities for more prosocial behaviours and friendship formations. Presenting interview data provided by 16 Norwegian secondary school pupils (aged 15 years), Johansen *et al.* (2024) found changing rooms to be a 'room of cohesion', a space where young people can develop social cohesion and strengthen friendships. This finding aligns to previously cited literature concerning banter within sporting environments, which often drew reference to changing rooms as locations in which banter was particularly prevalent. For instance, Hugman (2021) discovered that male university footballers utilised dressing room, or locker room, banter as a benevolent bonding strategy. Demonstrating how these experiences may transcend across generations, adult males involved in a dementia friendly walking football in Scotland suggested that all group members (players, supporters, volunteers and staff) enjoyed jovial football banter in the changing rooms, voicing how banter helped create a sense of togetherness (MacRae, MacRae and Carlin, 2022). Whilst there is some evidence of the role that changing room banter has on males, most adults, homosocial relations, to date there is not discussion of the influence of locker room banter on girls' peer relations.

In sum, this section has demonstrated how changing rooms, whether in schools or broader sport settings, are spaces in which high degrees of sociality, (re)constructions of gendered identities, and emotional expressions are manifested. Although examinations of school changing rooms have revealed how some young people are subjected to peer ridicule and abuse and many experienced negative emotions, there is some evidence that lockers are spaces in which homosocial relations can develop, serving positive prosocial functions. Whilst there is growing academic interest into young people's experiences within school changing rooms, to date there is a lack of knowledge regard changing room processes and procedures. One reason for this is that many ethnographers have been unable to gain access to the 'protected' and 'off-limits' changing room spaces (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Gerdin, 2017b; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Kehler and Atkinson (2015) stress the importance of researchers gaining access to the often-tabooed spaces of school locker rooms, suggesting the need for clear explorations of issues associated with such protected spaces. This thesis seeks to address Kehler and Atkinson's (2015) suggestion by providing ethnographic insights, including

observations, into school changing room processes, practices, and procedures, shedding light on how young people's changing room etiquettes and peer relations when doing so.

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to review and evaluate literature pertaining to secondary school pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within PE. It has become clear that young people's experiences in and perceptions of secondary PE are developed from a range of sociological, psychological, and emotion-laden factors, many of which appear gendered. The visibility of competence and the heightened visibility of the body in PE and youth sport settings make secondary PE a fertile ground from which to explore the complexities and nuances of young people's peer relations, gender embodiment and identity navigations. Evidence reveals how young people's peer relations and gender-informed performances are often verbally manifested, either through banter-based homosocial bonding rituals or via more sinister bullying-based peer commentary and ridicule, behaviours which often manifest in changing rooms.

Whilst there is much available evidence relating to boys' experiences of bullying in secondary PE, there is far less knowledge available pertaining to girls' peer group dynamics in PE. Moreover, there is a large empirical gap relating to both boys' and girls' perceptions, manifestations and navigations of banter within secondary PE. This knowledge gap is significant considering banter is becoming synonymous with sporting cultures and the embodiment of gendered identities and is often used to excuse bullying. Another major omission within existing literature is the failure to explore how young people's peer group dynamics change throughout the duration of secondary school. Specifically, there are no studies which focus on the fluctuations and nuances of young people's relationships, behavioural norms, and emotions within boys' and girls' PE across Years 7 to 11 (ages 11-16 years). There is also a lack of exploration of how differing aspects of PE provision, such as assessment PE and extracurricular PE, impact upon pupils' peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations in PE. Therefore, this thesis' aims to more adequately understand young people's experiences in PE by conducting an empirically rigorous analysis of these factors. This analysis focuses aspects of young people's experiences within secondary PE, specifically relating to their navigations of banter, bullying, and changing room processes. Such an analysis requires an appropriate theoretical framework. Therefore, the next chapter introduces and demonstrates the effectiveness of figurational sociology.

Chapter Three - Figurational Sociology

The aim of this chapter is to introduce figurational sociology, namely the sensitising concepts of figuration, interdependence and power relations, established-outsider relations, identity and habitus, civilised bodies and emotions. For organisational purposes these concepts are presented separately, however in reality they often interconnect and overlap. Once introduced, how these concepts have been critiqued and counter-critiqued is framed. Then, how figurational sociologists have applied each concept to examine young people's peer group dynamics, behavioural norms and gender embodiment within PE and broader sport settings is outlined. This outline is followed by a clear indication of how each concept is utilised in this thesis. This chapter begins by demonstrating how the concepts of figuration and interdependence offer useful theoretical tools from which to explain the uniqueness of PE in comparison to other curricular subjects.

3.1 Figuration, interdependence and power relations

Figurational sociology primarily developed from the writings of Norbert Elias (1897-1990) (see Elias, 1978, 1987a, 1987b, 2000, 2001), whose central theme was explaining how human beings are interconnected with one another. Given his focus on human interdependencies, Elias was critical of some more conventional sociological concepts and, as such, sought to avoid 'misleading and unhelpful dualisms such as that between the individual and society' (Bloyce *et al.,* 2008, p.361). Instead, Elias (2001, p.6) argued 'no one can be in doubt that individuals form a society or that each society is a society of individuals, neither exist without the other'. Therefore, Elias (1978) was critical of theorists who conceptualise the 'individual' and the 'society' as separate entities, lamenting the 'false dichotomy' within such theorising. Viewing the individual and the society as 'inseparable levels of the same human world' (Murphy, Sheard and Waddington, 2000, p.92), Elias (1978) championed *homines aparti,* a view that denotes how human beings are bonded together in dynamic constellations and in interdependent, pluralistic and dynamic ways.

To capture this view, Elias (1978) developed the concept of the 'figuration' to explain the complex ways in which people mutually identify with each other and are bonded together. Defining a figuration as 'a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people' (Elias, 1978, p.261), Elias used the concept to emphasise that human beings only exist in relation to the networks of social relationships which they are inevitably involved in. Because from birth human beings enter chains of interdependence and become dependent on others throughout the life course, figurational sociologists aim to shed light on the structure and dynamics of these figurations (Dunning, 1999). Elias (2001) explains that chains of interdependency are not tangible and visible, in the way that metal chains are viewed, but stresses that these chains are no less real and no less strong. Unlike metal chains, however, chains, or networks, of interdependence that bond people together are elastic, variable, and changeable (Elias, 2001). It is because of these inescapable bonds and interdependencies that a

figurational perspective contends that an individual's behaviours cannot be viewed in isolation, but instead an individual's thoughts and behaviours should be viewed as being enabled and constrained by other individuals with a figuration (Green, 2002; van Krieken, 1998). Therefore, Elias (1987a, p.79) argued that the task for sociologists is 'to explore and understand the patterns they form together, the changing configuration of all that binds them to each other'. Moreover, Mennell and Goudsblom (1998, p.22) declare 'in order to understand the feelings, thoughts, and action of any group of people, we have always to consider the many social needs by which these individuals are bonded to each other and other people'. It is necessary to clarify here that the interdependencies which figurational sociologists seek to explore are not always face-to-face in nature, but can constitute people and processes in the plural, encompassing past or present and recognised and unrecognised relationships (Green, 2000).

Inherent and central within these networks of interdependency are complex and multi-layered distributions of power (Maguire, 2005). Elias (1978, p.116) viewed power as 'an attribute of all relationships', explaining that power can only exist in relation to other people. This viewpoint draws an important contrast to those that suggest or imply that power is a tangible substance or property that can be possessed by individuals or certain groups and, therefore, can be characterised as zero-sum relationships of power (Mennell, 1998). Furthermore, Elias (1978) stressed that relational power can be polymorphous in nature and should always be viewed as a question of relative balances. In this sense, given the functional interdependency at play, figurational sociologists emphasise that no individual or group can ever be entirely powerful or entirely powerless (Elias, 1978; Maguire, 2005). However, due to the differing and flux degrees of interdependencies, such relative balances are underpinned by asymmetrical, complex and ever-changing power relations.

The concepts of figuration, interdependence and power relations have been applied by scholars to explain PE teachers' pedagogical practices and how they implement PE curricula (Green, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2008; Haycock and Smith, 2010; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023). Exploring sporting bias within extracurricular PE provisions in English and Welsh secondary schools, Green (2000) stressed that PE teachers' attitudes and practices should be understood as aspects of their figurations. Green (2000, p.194) noted that PE teachers 'find themselves enmeshed within a variety of practices, constraints and expectations', also discussing how many of these constraints are posed by other individuals (i.e., headteachers, heads of department, pupils, parents) and local constraints (i.e., inheritance of sporting traditions). For instance, many interviewed PE teachers explained how they felt 'at the mercy' of headteachers who had distinct expectations of what PE should involve, with sporting competition an important aspect of extracurricular PE (Green, 2000). Acknowledging that teachers and department managers experienced power advantages within the school figuration, Green (2000) also drew attention to the constraints imposed on PE teachers at a national level, through the NCPE and Ofsted. Subsequently, Green (2000) argued that to

understand secondary PE provisions PE teachers must be studied in their figurations, recognising that power relations operate at multiple levels.

Haycock and Smith (2010) interviewed PE teachers seeking to explore their perceptions and experiences of 'inclusive' PE in England, discovering that many teachers were unwilling to change their PE provisions in line with governmental guidance. Acknowledging their interdependency with and the power advantage of governmental policy makers within a PE figuration, teachers 'felt trapped in potentially conflict-laden situations' (Haycock and Smith, 2010, p.303). Specifically, teachers reported feeling constrained to include all pupils in PE lessons, yet expressed concerns over the extent to which inclusion of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs may have on other pupils' experiences and achievements (Haycock and Smith, 2010). This tension-balance sheds light on how figurational dynamics can lead to an outcome that, assumingly, was neither intended nor desired by the government (Haycock and Smith, 2010). In this sense, for Haycock and Smith (2010), the concept of figuration proved useful in denoting the complexities of implementing PE policy and managing power balances within everyday PE practice. In their conclusion, Haycock and Smith (2010) advocate how a figurational sociological approach may help shed light on the ways in which governmental policy goals may be undermined, or mediated, by the complexities of figurations which should be at the forefront when designing and implementing policy.

Viewing PE teachers and pupils as 'policy actors', Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón (2023) adopted a figurational sociological perspective to explore the influence of interdependent relationships on policy enactment in secondary PE. The authors discovered that interdependent relations between teachers and pupils enabled and constrained policy enactment processes, with students' perceptions and critiques of delivery guiding teachers' practices (Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023). Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón (2023) stress that although one may assume that PE teachers are in a powerful position throughout the policy enactment process, power balances within the PE figuration shift towards the pupils as policy actors given how teachers adapted their delivery. Outside of classroom environments, teachers also commented on how their relationships with departmental colleagues and training providers also influence their practice, demonstrating the significance of teachers' broader networks of interdependencies (Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023). Pupils and teachers also felt pressurised by broader subject learning outcomes, criticising policy makers for the wide-range curriculum requirements, seeming aware of how non-face-to-face interdependent relations constrained policy enactment in PE (Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023), a finding shared by Green (2002). Overall, these studies not only demonstrate how policy enactment constrained by teachers' and pupils' interdependent relationships, but also that teachers' practices are influenced by collective pupil preference, demonstrating the everyday power dynamic at play within a PE figuration. Whilst useful for examining policy enactment, previous applications of figurational sociology tend to be heavily focused on the constraining elements of policy enactment, often neglecting the enabling aspects

of PE provisions, therefore not fully representing both aspects within chains of interdependencies within PE figurations.

In this thesis, figurational concepts of figuration, interdependence and power relation will be utilised as the basis of discussion from which young people's gendered peer relations and behavioural norms in secondary PE are presented. By locating pupils and PE teachers within their various figurations, this thesis aims to present a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how boys and girls experience secondary school PE, shedding light on how interdependent relationships fuel enabling and constraining social processes within the PE figuration. At a macro-level, consideration will be paid to the enabling and constraining aspects of non-face-to-face interdependencies in which PE teachers and pupils are enmeshed within the PE figuration, specifically NCPE policy makers and governmental advisors (i.e., NSPCC, Sport England, Youth Sport Trust). Considering figurations at a micro-level, attention will be paid to the age-based and gendered nuances of pupils' interdependencies within their peer groups and within teacher-pupil relations. To this end, whilst discussion focuses on the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School, given the sex-segregated classes structured and gendered provisions of PE, boys and girls PE are viewed as distinct, yet interconnected figurations.

3.2 Established-outsider relations in PE

As illuminated above, power relations are a central concern of figurational sociology and Elias and Scotson's (1994 [1965]) model of established-outsider relations provides a useful framework which can be applied to explore social relations within a given figuration, such as the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School. While the model of established-outsider relations was first discussed within Elias' (2000 [1939]) seminal work, *The Civilising Process,* the model was developed in a book that Elias co-authored with his master's student, John Scotson, *The Established and The Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The book details ethnographic data concerning different social groups within a small community in the suburbs of Leicester, England. Within this community, Elias and Scotson (1994) identified three social groups; Zone 1 (Villagers), a predominantly middle-class residential area made up of families; Zone 2 (Villagers) and Zone 3 (Estate) which were both inhabited by predominately working-class families with comparable incomes (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Elias and Scotson (1994, p.48) explain how the residents of each of the three zones saw themselves and in each other in conventional terms with Zone 1 viewed as the 'better zone' and Zones 2 and 3 viewed as 'working class'. However, members of Zone 2 viewed themselves as far superior to the members of Zone 3, with Village members of Zone 1 and Zone 2 both viewing Estate members of Zone 3 as troublesome, problem families, who were unclean, rough, and promiscuous. Such findings and community tensions contributed to Elias and Scotson's (1994) empirical-theorising symbiosis.

At an ideological level, Villagers came to view Estate residents in terms of a 'minority of the worst', judging all members of the Estate in accord with the behaviours of a small number of families who were viewed as socially unacceptable (Elias and Scotson, 1994). This view and judgement contrasted to that of the Villagers who were viewed and judged by a 'minority of the best' ideology, that is behaviours of the best group members (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Notions of 'minority of the best' and 'minority of the worst' are used to explain emotional generalisations connected to a few group members that become embodied by all members of the social group, denoting the figurational interdependencies and rejection of individual-society dualisms (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The established Villagers internalised their socially superior and positive group image, whilst simultaneously imposing a belief that members of the outsider Estate members were socially inferior through their negative group image (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Such ideological and emotional generalisations were maintained and served as a powerful differentiator between the groups due largely to the relatively high degrees of social cohesion and interdependency ties amongst the established group, fostered through duration of residence within Winston Parva community. Such close-knit social bonds enabled the dominant ideology to be internalised, whilst a lack of kinship ties and low migratory mobility served to compound the issues experiences by members of the Estate (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

Referring to specific dimensions that shaped and maintained established-outsider relations within the community, Elias and Scotson (1994) identified how the nature and function of gossip played an extensive role. Specifically, Villagers were able to utilise gossip, distributed through gossip mills, to perpetuate the 'minority of the worst' ideology. Elias and Scotson (1994, p.122) contest that 'gossip is not an independent phenomenon', and therefore its effectiveness as a power resource is best understood through networks of interdependency. In this sense, what was gossip-worthy depended on communal norms, beliefs and relationships, serving dual purposes with praise gossip enabling the Villagers to strengthen their established relations, whilst blame gossip was also used to circulate and emphasise high degrees of intolerance towards Estate members (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The structures of praise-gossip, veered towards idealisation, and blame-gossip, veered towards negative stereotypes and abuse, are closely connected to the belief in one's own group charisma (established) and other's group disgrace (outsiders) (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Strong social ties and high degrees of social cohesion enabled gossip to flow freely amongst the Villagers, whilst more sluggish and much shorter social ties served as barriers to lines of communication amongst members of the Estate (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The strength of the blame-gossip contributed to Estate members internalising their collective disgrace, subsequently accepting their inferior statis, whilst the Villagers attributed themselves with collective graces (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

Whilst useful for denoting the non-materialistic and relational workings of power, Elias and Scotson's (1994) theory of established-outsider relations is not without its critics. Figurational sociologists Bloyce and Murphy (2007) are critical of Elias' motivations and intellectual involvements in the ethnographic study, questioning

why the views of certain inhabitants, for example the working-class members of Zone 1, were ignored within discussions. Moreover, Bloyce and Murphy (2007) question the extent that social divisions within the three zones at Winston Parva were present, highlighting a lack of exploration regarding any fluctuations and tensions within social groups, which is disconcerting given Elias's reference to the polymorphous and flux nature of power. To support such concerns, Bloyce and Murphy (2007) further questioned why relationships within and between the two community pubs, which are discussed as central institutions within the community, were not explored. Bloyce and Murphy (2007) also question the extent to which all members of each zone accepted and internalised the dominant ideologies afforded to them, suggesting that members of the 'Village-elite' may have also accepted their own inferiority to the middle-class members of Zone 1. Despite being critical of Elias and Scotson's narrow empirical focus, Bloyce and Murphy (2007) acknowledge the usefulness of the concepts of group charisma and group disgrace and the related tendencies for some human groups to view themselves in accord with a 'minority of the best', whilst simultaneously viewing others deemed socially inferior in terms of a 'minority of the worst' ideology, creating a perceived and sometimes actually significant power differential.

Within the sociology of sport, the theory of established-outsider relations has been utilised and developed by scholars who have explored gender relations (see Black and Fielding-Llyod, 2019; Liston, 2005; Maguire and Mansfield, 1998; Velija, 2012; Velija and Flynn, 2010) and race and ethnic relations (see Dunning, 1999; Williams, 2018) in sporting figurations. The theory has also been applied to explore young people's peer group dynamics within schooling contexts (Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing, 2016). Seeking to address Bloyce and Murphy's (2007) critique, and build upon Dunning's (1999) theoretical reappraisal, Velija (2012) applied the theory of established-outsider relations to explore power relations within an outsider group, specifically between groups of female cricketers. Velija (2012) discovered that established-outsider relations can develop within outsider groups, explaining how blame gossip and stigma attached to outsiders are clearly related to wider ideologies within the cricket figuration, those circulated by established group male cricketers. Velija (2012) also argued that the processes in which blame gossip and stigma are manifested is central to understanding power relations between groups, evidencing how being in a broader established and outsider figuration, in this case gender relations in cricket, has an impact on social cohesion and power differentials between outsider group members. In conclusion, Velija (2012) calls for more critical engagement with the theory of established-outsider relations, recommending that figurational sociologists should examine the process which enable people to be established in one figuration and an outsider in another and the processes involved in being in and maintaining an established position. Therefore, the theory of established-outsider relations will be applied to explore pupils' peer group dynamics within the boys' and girls' PE figurations. Despite the literature-informed finding that PE (particularly boys PE) involves different social groups who are categorised by sporting competence, no authors have utilised this theoretical model. Recognising that

bullying is often aimed at certain groups (GOV.UK, 2024; Olweus, 1993), which in PE appears to be pupils who lack sporting competence (Bejerot *et al.,* 2013; Jachyra, 2016; Noret *et al.,* 2015; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), the adequacy of Elias and Scotson's (1994) model will be explored to determine the role of gossip and other verbal means as effective power resources within the PE figuration. Cognisant of Bloyce and Murphy's (2007) concerns regarding the robustness of the model, the theory will be considered across multiple year groups to explore the rigidity of established-outsider relations, and to explore the extent to which pupils may accept, change, or reject dominant ideologies and group images within and across the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School.

3.3 Identities and habitus

Elias's personal pronoun model has been used to supplement analysis concerning established-outsider relations (Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing, 2016) and examine how young people manage and navigate their identities in PE figurations (Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Nielsen and Thing, 2019a, 2019b). Elias's (1978, 2001) personal pronoun model attempts to overcome overly singular/individualistic conceptions of identity, which, as such, fail to acknowledge how human identities are part informed and influenced by interdependent relations. Stressing how 'we are nothing by virtue of ourselves, but by virtue of our relations to the surrounding world' (Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing, 2016, p.104), Elias (1978, p.123) argued that the function of the 'I' pronoun can only be understood in reference to the six other positions, for one another imagine an 'I' without a 'he' or a 'she', a 'we', 'you' (singular or plural) or 'they', all only exist in relation to each other. Tracing this language-based interdependency to conceptualisations of identity, Elias (1978, p.124) referred to 'I', 'we', and 'they' pronouns as functional and relational as 'they express a position relative to the speaker at the moment or relative to the whole intercommunication group'. Inherent in this focus is the figuration and the fact that every human is fundamentally a social being whose personal identity, their 'I'-identity, is closely connected with the 'we'- and 'they'-identities of their figuration. Therefore, when examining people's identity Elias (2001, p.37) recommends starting 'from the structure of relations between individuals to understand the "psyche" of the individual person'. Given the relational nature of individual's identity formation, people's identities and their navigations of 'I'-'we'-'they' identities are shaped by their relative power balances within the figurations that they form and a part of. In this sense, 'I'-'we'-'they' identities are not static and fixed and should be conceived as changeable and constantly fluctuating (Elias, 1978).

In relation to this thesis, Nielsen and Thing (2019a) demonstrated how the balance between young people's 'I', 'we' and 'they' identities can render visible existing tensions balances. More specifically, the authors found that a young person's 'I'-identity was heavily determined by their affiliation or desire to affiliate with the dominant prevailing 'we'-identity of the figuration, whilst simultaneously avoiding any associations with

a socially undesirable 'they'-identity. This navigation and association can become more nuanced across different figurational spaces. For instance, Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing (2016) discovered that sport students constructed 'we'-identity differed to the prevailing 'we'-identity within the broader school figuration, one centred on a party culture. This contrasted to the dominant 'we'-identity within PE, which attached value to being healthy and physically active, depicting a 'they'-identity for students who failed to see the value of leading active lifestyles (Nielsen, Ottesen and Thing, 2016). Whilst socially enabling within a PE figuration, the adherence to a 'we'-identity of being sporty was also constraining, as it strengthened their reputation in the school as being anti-social. This application of the personal pronoun model demonstrates how 'I'-'we'-'they'-identities are relational and situational, as what is valued in one figuration can differ to what is valued in another. In a later article, Nielsen and Thing (2019a) discovered that the while dominant 'we'-identity in the PE figuration was strongly linked to playing football, with boys' 'I'-identities engulfed in sporting activities, pupils negotiated their identities in broader school and youth cultures. Nielsen and Thing (2019a) suggested that the sports students placed more importance on being accepted into a we-group, contradicting Elias' (2001) writing of how in more developed societies an individual's 'I'-identity possesses greater value than 'we'-identities. Such discussions imply that young people may be more influenced by prevailing 'we'-identities, whilst adults may prioritise their 'I'-identity. Evidencing how identities can change with age, Nielsen and Thing (2019b) reported that as young people progress from elementary to secondary school they increasingly feel the need to perform desirable identities in multiple figurations. Whilst being sporty was prestigious in elementary school, belonging to a group, and the camaraderie that could be experienced within it, was considered more important to the young people in upper secondary school (Nielsen and Thing, 2019b), demonstrating how 'we'-identities differ across different figurations and can change with age.

In this thesis, the flexibility of Elias' personal pronoun model will be utilised to demonstrate how the concept can aid explanations of any age-based similarities or differences to young people's embodiment of 'I'-we'-'they'-identities within and across the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School. More specifically, boys' and girls' perceptions of their peer group dynamics, as well as PE teachers' views on pupils' peer relations in PE, will be presented with the aim of identifying the extent to which embodying a sporting 'I'-identity influences or is influenced by 'we'- and 'they'-group formation and subsequently influence pupils' social status and power relations across Years 7 to 11. Additionally, the social significance of pupils representing the school as part of an extracurricular school sport team will be discussed to further explore the extent that 'I'-'we'-'they'-identities can operate at multiple levels within a figuration.

Habitus

Alongside Elias' personal pronoun model, theorising of individual and shared habitus will also be utilised to analyse gendered behavioural norms in PE. Although the concept of habitus was referenced in Chapter One

in reference to the theorising of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Elias' use of the term predated that of Bourdieu. Elias used the term to denote an individual's 'second nature' or 'embodied social learning' (van Krieken, 1998, p.58), which acts as a 'blindly functioning apparatus of self-control' (Elias, 1978, p.113). Therefore, a fundamental difference between Elias' and Bourdieu's conceptions is that Elias considered both sociogenetic and psychogenetic factors and their symbiotic relationship, not just aspects of social reproduction (Mennell, 1998; Velija and Hughes, 2019). In this sense, Elias explains how an individual's personality structure, their socially learned second nature, develops through ongoing socialisation processes whereby human beings learn what seem taken-for-granted ways of interpreting and using their bodies (Mennell, 1998). At an individual level, this means a person's habitus contours their actions, ambitions, dispositions, expectations, and tastes (Elias, 1978). However, this individual habitus is developed within and through the various figurations in which they are enmeshed and continues to develop throughout their life course, with childhood and youth considered to be the most impressionable phases of habitus development (van Krieken, 1998). During this phase of socialisation, young people tend to be most affected by those around them. In relation to this thesis, as young people enter secondary school, they are likely to develop elements of their habitus due to entrance into new and more complex networks of interdependence, spending longer amounts of time with their peers and teachers. Whilst this thesis is primarily concerned with pupils' peer group dynamics and gendered behavioural norms, it is important to note that an individual's habitus development 'never ceases entirely to be affected by his [sic] changing relations with others throughout his life' (van Krieken, 1998, p.60). This conception is important to this thesis as the impacts of PE teachers' sporting habituses is also considered to part explain gendered social processes within PE at Lord Taylors School.

Elias (2001) also denoted how habitus can operate at a collective level whereby people share the same values, behaviours, tastes, and dispositions. This is significant as it forms 'the soil from which the personal characteristics which an individual differs from other members of his [sic] society' (Elias, 2001, p.182). As such, the concept of collective habitus can be used to explain how entire figurations of interdependent individuals can develop and embody similar attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. Whilst Elias' conceptualisations of identity and habitus share similarities, primarily that they are both formed through networks of interdependence, they are also different and operate at different levels. Identity operates at a more conscious and reflexive level than habitus formation, which is less susceptible to rapid change, meaning an individual's identities can fluctuate between figurations, whereas people's habitus are more engrained and consistent, and are often 'psychologically tied to yesterday's social reality' (Elias, 2001, p.211).

In relation to the aims of this thesis, gender provides a particularly interesting example of a form of shared habitus. Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b, p.123) explain that 'from infancy, young people adopt habitus behaviours and ingrained attitudes that are gendered'. Discussing how young males' gendered habitus

develops during secondary school, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) suggest that although young people develop varying degrees of self-conception of gender from infancy, the influence of shared habitus on individual habitus becomes intensified as they enter secondary school, more figurations and develop a greater understanding of the biological differences between males and females. More specifically, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) suggest that boys enter the male PE figuration with a gendered habitus and gendered identities that are shaped by their interdependencies within and outside of school. Within a school, and PE in particular, male teachers and male pupils (ages 11-14 years) shared masculine habitus involved a dominant masculine 'we'-identity, which included offering each other emotional support (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b). Discussing how young males embodied masculinity through a shared and social gendered habitus, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) reported how many boys embraced mock wrestling as a form of gendered role play and bantered each other and teachers, particular older boys (ages 13-14 years). This finding contributed to a broader illustration of the significant role of that PE teachers play in enabling gendered social processes that influence young males' habitus formation and performance. These findings and analyses may partially explain why banter appears to be a normalised and legitimised feature of male peer group dynamics in sporting environments (Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Nichols, 2018).

Further exploring PE teachers in their figurations, Green (2002) also utilised the concept of habitus to part explain teachers' ideologies and practices. Green (2002) discovered that many PE teachers shared a sporting habitus through a profound attachment to sport, particularly competitive sport, which shaped their ideologies and teaching practices. Whilst acknowledging the influences of teacher training, 'on the job' experiences, and significant others (i.e., senior colleagues), Green (2002) explains how many PE teachers entered their roles with particular dispositions, or habituses, which were shaped by their prior experiences of PE and sport, arguing that it is somewhat unsurprising that many teachers replicate 'traditional' sport-based curricular approaches. While acknowledging that PE teachers are not a homogenous group, Green (2002) reported how PE teachers' individual and shared habituses were manifested most clearly along the lines of gender. Although stating that many teachers' practices reflected degrees of gender-stereotyping, Green (2002) discovered that male PE teachers remained more likely to hold normative stereotypical views than female PE teachers. When concluding, Green (2002, p.80) reveals that 'PE teachers' outlooks on PE remain to a greater or lesser extent tied to "yesterday's social reality"'. Whilst published two decades ago, Green's (2002) suggestions are supported by the literature presented in chapter two which demonstrates how across many Western societies competitive team-based games, and the subsequent valuing of sporting prowess, are at the centre of secondary PE curricula (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011).

In this thesis, a figurational conceptualisation of individual and shared habitus will be drawn upon to understand and explain young people's gendered behavioural norms and PE teachers' gendered practices

within and across the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School. More specifically, Elias's concept of shared habitus will be drawn upon to explore the gendered nuances in PE and school sport provisions and practices, teachers' and pupils' attitudes, experiences, and navigations of banter within PE, and teachers' implementations of gendered changing room procedures.

3.4 Civilising processes, gendered civilised bodies and gendered emotions

Arguably, Elias is best known for his work on *The Civilising Process* (Elias, 2000 [1939]), whereby he explains how state formation processes in Western Europe occurred in conjunction with changes in patterns of human behaviour and the human psyche. In this work, Elias (2000) was fundamentally interested in how individuals regard themselves as 'civilised' in relation to others. It is not possible to cover the whole corpus of his magnum opus here, so focus is paid to theorising of civilised bodies. Elias demonstrated 'how the changing structure of social relations over time increase the expectation for people to exert greater self-regulation over their bodies' (Malcolm and Gibson, 2019, p.170). The internalising of these expectations often informs how people self-regulate their emotions, manners and bodily deportment, which have become increasingly important markers of civilised bodies within increasingly stratified social groups (Malcolm and Gibson, 2019). In this thesis, the concept of civilised bodies will be drawn upon to understand and explain young people's changing room etiquettes and the gendered nuances within young people's emotional experiences and expressions in PE.

Shame and embarrassment are two emotions which have been associated with changing processes in secondary PE (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Fisette, 2011; Frydendal and Thing, 2020), consideration which could view this process as an 'occasions of shame' (Goudsblom, 2016). Elias (2000, p.292) understands shame to be 'a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual in certain occasions by a force of habit'. This type of anxiety can evoke a fear of social degradation inwardly triggered by feelings of inferiority (Elias, 2000). In this sense, shame is an emotion which signals that something is wrong within a social figuration (Goudsblom, 2016). In contrast, feelings of embarrassment are more socially derived as they are triggered by the actions or observations of another individual. As explained by Elias (2000, p.296), 'embarrassment is displeasure or anxiety which arises when another person threatens to breach, or breaches, society's prohibitions represented by ones' super-ego'. From a figurational perspective, it is important to note that both these emotions, along with all other emotions, arise from social interactions and social processes (Goudsblom, 2016). For instance, considering the emotions evoked within school toilets, Slater, Jones and Procter (2018, p, 958) state 'gender is one axis along which civilising lessons of shame and privacy are learnt', whilst also noting that 'lessons of civilisation are always gendered'. One central feature within this emotional and learning process is gendered spatial arrangement, with the fact that male toilets often include a shared urinal whilst females use individual cubicles, evidencing how it is more socially accepted for men to urinate

in public than it is for women (Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018). Despite these gendered processes, Slater, Jones and Procter (2018) argue that the impact that school toilets have upon young people's identities is a largely neglected area, and considering the literature reviewed in Chapter Two the same argument could be presented in relation to school changing rooms, an empirical and theoretical void that this thesis seeks to address.

Exploring young people's experiences within secondary school changing rooms, Frydendal and Thing (2020) discovered that many students feared how their peers may perceive their bodies when unclothed, evidencing how feelings of shame operate from within. The requirement for students to temporarily reveal their naked bodies when changing for PE was also reported to foster feelings of embarrassment, with some students changing quickly, whilst others, particularly boys, laughed about the situation attempting to bypass feelings of shame (Frydendal and Thing, 2020). Placing these ethnographic findings within broader cultural and historical specificity, Frydendal and Thing (2020) explain how feelings of shame and embarrassment are developed in a figurative space and are dependent on the prevailing body culture of the time, leading to generation specific displays (Elias, 2000). In this sense, students' feelings of shame and embarrassment triggered by revealing their naked bodies can be considered as an unintended consequence of long-term shifts towards social inhibition of the body in Denmark, whereby from a young age taboo towards public nudity is unconsciously internalised as part of the habitus (Frydendal and Thing, 2020). The practical effects of such inhibitions and taboo included some students, particularly girls, avoiding becoming sweaty during lessons to ensure they avoid the emotion-laden showering process, demonstrating the significance of private bathing availability (Frydendal and Thing, 2020). Collectively, these findings not only demonstrate the socially induced emotional processes that partaking in PE can evoke, but also how engagement in PE can be impacted by such feelings, which are unintended social consequences of a series of long-term civilising processes. This theorising is important as interventions to address engagement in PE are often centred on activity choice and student autonomy (DfE, 2010; George and Curtner-Smith, 2017; GOV.UK, 2023a), but these types of emotional responses and the processes from which such emotions are manifested are often neglected.

Elias's work has been criticised for not discussing embodiment and performance of gender within his writings (Atkinson, 2012; Hargreaves, 1994). In response to such critiques, several figurational sociologists have developed Elias's seminal work to examine gendered civilised bodies in sporting figurations (see Maguire and Mansfield, 1998; Mansfield, 2002; Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm, 2014; Liston, 2008; Thing, 2001; Velija and Hughes, 2019). For example, Mansfield (2002, p.329) explained how female bodies are 'civilised in accordance to established ideals of femininity', while Thing (2001) illustrates how ideals of femininity are often centred upon women being passive in sporting environments, often perceived as having 'soft' emotions. Evidencing such notions within a mixed-sexed sport, National Hunt horse racing, Velija and Hughes (2019) discovered that while male and female bodies are at equal risk of injury there is a perception that female

jockeys are more susceptible to injury than male jockeys, evidencing an established and largely unchallenged ideology that female bodies are weaker and more fragile than male bodies. Notions of fragility are often underpinned by (male) assumptions that female bodies need protection for motherhood, a degree of shielding seemingly not transferred to male jockeys and fatherhood, demonstrating twenty-first century gendered expectations of civilised bodies. Seeking to further explore how such notions are maintained and exposing their effects, Velija and Hughes (2019) suggest further analysis should focus on the role of shame as a potentially constraining mechanism of control for female and male gendered civilised bodies in sport.

As proposed by Velija and Hughes (2019), in this thesis the concept of gendered civilised bodies is utilised to provide greater understandings of gendered peer group dynamics, gendered behavioural norms, and gendered identity reproductions in secondary PE. The literature review presented in Chapter Two revealed that PE is a social setting in which young people's gendered bodies are made visible, monitored and assessed (Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Gerdin, 2017a; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008). In particular, girls' bodies are regularly subjected to self- and peer-surveillance tactics, especially within changing rooms (Fisette, 2011; Metcalfe, 2018; Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud, 2017). Building upon these findings and seeking more nuanced theoretical explanations, in this thesis Elias's (2000) writings of civilising processes and figurational sociologists' developments of gendered civilised bodies are drawn upon to explore gendered changing room etiquettes and navigations of the PE changing process. The extent to which young people's changing room behaviours and emotions fluctuate from the beginning (Year 7) to the end (Year 11) of secondary school will also be examined.

Much of the discussion presented in Chapter Eight focuses on young people's feelings of shame and embarrassment within the changing rooms, whilst the importance of other emotions, particularly enjoyment and fear, is discussed when analysing pupils' navigations of banter and bullying in Chapters Six and Seven respectively. Therefore, it is important to detail a figurational perspective on human emotions. Detailed within his essay *On Human Beings and their Emotions,* Elias (1987b) argued that no human emotion is entirely genetically fixed or unlearned, instead suggesting that human emotions develop from a series of learned and unlearned processes. Comparing human emotions to the learning of language, Elias (1987b) writes, 'a child's learning of a language is made possible by the intertwining of two processes: a biological process of maturation and a social learning process'. In this sense, Elias (1987b) viewed human emotions as developing as part of a two-way process. In keeping with his core principles, Elias understood emotions as dependent on time and culture, developing in relation to dynamic figurational structures (Elias, 1987b). Discussing how human emotions differ from non-human species, Elias (1987b) explains that human emotions are distinguished through three components: 'a behavioural component, a physiological (or somatic) component, and a feeling component, arguing that only humans can mask their true emotions. To this end, Elias (1987b, p.356) states that 'what shows itself on one's "outside", for instance on one's face, is merely a derivative or

else an "expression", and often a distorted expression, of what one is feeling inside'. As such, Elias (1987b) believed that humans often make use of physiological responses, for example displaying a smile or other facial expressions, to mask their true emotions. Therefore, socially informed emotional expressions often involve self-regulation, a 'form of a tension balance between emotional impulses and emotion controlling counter-impulses' (Wouters, 2007, p.103).

Whilst there has been little application of Elias's (1987b) conceptualisation of emotions in PE figurations, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) discussed boys' emotional regulations and expressions within a male PE. Through a figurational lens, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) explained how aware of the gendered expectations within the single-sex PE figuration, many boys internalised gendered social restraints as part of their gendered self-restraints. Masculine embodiment involved boys suppressing how they expressed feelings of disappointment or distress due to associations with traditional masculine-informed 'negative' emotions such as crying, moaning or complaining, emotions often affiliated with femininity and homosexuality (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b). For instance, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) found that older boys (aged 14 years) had developed distinct binary understandings of gendered emotions, which positioned females as the weaker sex both physically and emotionally. While such gendered expectations were no doubt internalised from infancy as part of gendered habitus formation, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) noted how male PE teachers enabled a greater opportunity for polarised gendered emotions to be realised and practiced. In summary, Mierzwinski and Velija (2020b) highlighted the significance of how unique figurational dynamics in male PE can influence boys' understandings and internalisations of expected gender-appropriate emotional expressions.

This thesis seeks to utilise this under theorised area of Elias's work and add to Mierzwinski and Velija's (2020b) work by examining how girls and boys navigate banter within the PE figuration at Lord Taylors School. This focus is necessary as the literature review revealed that many males in sporting figurations are expected to 'take' banter in order to conform with established group norms and masculine embodiment (Adams, 2020; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Hickey and Roderick, 2022). However, little research references banter amongst female peer groups, and therefore the emotional expressions expected when confronted and/or partaking in such behaviours remains unexplored. Exploration of Elias's theorising of emotions will therefore be utilised to explain the challenges pupils and PE teachers face in identifying and navigating (in)appropriate banter in secondary PE.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed several sensitising concepts that partly form figurational sociology, namely figurations, interdependence and power relations, established-outsider relations, identity and habitus, and

gendered civilised bodies and emotions. It has been argued that a figurational sociological lens helps shed light on the everyday realities of secondary PE by illuminating the complex social processes and relationships within the PE figuration. Throughout the ensuing chapters it is argued that by maintaining focus on the PE figuration, whilst acknowledging broader education and sporting figurations, can provide insights into young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms in secondary PE, illuminating the ways in which power operates within pupil-peer and teacher-pupil relations and how these balances enable and constrain pupils' identity and habitus development. Such theorising seeks to move beyond zero-sum and dyad examinations of power hierarchies and largely fixed and static forms of gendered embodiment in secondary PE. One aim of the following chapter is to outline the ways in which the broader theoretical framework of figurational sociology was employed in the crafting of this thesis, detailing how a figurational approach guided each methodological decision and process in this ethnography.

Chapter Four - Research Methods

This chapter details the methodological decisions and research processes undertaken within this thesis and provides reflexive thoughts on being an ethnographer. Mindful of Mac an Ghaill's (1994, p.102) proposition that 'all education ethnographies have a hidden history; a narrative of what really happened', this chapter provides detailed insights into the everyday realities of conducting a school-based ethnography, including the often 'very messy nature' of such research and the numerous practical and ethical tensions encountered (Bloyce, 2004, p.145). This chapter starts by explaining how a figurational sociological conception of knowledge generation was coupled with ethnography as a methodological framework, drawing attention to the figurational concept involvement and detachment. From here, the research setting, Lord Taylors School (LTS – pseudonym used throughout) is presented, before the three research methods utilised to generate empirical data are outlined. It is then necessary to acknowledge procedural and situational ethical challenges encountered, as well as reflexively reporting various aspects of the fieldwork. An overview of thematic analysis is then provided, which includes robust and honest accounts of what each phase involved and how it was conducted in this thesis.

4.1 A figurational sociological approach to ethnography

Figurational sociologists, such as Bloyce (2004), argue that there are more object-adequate ways of understanding human relationships than research approaches commonly underpinned by ontological and epistemological positions and notions of objectivity and subjectivity (Baur and Ernst, 2011; Clark *et al.,* 2021). This argument is based on the premise that positioning ontology and epistemology as separate entities and dichotomising within their assumptions (i.e., positivism or interpretivism) does not appreciate how both entities are interrelated and interdependent, and that assumptions are better viewed as a continuum (Bloyce, 2004). Therefore, figurational sociologists contend that research processes involve blends of involvement and detachment (Bloyce, 2004; Elias, 1956; Mansfield, 2007). Rejecting notions of 'ultimate truth' and absolute terms such as 'objectivity', Elias referred to 'varying degrees of adequacy' whereby findings have greater or lesser degrees of adequacy, or what he termed 'reality-congruence' (Bloyce, 2004, p.147). As such, researchers are encouraged to develop and present explanations in accord to varying degrees of adequacy through adopting appropriate degrees of involvement and detachment (Bloyce, 2004; Elias, 1987a). Elias believed this concept avoided dichotomous assumptions associated with value-free findings (objectivity) and value-laden conclusions (subjectivity) in favour of acknowledging the greater or lesser of degrees of objectivity and subjectivity that are inescapable aspects of human life (Kilminster, 2004; Mansfield, 2007). Kilminster (2004, p.31) stresses that the concept of involvement-detachment does not denote 'a zero-sum relationship implying that as involvement increases, so detachment decreases'. Instead, blends of involvement and detachment are best understood as a 'changing equilibria between sets of mental activities

in which man's [sic] relations with men, with non-human objects and himself' (Elias, 1956, p.227). In other words, detachment is inextricably linked with involvement, both of which are fundamental features of all human relationships.

To achieve appropriate blends of involvement and detachment figurational sociologists must ensure that their own personal perceptions and experiences do not heavily influence the research process and outcomes. Therefore, the findings presented in any study should reflect the participants' perspectives as closely as possible, rather than reflecting the researcher's ideological preconceptions (Bloyce and Murphy, 2007). This reflection appreciates that human beings are unable to completely distance themselves from the networks of interdependence in which they are enmeshed. As such, researchers need to recognise their involvement, whilst striving to distance themselves from their own values and emotion-laden thoughts as far as possible (Bloyce, 2004). One way to achieve this involves adopting what Elias (1987a, p.6) referred to as a 'detour via detachment'. Such an endeavour requires researchers to identify and seek to avoid emotion-laden judgements, personal fantasies or short-term interests throughout the research process (Dunning, 1992). Whilst steps such as this can be advantageous, Elias (1987a) also argued that complete detachment from the area of research is neither realistic nor desirable, as a researcher's insider knowledge can aid their synthesis and subsequent interpretations of what they have observed. Therefore, to apply such considerations and conceptions more broadly to this thesis, it is necessary to seek appropriate degrees of involvement and detachment throughout the various stages of fieldwork and reporting. Arguably, this is more challenging when undertaking ethnography given ethnographer's famed involvement and submersion in the field (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Silverman, 2021).

In this thesis, an ethnographic approach was adopted to systematically examine people in a specific social environment by immersing myself in the research setting for an extended period (Clark *et al.,* 2021). This approach enables researchers to gain in-depth understandings of the complexities and nuances of participants attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and relationships within their real-life social contexts (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Silverman, 2021). In this thesis, this entailed examining young people's peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and gendered identities within secondary PE. Detailing the tasks ethnographers undertake, Clark *et al.* (2021, p.393) reference: (a) being immersed in a social setting for an extended period of time, (b) making regular observations of the behaviours of members in that setting, (c) listening to and engaging in conversations with members, (d) interviewing key participants, (e) collecting documents about, or relevant to, the group, (f) developing understandings of the culture of the group and people's behaviours within the cultural context, and (g) writing up a detailed account of the research setting.

In this ethnography, each of these tasks were undertaken with the concept of involvement-detachment in mind. For instance, when discussing ethnographic research, Mansfield (2007, p.124) postulates how

'involvement is a necessary requirement if ethnographers are to be able to understand the realities and identities' of their participants, as personal and emotional involvement can 'make visible and make that which seems strange become familiar'. Such involvement, Matthews (2018) claims, can enable researchers to ask questions which outside of their own sociological imagination, enabling rich and detailed understandings of the social world to be generated. Emphasising the processual nature of knowledge generation, Matthews (2018, p.112) also highlights how the ethnographer's involvement can shift during a research project. Subsequently, researchers are recommended to develop their own reflexive appreciations and practical understandings of how blends of involvement and detachment can be navigated during ethnographic research processes (Matthew, 2018). In this chapter, such considerations are presented at the end of each research method discussion, as well as being drawn together in the broader research reflexivity section.

4.2 The research setting – Lord Taylors School

When planning the ethnography, several comprehensive secondary schools were initially identified as potential cases affording adequate opportunities to answer the research questions (Denscombe, 2010). As such, a criterion-based sampling strategy was established based on recruiting a state-funded mixed-sexed secondary school that would provide opportunities to explore boys' and girls' peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and gender embodiment in PE. Criterion included recruiting a non-fee-paying secondary school which followed the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a) and delivered the following provisions: core (compulsory) PE, assessment PE, and extracurricular school sport. It was also desirable, but not essential, that PE and school sport was delivered to single-sex and co-educational (mixed-sexed) groups. Recruitment criteria were partly convenience-based, as the school had to be within a 40-mile radius of my home address to ensure that fieldwork was financially viable. Five schools were approached to participate, however only LTS expressed an interest in facilitating the project. LTS was identified as a suitable school as it met the recruitment criteria and largely epitomised a much broader range of schools, as now explained.

LTS is a Catholic-affiliated comprehensive (state-funded) secondary school located in the suburbs of a city in the north of England. The ethos at LTS centres upon 'British' and 'Christian' values of compassion, forgiveness, justice, and trust, values which were embroidered into PE kits and served as a daily reminder of the morals pupils and staff were expected to embody. LTS follows a nationally standardised state-school term pattern with an academic year divided into three terms (12-14 weeks), each including a half-term break. The organisation of the school day also reflects national norms, with a 20-minute registration period starting at 08:50, followed by five one-hour lessons and a post-lunch registration session, before the school day finishes at 15:10. Teaching at LTS is guided by the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014a), with all pupils required to attend weekly Mathematics, English, Science, Computing, Citizenship, Religious Education, and PE lessons. Pupils are also taught Humanities, Arts, Life Sciences, and Modern Foreign Languages as part of a wide-

ranging curriculum. In addition to these core subjects, pupils could also attend opt-in (voluntary) extracurricular sessions across a range of subjects, including sports club, performing arts, coding club, and maths club. To my knowledge, these learning opportunities align with national norms within comprehensive secondary schools in England.

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted between January 3rd and July 21st 2022, during which period LTS had a pupil population of approximately 1500 pupils (ages 11-16 years). The Year 7 intake consisted of pupils from 41 primary schools, resulting in quite diverse pupil demographics. Using the Indices for Multiple Deprivation[4] (see GOV.UK, 2019), at LTS approximately 10% of pupils were Decile 1 (most deprived) and approximately 20% of pupils were Decile 10 (least deprived), with approximately 20% of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding[5]. Approximately 40% of pupils were non-Christian or non-religious, approximately of pupils 15% identified as Black or Minority Ethnic (BME), approximately 5% of pupils had English as a second language, and approximately 10% of pupils had a registered special educational need or disability (SEND). These figures compared to regional statistics of 84.7% of secondary school pupils being White British and 14% BME, and nationally 22.5% of pupils in state-funded secondary schools were eligible for free school meals (one aspect of pupil premium funding) (GOV.UK, 2022). As well as pupils, most of the pupil-facing workforce (i.e., teachers, teaching assistants, Heads of Year, senior leadership officials, receptionists, caterers, and the school nurse) were White-British, with no notable gendered trends captured. Collectively, in many respects, LTS represented many state-funded secondary schools within the region, strengthening the generalisability of the research findings.

4.3 Data collection: participant observations, focus groups and interviews

The research methods utilised is a key dimension of ethnographic research, with ethnographers generally using numerous means to supplement participant observations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). In line with a figurational approach, it is the researcher's job to adopt methods that are appropriately matched to the relational and processual character of their subject matter (Dunning and Hughes, 2019). Indeed, Elias was sceptical of both philosophically underpinned and standardised approaches to research methods (Dolan, 2009). Instead, he advocated 'theoretically-grounded empirical work' (Dunning, Murphy and Williams, 1988,

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[4] The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England and is part of a suite of outputs that form the Indices of Deprivation (GOV.UK, 2019).

[5] The pupil premium grant is funding to improve the educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state-funded schools in England (see GOV.UK, 2024)

p.267) achieved by adopting process-oriented methods (Baur and Ernst, 2011). As such, each research method utilised in the crafting of this thesis was selected to illuminate the processual, complex, and fluctuating nature of pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within the PE figuration at LTS. Collectively, participant observations, focus groups, and individual semi-structured interviews were appropriate research methods to answer the research questions. Evidence of such appropriateness is now detailed in discussing each method.

Participant observations

As the primary data collection method undertaken, participant observations involve researchers watching, listening, and recording what they see and hear, developing their own interpretations from their observations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Such observations should be conducted over a prolonged period during ethnographies to capture the everyday realities of the research setting, generating in-depth rich descriptions into participants lived experiences in their real-life contexts (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Echoing Bloyce's (2004) previous reminder, Hammersley (2018) stresses the need for ethnographers to document the behaviours and traditions within the research setting from the experiences of participants, rather than their own preconceptions. Therefore, observing PE lessons and extracurricular school sport activities enabled me to capture everyday processes, procedures and practices and, in doing so, gain in-depth insights into young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms across all aspects of PE provision at LTS.

The capturing was partly managed by adopting the role of *partially participant observer* during lessons and sporting activities (Clark *et al.,* 2021). After a week of familiarisation and becoming accustomed to LTS's processes (i.e., timetabling, behaviour policies, class formations), the procedures within the PE department (i.e., changing room practices and extracurricular schedule), and getting to know staff, before participation observations started. From the start, I positioned myself in the vicinity of activities, engaging in conversations with PE teachers and pupils whilst doing so. This positioning was agreed by Mr Wilkinson (gatekeeper) and between the 10th January and 11th July 2022, I conducted formal observations of 105 core PE lessons, 13 GCSE PE lessons, and 35 extracurricular school sport activities – including 14 minibus journeys to and from interschool sport fixtures. To differentiate this thesis from previous cited similar studies, compulsory, assessment, and voluntary forms of PE provision were observed to provide in-depth insights into the nuances within and across all aspects of secondary PE. All formal observations presented in this thesis are captured from Year 7, Year 10, and Year 11, including an almost equal number of girls' and boys' lessons and sporting activities. This focus was partly determined by accessibility (i.e., timetabling on research days) and a desire to fill a previously identified empirical gaps relating to age-based differences in young people's peer group dynamics, while also enabling gender-based comparison to be made. Fieldwork was conducted across three

days per week, allowing appropriate blends of involvement and detachment to be maintained. In this sense, deep immersion was enabled through spending over 20 hours per week in school, whilst two days were spent on the university campus reflecting upon my positionality and the generated data, as well as undertaking other research-related tasks, such as reading and research assistant work.

When conducting formal participant observations, a pocket-sized (six inch) notebook was used to quickly record shorthand notes, which were later written up into detailed fieldnotes using a fieldnote template (see Appendix A). This digitalisation process ensured that all fieldnotes were formatted identically, aiding the data analysis process, whilst also ensuring that all observational data could be stored securely in my password protected One:Drive account. The recording of initial observations was not without considerations or challenges, as initially printed copies of the fieldnote template were attached to an A4-sized clipboard and used to record observations. However, after trialling the method for a week, I decided to use the smaller and more discrete notebook. This decision was made due to the impracticality of the clipboard when observing lessons in outdoor spaces (i.e., sports field, tennis courts) where wind and rain made it difficult to record notes and maintain the readability of fieldnotes due to water damage. A second reason for this practical shift was that a clipboard was used by Mr Wilkinson when he observed and assessed the trainee teacher or assessed the GCSE PE pupils. Such similarity was considered problematic as teachers and pupils may have become sceptical of what I was recording or felt like they were being assessed and/or judged, which may have served as barrier to me capturing everyday processes, behaviours and relationships. In this sense, the procedural shift to using a small notebook enabled a more discrete observational noting style to be adopted and enabled fieldnotes to be preserved from rain by storing in a waterproof coat.

In practice, shorthand fieldnotes were recorded when pupils were being addressed by teachers, engaged in activities, or during transitionary moments (i.e., changing teams or activities). The use of a notebook, rather than an individual sheets, enabled me to revisit and crosscheck observational notes within lessons, which was beneficial in identifying fluctuations and nuances within pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms. As Flick (2023) postulates, ethnographers often develop their own style of note taking through the research process, becoming more efficient over time. Undoubtedly my note taking developed over the seven months whereby I became more efficient in applying Clark *et al*. (2021, p.403) guidance, ensuring that all fieldnotes: (a) were recorded as quickly as possible, (b) provided vivid and clear detailing (i.e., specific locations, who was involved, what promoted exchanges, and how pupils/teachers responded), (c) included my feelings about what I had observed or overheard, and (d) included emerging ideas for analysis (i.e., power relations favouring certain pupils, gendered behavioural norms, and identity self-promotion).

When not formally observing lessons, the notebook was stored in the zipped pockets of my shorts, enabling me to capture and reflect on interesting events when transitioning around the department, ultimately giving

me a more adequate appreciation of school cultures. In addition to observations, fieldnotes were also used to document what have been referred to as 'research conversations' and 'naturally occurring accounts' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Powell, 2022). When observing PE lessons or sport activities, some pupils and PE teachers liked to point out specific events or interactions that may be of interest, often providing their own attitudes and interpretations of what was unfolding. During such instances, I was cautious when managing my emotional involvement, probing pupils' or teachers' assessments without offering my own. As recommended by Powell (2022), after any particularly in-depth or nuanced research conversations had taken place, my fieldnotes enabled me to reflect upon balances of emotional involvement-detachment, ethical considerations, and relationships with participants. It is important to note that research conversations are not presented as empirical data in this thesis, however they did provide context and certain insights into pupils' and PE teachers' perceptions, both of which partly formed the focus group and interview schedules. These conversations are important to note, however, as when combined with formal observations they enabled me to appreciate and capture the value of what Powell (2022) labelled 'irrelevant' moments, generating data that may be unascertainable through non-ethnographic methods. For example, through observing, and asking subsequent questions, departmental processes, procedures, and PE-specific practices aided my abilities to capture the age-based and gendered nuances of PE provision at LTS, including insights into moments of non-active participation (i.e., changing room processes, transitions within lessons, and minibus journeys). Such insights are important as curriculum-focused lesson observations alone may have a failed to capture the hidden curriculum at LTS, which is central to discussions in Chapters Five to Eight.

Focus groups with pupils

The second data collection method utilised was focus group discussions. Kitzinger and Barbour (1999, p.20) suggest that 'any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction'. As a social science research method, focus group discussions are understood as a type of relatively informal group interview where participants are encouraged and supported to discuss specific topics to gain insights into an underlying issue or research question (Parker and Tritter, 2006). During focus groups, researchers adopt the role of a 'moderator', asking questions, controlling the dynamics of discussions, and encouraging dialogue between participants (Parker and Tritter, 2006). Discussing the advantages of this method, Barbour (2018) and Flick (2018) state that focus groups provide insights into processes as well as outcomes, enabling researchers to explore what participants think and why they think as they do. Furthermore, the group-based nature of focus groups proves useful in uncovering misconceptions, as deliberations between participants can provide deeper understandings (Barbour, 2018; Flick, 2018). In relation to this thesis, focus groups were a particularly useful research method as they empower young people to engage and contribute when they may have been less confident to do so in an individual interview (Gratton and Jones, 2014). Focus groups were also considered are more suitable

method than individual interviews as they enabled multiple pupils' perspectives to be generated in a relatively short period of time and required less gatekeeper facilitation (Flick, 2018).However, it was also necessary to make sure that any pupils voice was not belittled or over empowered by a dominant peer (Gratton and Jones, 2014), partly achieved by inviting all participants to contribute or develop on points previously raised. As such, focus groups were identified as a suitable method from which to generate insights into pupils' understandings, perceptions and experiences of banter, bullying, and changing room processes.

In total, 14 focus group interviews were conducted with 49 pupils, a sample which included 24 girls and 25 boys. All but one focus groups were year group specific and single-sexed, mirroring the core PE class structures at LTS. One focus group involved boys and girls, who were recruited from a Year 10 co-educational GCSE PE class. Aiming to explore any age-based nuances of pupils' perceptions and experiences of banter, bullying, and changing room processes pupils were recruited from Year 7 (n=18), Year 10 (n=18), and Year 11 (n=13). The original intention was to conduct 12 focus group interviews – four per target year group (two male and two female groups) with up to six pupils participating in each discussion. During the recruitment phase, 72 pupils verbally expressed an interest to participate in focus groups, however some failed to return informed consent forms, two parents failed to provide consent for their child participating, and nine pupils opted not to attend the scheduled focus group. Drop out, that is when participants agree to participate by fail to turn up, is not uncommon in focus group research (Clark *et al.,* 2021). Due to such participant drop out, focus groups ranged from three to six participants, rather than the initially desired six per group. A decision was then made to conduct two further focus groups with pupils who later expressed an interest in participating and provided parental consent. All focus groups were conducted between March-June 2022, by which time the pupils were familiar with the researcher and COVID-19 restrictions had eased.

Discussing research methods in PE and youth sport, Armour and Macdonald (2012) emphasise how the location in which interviews are conducted may have a significant influence on young people's comfort levels. Subsequently, whilst constrained by the spaces offered by the project gatekeeper, careful considerations were made to the spatial arrangements of the rooms in which focus groups took place. Aiming to facilitate open discussions whereby all participants can maintain eye contact when speaking (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), prior to each focus group efforts were made to create a space in which pupils felt comfortable and were positioned in a circular group, using wooden benches, chairs, or yoga mats. Each focus group followed the same format, beginning with me checking that all pupils had provided parental consent (see Appendix B), had understood the participant information sheet and had given their assent (see Appendix C). Before beginning discussions, all pupils were informed of how the focus group would be structured and emphasised that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, reiterating that contributions would not be disclosed

to PE teachers or any of their peers. Finally, the Dictaphone and its purpose was discussed before any questions pupils may have about the focus group process or research project more broadly were answered.

During focus groups, the researcher's role is to ask a series of topical questions to encourage participants to exchange their thoughts and perceptions, aiming to gain insights into common group understandings (Armour and Macdonald, 2012). A semi-structured guide was followed when moderating all 14 of the focus group discussions, ensuring that pupils discussions were aligned with the research questions (see Appendix D). From a figurational perspective, a semi-structured approach to interviewing, albeit through a focus group approach, provides a 'particularly productive data collection method for exploring figurations and the role of people's interests and values in complex social processes' (Thurston, 2019, p.116). As suggested by Gratton and Jones (2004) all focus group discussions began with a simple ice breaker question, 'please can you tell me your name and sports that you play?' This question gave all pupils an opportunity to contribute to the conversation and relax into the discussion, also providing useful insights into each participants sporting biographies. All pupils were asked to cite their name to aid the transcription process, enabling any idiosyncrasies with each pupil's voice to be identified and ensuring that quotes were assigned to the right participant.

After initial ice breakers, pupils were asked a series of open-ended questions relating to their perceptions and experiences of banter, bullying, and changing room processes within PE. The content of each question was devised by considering the nature of the research, including the research questions and theoretical orientation, emerging observational insights, and academic literature (Gratton and Jones, 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In all focus groups, questioning began by seeking pupils' understandings, perceptions and experiences of banter in PE and school sport, the decision to present questions related to banter first, rather than bullying or changing rooms, was deliberate. Adopting a similar approach to their survey structure, Buglass *et al.* (2020) stressed that presenting banter-related questions first helped ensure that responses to bullying did not impact upon initial responses. Questions related to both banter and bullying were focused on understanding, (*Please can you explain what the term banter mean? How would you describe banter to someone who has not heard of the term before?*), prevalence, (*To what extent, if any, does banter [or bullying] take place in your PE lessons? Which pupils are most likely to banter in PE? And why?*), perceptions, (*why do you think some pupils get bullied in PE?*), and comparative questions (*Do you think banter/bullying are more prevalent in PE compared to other school subjects?*'). As there is limited existing literature relating to changing room processes in secondary schools, pupils were also asked as series of descriptive questions (*Can you please explain how the changing room is organised? 'What do teachers do when you are getting changed?*) and more specific etiquette-related questions (*Which areas of the changing rooms do pupils use when changing clothes? Why do you think that is? Do pupils socially interact within the changing rooms?*). Such questions were designed to explore how pupils conceptualised banter and bullying, to explore how blurred lines

between banter and bullying may arise in PE and sporting environments, and to understand how pupils negotiate the attire changing process.

As focus groups were scheduled to last 20 minutes, the time allocated by the gatekeeper, it was important to ensure that each question was carefully designed to elicit information to help answer the research questions. A combination of styles of questioning were utilised during focus groups aimed at ensuring rich descriptions were provided, discussions maintained a healthy flow, yet remained related to the research questions (Clark *et al.,* 2021). More specifically, the focus group guide included a series of direct questions, follow up questions, probing questions, specifying questions, indirect questions, and structuring questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Whilst examples of direct questions are presented above, follow-up questions were used to generate elaboration or contribution from other participants, probing questions were used to clarify specific points, for example '*why do you think lots of girls prefer to change in the toilet?*', and indirect questions were used to gauge the extent to which participants perceptions mapped to their peers, for example '*do you think your classmates like being bantered during PE lessons?*'. On numerous occasions structuring questions were utilised to ensure that conversations remained relevant to the research project. All focus group discussions concluded with an open-ended relatively unstructured question, asking participants if they would like to add anything that had not been discussed. These closing questions provided valuable insights into aspects of PE provision not considered before the interview, for example several pupils discussed the significance of the school 'sports day' to their perceptions of PE, highlighting how certain pupils feel embarrassed and socially excluded during this event.

Seeking to ensure that pupils' perceptions and experiences were captured in accordance with their everyday realities and not influenced by my own ideologies, particularly regarding the prosocial functions of banter, several reflexive considerations accompanied the process of completing focus groups. Although the pupils were aware of my involvement in the subject area, given my immersion at LTS and explanations of the aims of focus group, I also aimed to maintain appropriate degrees of detachment achieved through a detour via detachment (Elias, 1987b). For example, throughout the duration of fieldwork, I had carefully managed my responses (verbal and non-verbal) to pupil banter, ensuring that I did not give off a judgment to pupils. This detour via detachment was crucial when asking pupils for their perceptions and experiences of banter, as some held negative views of banter and these insights may not have been generated if I had become too involved during fieldwork and given the impression that I enjoyed or considered banter to be positive. During focus groups I also sought to achieve appropriate degrees of detachment by asking pupils to qualify specific examples of banter or bullying, enabling and ensuring that their accounts of such phenomena to be ascertained. The group nature of pupil discussions also served as a further detour via detachment, as knowledge was generated through pupil dialogue, rather than solely relying on my questioning. It is important

to note, however, that these attempts to distance myself from involvement were not without their limits as my immersion within the PE department at LTS for a prolong period undoubtedly positioned me as an insider (Perry, Thurston and Green, 2004). Arguably, however, such involvement and insider status enabled me to become familiar and trusted by pupils, aiding focus group recruitment and levels of rapport with pupils during focus groups, factors which are considered important when conducting school-based research (Garratt, 2021; Gibson, 2007). Furthermore, this involvement also aided my abilities to moderate focus groups as I had prior understandings of pupils' personalities, preferences, and peer group dynamics, partly enabling me to assess pupil's comfort levels when discussing potentially sensitive issues, such as bullying.

Individual interviews with PE teachers

The final method of data collection was individual semi-structured interviews conducted with eight PE teachers and one cover supervisor, who taught five core PE lessons each week. These interviews took place during the final six weeks of the school year, a scheduling decision that was both purposefully and conveniently informed. Beginning with the former, it was considered important to interview teachers once data saturation had been reached from observations and all pupils focus groups had been conducted. The decision to interview teachers during the final half-term was also made due to changes in teachers' capacities to participate. During this period, all school-wide examinations had concluded, and the Year 11 pupils had graduated following their exams. Combined, these factors contributed to teachers having more free-periods (non-teaching time) and less examination-based pressures, providing more opportunities and greater willingness to participate in a recorded conversation. Teacher interviews took place in a variety of spaces, including the gymnasium, the PE office, the fitness suite, and the sports field, with teachers asked to select the location where they would prefer to participate. Irrespective of the space used, careful considerations were paid to ensuring that these spaces would be free for the duration of the interview and that confidentiality would not be breached through interruption. After receiving written and oral consent (see Appendix E), all teacher interviews were audio recorded using a Dictaphone. Interviews ranged from 14-75 minutes with an average of 44 minutes. The shortest interview was conducted with Mr Morley, a cover supervisor, due to him only being able to draw on teaching KS3 boys core PE.

A semi-structured interview guide (see appendix F) was used when interviewing all teachers, which allowed a series of structured questions, probes and specifying questions to be asked. The semi-structured interview guide was formed around four key sections which related to pupils' peer-group dynamics, manifestations and navigations of banter and bullying, changing room etiquettes, and teacher-pupil relations within the PE figuration. In accord with the focus group guide discussed above, the teacher interview guide was crafted to generate in-depth, rich descriptions aligned with the research questions. More specifically, eight types of questions were included within the semi-structured interview guide, guided by Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009,

p.135) open-ended question types including: introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting. Alongside these types of questioning, short pauses and managed silences were used as non-verbal prompts for teachers when more information was sought (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Probing was often centred upon teachers' perceptions and experiences of teaching pupils of differing ages, genders, and abilities, which enabled observational and focus group insights to be triangulated. When conducting semi-structured interviews, questions were designed to explore how teachers perceived their networks of interdependence within and across the PE figuration and the relative and nuanced positions and behaviours of pupils within boys and girls PE. Probing on PE teachers' initial responses enabled light to be shed on not only the 'what', but the 'how' and 'why' aspects of pupils' peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and relations with PE teachers (Baur and Ernst, 2011).

When conducting interviews, the researcher must ask questions in order to listen, hear, and understand how participants perceive and understand a particular phenomenon (Thurston, 2019). Interviews are inherently social processes, therefore the interdependencies between the interviewee(s) and the interviewer influence the extent to which rich, detailed descriptions can be generated (Thurston, 2019). Undoubtedly. The rapport that I developed with the PE teachers and, to a lesser extent, the pupils whilst immersed at LTS enabled me to generate detailed insights during interviews and focus groups. During focus groups and individual interviews all participants appeared comfortable in providing their thoughts, perceptions and experiences about banter, bullying, and changing room etiquettes. Arguably, teachers would not have been as comfortable or as willing to disclose information relating to taboo subjects, such as school-based bullying and child semi-nudity, without the relationship formations that had developed during the four months prior to interview. Perry, Thurston and Green (2004) argue that Elias's concept of involvement and detachment is particularly important when conducting semi-structured interviews. From this perspective, it is imperative to consider how such rapport may create tensions of emotional involvement (Perry, Thurston and Green, 2004; Thurston, 2019). Involvement can be beneficial as researchers can utilise their insider status to convey a sense of familiarity with interviewees, which can help develop a climate within which participants feel able to express their views (Thurston, 2019). In this study, teachers appeared to take comfort in knowing that I understood many of the issues they were discussing, several made comments such as '*you will have seen it for yourself*' or '*like earlier today, you saw how they were behaving*'. While Perry, Thurston and Green (2004) explain how emotional involvement can foster degrees of empathetic understanding, the value of such insights are only likely to be harnessed if combined with degrees of detachment. In this study, detours via detachment involved not passing personal judgements or perceptions of the issues that pupils or teachers were discussing, but instead seeking elaboration of why they felt the way they did.

The task for figurational sociologists is to transcend their subjective experiences of the world in order to present reality congruent knowledge (van Krieken, 1998). As such, this research was aligned with Elias's

(1978) proposition that the role of the sociologist is to be a 'destroyer of myths'. This belief advises that sociologists should reject common sense assumptions or fallacies than people or group may tell you and, instead, researchers should strive to provide more adequate understanding of the key social processes and relationships that are involved in the social setting under exploration (Elias, 1978). From this perspective, the aim of the ethnography was to provide a more adequate understanding of the young people's peer group dynamics, achieved by considering their experiences of banter, bullying, and changing room processes. As such, the aim of the ethnography was not to expose gendered practices or behavioural norms, which were discussed in Chapter Two, but to provide a sophisticated understanding and analysis of the key social processes, relationships and power imbalances that exist within the PE figuration. Collectively, these methods provided useful in achieving such aims as they allowed the researcher to holistically explore individual's attitudes, thoughts and behavioural norms within the PE figuration.

4.4 Ethical processes, procedures and practices

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how this ethnography aligns with the British Sociological Association's (2017) Statement on Ethical Practice, whilst also disclosing ethical tensions encountered at various stages of this ethnography. Prior to the commencement of the research project, ethical approval was granted by the York St John University's School of Science, Technology and Health Research Ethics Committee for observational research to be conducted in a comprehensive secondary school in England [see Appendix G]. The same research ethics committee later granted ethical approval to conduct focus groups with secondary school pupils (ages 11-16 years) [see Appendix H] and individual semi-structured interviews with teachers [see Appendix I]. The decision to seek ethical approval at multiple stages was decided upon due to the complexities and procedural fluctuations of the COVID-19 school restrictions imposed by the UK Government at the time of study (see GOV.UK, 2021). During this time, it was uncertain whether face-to-face interviews or focus groups would be feasible or achievable due to legislation regarding the wearing of face coverings in school. However, as restrictions were reduced in February 2022, it became possible to conduct in-person discussions, therefore ethical approval was sought.

Before entering the LTS PE department, Mr Wilkinson (Head of assessment PE) and Mr King (pseudonym - Headteacher) were provided with information sheets and informed consent forms, which were signed by both gatekeepers [see Appendix J]. The process of gaining access to LTS involved a series of emails and an online video-call meeting with the Head of PE, whereby the nature of the proposed research and study timeline was outlined. After consulting Mr King, Mr Wilkinson consulted his departmental colleagues to ascertain if they had any objections to the proposed project. In this sense, while Mr Wilkinson acted as the 'formal' gatekeeper, the other PE teachers at LTS were very much gatekeepers in their own right, as without their consent and continued support this ethnography would not have been possible. Later in the research project, after

receiving gatekeeper consent, informed consent for participation in focus groups and individual interviews was sought from pupils and teachers respectively. As focus group discussions took place within school hours parents were provided with an opt-out consent form which was only returned should a parent/guardian not want their child to participate. Pupils were also provided with a debrief form [see Appendix K] at the end of each focus group discussion. Throughout the duration of the research process, no pupils requested to withdraw, while one PE teacher requested that one of their interview responses was omitted from the study [after reflecting on the potentially discriminatory wording of an answer], with data subsequently deleted. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all participants, pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis with all identifiable information related to any individuals removed. All data was stored in accord with York St John University best practice guidelines, which included all data being digitised at the earliest possible opportunity and electronically stored on a password protected York St John University One:Drive account.

Ethical considerations extended from procedural to a situational level. Tracy (2010) explains that situational ethics refer to ethical practices that develop from a deeply contemplated consideration of the research conditions. Furthermore, Ellis (2007, p.4) states that situational ethics attend to the 'unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field'. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the scope of the ethnography, several situational ethical tensions were encountered during fieldwork, however these less obvious ethical challenges were most frequently experienced when conducting focus groups with pupils. One particular ethical challenge was ensuring the confidential nature of pupils' responses. The importance of guaranteeing and ensuring confidentiality are well documented (Clark *et al.,* 2021; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), and it is important to stress that children and young people have the same rights to confidentiality as adults (Alderson and Morrow, 2020). Ethical tensions related to pupils' rights to confidentiality arose on several occasions. Specifically, shortly after conducting focus group discussions, several PE teachers would ask me what the pupils had discussed and disclosed during the recorded conversation. These questions were well-intended as teachers were interested in what their pupils had to say about PE provision at LTS, however answering such questions would have compromised pupils' confidentiality and, therefore, such questioning was quashed by reiterating the importance of adhering to procedural ethics. Initially the PE teachers seemed surprised and somewhat dismayed that I was unwilling to divulge any information, perhaps given the largely positive and transparent relationships we had developed during my immersion within the department. After explaining the importance of each pupil's rights to confidentiality, however, PE teachers better understood and accepted my discretion and my rapport with teachers did not appear to be affected.

Observing changing room processes and procedures posed another ethical tension, one which many PE ethnographers have failed to address or discuss (see Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Gerdin, 2017b; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Recalling national policy, it is recommended that adults (teachers) should not be present

in changing rooms whilst children and young people change attire (NSPCC, 2022). However, at LTS, teachers were present within the changing rooms and the gatekeeper (Mr Wilkinson) permitted me access to the boys changing rooms to observe changing room processes. It is important to note that my male identity limited changing room observations to boys PE, as changing room policies, including the one implemented at LTS, advise same-sex supervision (GOV.UK, 2018; NSPCC, 2022). After consulting the school safeguarding officer and the university ethics board, it was agreed that when conducting participant observations within the boys changing rooms, I should be accompanied by a PE teacher, mitigating safeguarding concerns for all those involved. However, on rare occasions during the later stages of fieldwork when pupils and teachers were very familiar with my presence and research role, male PE teachers briefly left me unaccompanied in the changing rooms as boys were changing attire (for example when collecting the laptop, spare kit). Reflecting just one example of the messy nature of conducting a school-based ethnography, during such instances I positioned myself in the small office space and tidied away spare equipment, avoiding any direct interactions with boys until a teacher returned.

Whilst immersed within the PE department my attempts to manage blends of cognitive, emotional and physical involvement-detachment were not easy or completely consistent. In the latter stages of fieldwork, PE teachers would often entrust me with supervising pupils in the (boys) changing rooms or requesting that I would set up equipment whilst they lead warmups. Supervising the changing rooms provided the biggest challenge of maintaining my least teacher role, especially when negotiating misbehaviours. Cautious that I did not want to impose an authoritarian, teacher-like role, but also conscious of my responsibilities as a trusted adult to safeguarding pupils, I would often address unsafe behaviours, such as boys placing each other in headlocks, with a question of "*what would your teacher say to you doing that*?" Such questions were often followed by a friendly smile from the boys, realising their behaviours would be viewed as unacceptable by their teachers. My experiences of sports coaching enabled me to use non-disciplinary techniques to maintain acceptable behaviours when tasked with supervising pupils.

An ethical tension relating to coercion arose when recruiting for and conducting focus groups with pupils. Participant recruitment for all focus group interviews took place at the end of core PE lessons, when I outlined the aims and scope of focus groups to all class members. Pupils expressing an interest in participating were provided with a participant information sheet, consent form, and a parental assent form. Once pupils had provided their assent, I met with them to form groups, providing pupils the opportunity to select which peers they would feel most comfortable participating alongside, as advocated by Gibson (2007) Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) and Krueger (2014). This was one reason some focus groups involved three pupils, whilst others contained up to seven pupils, further exemplifying the messy nature of social research and challenges in managing complex peer group dynamics when trying to facilitate group-based discussions. A time and location for the recorded discussion was then agreed with Mr Wilkinson (gatekeeper), most focus groups

were scheduled for the afternoon registration period (20-minutes) when pupils had PE before or after this session. As pupils would miss afternoon registration, Mr Wilkinson emailed each participant's form tutor to excuse them from the registration session, ensuring that each pupil's attendance and whereabouts was accounted for in case of an emergency (i.e., fire alarm). On six occasions, one or more pupils did not attend the scheduled focus group session and pupils' decisions not to attend was viewed as unsatisfactory by Mr Wilkinson, who viewed failures to attend as disrespectful, breaching the school values. On two occasions, Mr Wilkinson informed pupils who had opted not to attend the scheduled focus group that they needed to participate in the recorded interview during their PE lesson, seemingly driven by a desire to help with the project. Indicative of teacher-pupil power dynamics, such requests would have breached pupils' rights to voluntary participation and therefore pupils were reminded they did not have to participate. Whilst thankful to Mr Wilkinson for his role in facilitating focus group discussions, it was important to stress that should a pupil fail to participate in a focus group discussion they should not be coerced or sanctioned. Therefore, all pupils were reminded of the voluntary nature of participation and their right to decline without reason or consequence, an ethical principal also reiterated to Mr Wilkinson.

4.5 Researcher reflexivity

Reflexivity is embedded within the language of social science and is well-established as a critical component of qualitative research (Clark *et al*., 2021; Townsend and Cushion, 2021; Tracy, 2010). This process involves researchers being aware, assessing, and reassessing their own contributions, influences, and shaping of their research findings (Townsend and Cushion, 2021). This holistic process should take place throughout all stages of the research process – from the formulation of research questions through to the interpretation and writing (Evans *et al*., 2018; Townend and Cushion, 2021). Reflexivity requires 'continuous interrogation' of the self on the part of the researcher, but in relation to their field of study and their participants (Evans *et al*., 2018, p.2018). Having spent seven months immersed at LTS as a neophyte ethnographer an abundance of reflexive fieldnotes and daily journal entries were recorded, many of which cannot be detailed here due to word limit constraints. Brooke and Hogg (2004, p.115) propose, 'one of the truisms of ethnographic research is that the research itself will change you'. My experience of conducting ethnographic research at LTS supports this contention, with the process not only enabling me to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms in an English secondary school, but also the complexities of my gendered identity and sporting habitus when seeking to understand, examine and explain such findings.

As implied thus far, throughout the duration of fieldwork, the role of 'least teacher' (Dunne *et al.,* 2005), an adaptation of Mandell's (1988) 'least adult role' was adopted. Mandell (1988) first used the 'least adult role' when conducting research with kindergarten children (ages 2-4) and explained that this positionality enabled

her to become an active, fully participating member of the research setting. While the 'least adult role' has proved popular for scholars of education, the role has also been critiqued, as scholars have argued that one's adult identity can never be completely transcended as adults have a duty of care to safeguard child participants (Atkinson, 2019; Garratt, 2021). Whilst adulthood is inescapable, enactment of the 'least adult role' can arguably assist adult researchers in minimising unequal power relations between themselves as adults and young people (Garratt, 2021; Mandell, 1988). Striving to achieve such benefits, the 'least teacher role' involved seeking to distance myself from being viewed by pupils as an adult with authority or increased power within the school figuration at LTS.

Achieving a 'least teacher' researcher positionality was imbued with tensions. On a daily basis I considered my interactions with pupils and teachers, questioning and seeking to maintain appropriate blends of involvement-detachment. In practice, embodying a 'least teacher' position involved blends of being a 'friendly adult' (Fine, 1987; Van der Smee and Valerio, 2023), recognising my adult identity and the ethical obligations that accompanied my adult researcher status in school, whilst also attempting to distance myself from the role of a class teacher. Embodiment of the 'least teacher' positionality was challenging and fraught with tensions. Upon entry to the LTS PE department, I overtly explained the aims of my research and what my role as a researcher would involve to all pupils and PE teachers. When first greeting each PE class, I introduced myself as 'Matt', a university researcher, and suggested that pupils should address me as such, rather than as 'sir', the title assigned to all male teachers. Throughout the duration of fieldwork, I regularly reiterated to pupils that I was a researcher interested in PE, rather than a PE teacher or a trainee teacher. This fact was regularly reiterated to pupils when I referred any of their questions regarding formal school matters to their class teacher.

Despite conscious consideration been paid to embodying the 'least teacher' positionality, at various stages of fieldwork I did, however, experience role-ambivalence. On several occasions I was left alone with classes whilst PE teachers delt with behavioural matters, during such periods teachers would ask me to supervise pupils. Whenever a situation occurred in which my 'least teacher' status may be questioned, for example when required to intervene in a potentially dangerous situation (i.e., pupils misusing equipment or play fighting), I opted to take a dialogic approach to behaviour management, rather than a punitive approach. In practice, this involved me approaching pupils and asking questions such as, '*what would Mr Wharfedale say about your behaviour*?' or '*do you think that is the best way to use a tennis racquet*?'. I was always cautious to avoid passing judgement on any pupil's behaviours and instead encouraged students to be self-reflexive about their actions. Such considerations illustrate the messiness of school-based research and demonstrate how my positioning as 'least teacher' was not fixed and static, but continually negotiated depending on the circumstances, situations and context in which I found myself in. Therefore, being reflexive involved acknowledging my varying degrees of involvement and, whenever possible, attempting to detachment myself

from the authorative role of a teacher. Whilst attempting to distance myself from being viewed as a teacher, I was also mindful that the PE department had provided me with the means from which to conduct a seven-month ethnography. I also felt compelled to ensure that I was not viewed as an 'exploitative interloper' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019, p.68), and therefore assisted PE staffs whenever possible. From the outset, I made the decision not to directly assist PE teachers when in the presence of Year 7, 10 and 11 pupils (e.g., during lessons or extracurricular activities), those of which I was observing, however I attempted to help in non-student facing aspects of PE provision. For instance, on a daily basis I assisted Mrs Clark (pseudonym - PE technician) in laundering the spare PE kits or bibs, setting up equipment for forthcoming lessons, and organising the equipment stores. Being helpful within the PE department helped me to quickly establish healthy levels of rapport with each member of the PE department, without compromising my 'least teacher' observe role during PE lessons and extracurricular activities.

4.6 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis processes often require researchers to explicitly position their analytical strategies as either 'inductive' or 'deductive' (Bingham, 2023; Clark *et al*., 2021; Silverman, 2021). Inductive, or 'bottom up' forms of analysis involve researchers generating meanings directly from empirical data, whilst deductive, or 'top down', forms of analysis generally involve applying theory to generated data (Bingham, 2023). From a figurational perspective, however, such considerations represent something of a false dichotomy (Bloyce, 2004). Rather than separating method and theory, Elias's approach to research treats theory and data as symbiotic, a process which requires a 'two-way traffic' between theoretical frameworks and empirical data (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978). In this sense, theory should be treated as a sensitising agent in the development of 'theoretically-grounded empirical work' (Dunning, Murphy and Williams, 1998, p.267). The role of the figurational sociologist, therefore, is not to 'apply' theory, but rather to 'test' its adequacy in respect to the key findings (Dunning, Murphy and Williams, 1998). Guided by such figurational approaches to research, throughout this research process, knowledge and reality were not considered as separate entities, but rather as developing as part of the same process. As such, a 'two-way traffic' between theory and data underpinned analysis processes (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978). Therefore, following this approach, the results and discussion chapters presented in this thesis were developed by considering empirical data and theoretical concepts during a thematic analysis process.

Due to the theoretical flexibility and ability to combined multiple forms of empirical evidence (Clark and Braun, 2017; Sparkes and Smith, 2014), thematic analysis was employed to analyse the ethnographic data. Commonly employed by qualitative researchers, thematic analysis is a method of identifying, interpreting and analysing patterns of meanings within the data (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). In combination with theoretical flexibility, thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate data analysis process as it

enables researchers to 'identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experiences, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices' (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.297). Due to being immersed in school for a minimum of three days per week, data analysis did not commence until leaving the field. At this time, however, all focus groups and interviews had been transcribed and all observational fieldnotes had been written up. Due to the vast amount of empirical data generated, which included over 35,000 words of interview data and 250 pages of fieldnotes, all data was imported into NVivo-12, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. When importing data into NVivo-12 I systematically categorised the entire data set (i.e., observations of girls PE, observations of boys PE, focus group transcripts, teacher interview transcripts) [see Appendix L]. From here, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phased guide of thematic analysis were followed, however the analysis process more iterative than the named phases imply and involved multiple fluctuations between stages.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, phase one involved (re)familiarising myself with the data by reading all observational fieldnotes and interview transcripts multiple times, noting initial ideas and highlighting points of interest when reading the data for the second and third time. Phase two involved the generation of initial codes from the raw data by searching for pupils' and teachers' reflections and observational notes relating to banter, bullying, changing rooms, pedagogical practices, gendered behavioural norms, and extracurricular sport. In total, 128 initial codes were created, which included banter strengthening boys' peer relations, performative errors leading to peer commentary, girls' reluctance to change in public areas, single-sex interactions in co-educational PE, behavioural shifts when taught by non-PE specialist, and male teachers favouring most competent footballers. From here, phase three involved searching for themes whereby initial codes were grouped through theoretical and empirical similarities and differences. During this phase, numerous initial codes did not align with emerging themes and, therefore, were group together and not drawn upon in the later analysis stages. When identifying and generating themes figurational concepts of figuration and interdependence, power and established-outsider relations, shared habitus and gendered civilised bodies, and 'I-we-they' identities were used as sensitising tools. This two-way traffic between data and theory helped establish the necessary detour via detachment, maintaining appropriate distance from the object of study (Liston and Maguire, 2020). Coding and theme generation was conducted in conjunction with continual discussions with the research supervisors who scrutinised the developed codes and help foster greater degrees of detachment from the data (Perry, Thurston and Green, 2004; Mennell, 1992). This process ensured that themes were developed and continually revised during the analysis process, improving the overall validity (Clark *et al*., 2021). Although the analysis process revealed some variations among pupils and PE teachers' perceptions and experiences of PE and observations of PE at LTS, there were more consistent similarities which arose from all three data sources. As such, the themes identified which form the basis of

the following four results and discussion chapters represent pupils' peer group dynamics, banter, bullying, and changing processes within the PE figuration at LTS.

4.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter a transparent and honest account of the ethnographic research process undertaken in the completion of this thesis has been presented. By framing the chapter with a figurational sociological approaches to social scientific research, this chapter has evidenced the rigor and reflexivity that unpin the ensuing results and discussion chapters. Justifications for the ethnographic approach, for the combination of three research methods, and the decision to thematically analyse the data have been provided. By carefully considering each methodological decision, discussing the practical and ethical tensions encountered, and providing open and reflexive accounts of how issues of involvement and detachment were navigated, evidence of how the research process is credible and trustworthy was strived for. The following chapter, the first of four results and discussion chapters, details everyday realities of key social processes, procedures, behavioural norms and relationships within the PE figuration at LTS.

Chapter Five - The PE Figuration: Key procedures, everyday practices, and gendered peer group dynamics

This chapter provides ethnographic insights and theoretically informed analysis into the structure and delivery of PE and extracurricular sport at LTS, also discussing pupils' gendered peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations. Drawing on Chapter One's synthesis of the provision of PE in English secondary schools, this chapter begins by positioning legislative policy and governmental guidelines within the context of LTS's provision of PE. As such, detailing of the key procedures and everyday practices at LTS are presented, focusing on age-based and gendered similarities and differences in how core (compulsory) PE lessons were structured and delivered, emphasising the nuances of secondary PE provision. While discussion is mostly centred upon compulsory PE, examination PE and extracurricular school sport are also reported. Such documenting provides necessary foundations from which teachers' pedagogical approaches and teacher-pupil relations are explored, before considering how nuanced delivery methods may affect pupils' peer group dynamics. From here, the age-based and gendered similarities and differences in pupils' peer group dynamics are examined, before considering how pupils' peer group dynamics fluctuate across differing forms of PE provision. Throughout this chapter the presented findings are focused on generally observed and reported practices and relationships, as opposed to episodic events, seeking to capture the everyday realities of PE at LTS. Pseudonyms are used when referring to all pupils and teachers, with all quotes presented from pupil focus groups or teacher interviews.

Throughout this chapter empirical insights are discussed through a figurational sociological lens, placing emphasis on the networks of interdependencies between pupils and teachers, whilst also considering broader interdependencies with school leadership officials and the DfE. Elias's sensitising concept of figuration is utilised to shed light on the enabling and constraining social processes that underpin the structure and delivery of PE at LTS. Viewing girls' PE and boys' PE as distinct, yet interconnected, figurations prove useful in explaining the gendered nuances in everyday procedures, practices, and pupils' peer group dynamics. Conscious that sociological examinations of contemporary issues can benefit from more detached long-term perspectives (Elias, 2000; Green, 2008), consideration is paid to the influence of other figurations, past and present, as well as the influence of interdependent individuals within broader schooling figurations. Elias's (1978, 2001) personal pronoun model and concept of collective habitus are also drawn upon to help explain pupils' gendered peer group dynamics and behavioural norms, and gendered nuances in PE teachers normalised practices, illuminating how differing figurative relations give rise to differing procedures and practices. Aware that present-day examinations can benefit from a more long-term detached understanding, Elias's (2000) and Wouters's (2007) respective works of civilising and informalising processes are considered when exploring gendered practices, peer group dynamics, and behavioural norms.

5.1 Embedding PE policy: enabling and constraining figurational processes

The PE provisions at LTS were constrained by NCPE (DfE, 2013) requirements, although the Head of Core PE (Mr Walker) and other PE teachers were enabled to interpret and implement such requirements as they considered appropriate. Therefore, in one sense PE teachers are 'policy actors' who translate and enact policy daily (Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023), but in another sense are autonomous beings presiding over how, what, and where PE activities are delivered (Herold, 2020; Simmons and MacLean, 2018). Such presiding is also part enabled and constrained by their close independent relationships with pupils, teaching colleagues, heads of department, school leaders and governors, all of whom may have differing perceptions of what high-quality PE provision may look like in practice. Furthermore, the enactment of PE policy may also be influenced by a particular school's sporting reputation or preference (Green, 2002), or how PE is positioned alongside 14 other curricular subjects, all of which are compulsory for pupils in KS3 and seven of which are compulsory for pupils in KS4 (DfE, 2014a). However, unlike many core subjects (i.e., English, mathematics, science) pupils are not formally assessed in core PE, meaning that in a neo-liberal market-driven era, PE is often side-lined as a non-academic subject (Fitzpatrick, 2023; George and Curtner-Smith, 2017). It is from within these enabling and constraining factors that this section details how core PE was delivered at LTS, paying specific attention to the observed age-based and gendered nuances in everyday procedures and practices.

At LTS, across a five-day week, all pupils were timetabled for five daily one-hour lessons. Of these 25 lessons, KS3 pupils were timetabled for two core PE lessons, whilst that number halved for KS4 pupils. The Education Act 2002 prohibits the Education Secretary prescribing specific curriculum time dedicated to any subject (DfE, 2014a), enabling school leaders and governors to organise the school day. Conversations with the Head of Practical PE (Mr Wilkinson) revealed that the shift from two lessons at KS3 to one lesson at KS4 was decided upon by the senior leadership team, who placed emphasis on older cohorts (Years 10 and 11) devoting more time to study additional English, mathematics, and science, a finding indicative of perceptions that PE is a non-academic subject (Fitzpatrick, 2023; George and Curtner-Smith, 2017). Such emphasis reflects national tends with the Youth Sport Trust (2018) reporting that on average KS3 pupils spent 124 minutes in PE per week, whilst KS4 pupils spend 98 minutes on average. This trend is not new but continuing as a more recent Youth Sport Trust (2023) longitudinal survey revealed that core PE provision in England has fallen by 11% since 2011, with KS4 experiencing a 20% drop within the past 12 years. Seemingly aware of and seeking to address this decline, the UK Government recently published guidance (non-statutory) encouraging all schools to deliver a minimum of two hours PE weekly to all pupils (GOV.UK, 2023a). As well as providing useful time in the subject context, these constraints also impact pupils' (and non-PE teachers) perspectives of PE as a non-academic subject, outlooks which may partly inform their attitudes and behaviours when in PE.

Achieving the UK Government's minimum two hours of PE per week recommendation is critiqued on the grounds of how much time pupils spend being physically active during lessons. At LTS, although all lessons were timetabled for one hour, observations revealed that pupils (of all ages and genders) would generally spend the first 10 minutes and final five minutes of each core PE lesson in the changing rooms. During this time, pupils changed into their subject-specific attire and awaited staff-initiated lesson registration and instruction. This procedure often results in a maximum opportunity of 45 minutes for pupils to be physically active, with Powell *et al.* (2019) reporting an average of 35 minutes of PE lessons (one hour in duration) are spent in the 'working area'. Without allowing pupils to wear PE kit to school on PE days, a practice more commonly adopted in primary-schools, such time losses are unavoidable. However, this finding does serve as a reminder of the significant periods in PE lessons spent changing attire and transitions between spaces, periods which are not only unique to PE, but enable distinctive opportunities for sociality.

Whilst pupils are constrained to change into subject-specific attire before participating in PE (DfE, 2023b), there is no government mandate on what clothing they should wear. Although not ratified, the DfE (2021, np) do recommend that 'schools should not be overly specific when creating kit requirements, limiting the number of branded items required'. Therefore, individual school governing bodies are enabled to stipulate PE kit requirements, an approach which maps to broader school uniform policies (DfE, 2021). At LTS, all pupils were expected to wear a unisex tee-shirt or polo-top, netted nylon shorts, white socks, and footwear appropriate for the activity being delivered (barefoot, sports trainers or football boots). The tee-shirt, polo-top, and shorts were LTS branded, embroidered with the school's crest and core values (compassion, forgiveness, justice and trust). Such emblematising on school uniform is customary practice in English schools and is understood to reinforce a school's traditions and bespoke identity (Harber, 2021; Wilken and Aardt, 2012). As swimming was also delivered, pupils were required to provide swimwear and a towel, however there was no formal school policy for swimming attire. Observations revealed that most boys wore either Hawaiian-style swim shorts or their regular PE shorts, whilst most girls wore a one-piece swimsuit. Although there was no formal policy per se, conversations with PE teachers revealed that additional items (i.e., tee-shorts, goggles, and swim caps) were permitted, however girls were prohibited from wearing bikinis, which were considered inappropriate attire for swimming in school, a finding which appears indicative of Western civilising processes and (gendered) civilised bodies (Elias, 2000). Guidelines extended to detail that any pupil who failed to provide the correct kit would receive a negative code, a school-wide reprimand, before being loaned LTS-specific PE attire for the lesson. In all, PE kit requirements at LTS represented largely standardised secondary school policies, indicative of long-term customs in education and standards of dress.

Although constrained by universal PE kit stipulations, observations revealed that some pupils wore additional or alternative items. Specifically, up to five girls in each Year 10 and Year 11 PE class were enabled to wear LTS branded sweatshirts and/or non-branded tracksuit bottoms, a finding not discovered in younger cohorts

or in boys PE. Conversations with female PE teachers revealed that some girls had received permission from teachers to wear distinguishing clothing to appease body-image concerns, a consideration also identified by O'Donovan and Kirk (2008), Fisette (2011) and Hill (2015). Further gendered differences were observed in relations to pupils' choice of socks, as most girls (of all ages) opted to wear black trainer socks, rather than department specified white ankle-high socks. Whilst girls were enabled to wear alternative socks without punishment, whenever boys failed to wear white socks male PE teachers would give them a negative code, a detail checked during the pre-lesson changing process. This gendered difference related to a broader observation that many girls placed, and were enabled to place, more importance on their appearance within PE than their more constrained male peers. It is also important to detail that some pupils were enabled to wear alternative attire that upheld their religious and cultural beliefs, a requirement provided by the DfE (2023b). Observations revealed that some pupils, such as those who practiced Islamic faith, opted to wear clothing which covered their arms and legs, preserving their modesty (DfE, 2022; Kahan, 2023). Whilst such empirical findings may seem idiosyncratic, collectively they demonstrate gendered and ethnic nuances in the everyday realities of secondary PE, which may affect peer group dynamics given the importance that some young people place on appearance in PE (Fisette, 2011; Hill, 2011; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008; Slater and Tiggemann, 2011), also providing insights into the gendered ways in which displays of the bodies are enabled and constrained in secondary PE.

In core PE, pupils were timetabled in year-group specific, sex-segregated, and mixed-ability (non-setted) classes. The term 'sex-segregated' is used instead of 'gender-segregated' as pupils were grouped in accord with their biological sex in binary terms, a practice which was upheld for one self-identified transgender and two self-identified non-binary pupils. In practice, this involved up to 120 pupils from one year group being timetabled for PE during any given lesson, which generally involved an even split of boys and girls. From here, pupils were further divided alphabetically, forming two boys and two girls groups. Consequently, core PE lessons involved between 25-30 pupils being taught PE often, but not exclusively, but a same-sex teacher. At LTS, this constraining process was unique to PE, arguably enabling relatively distinctive peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations. Whilst this subject-specific constraint may seem to counter the DfE (2018, p.4) preference that 'schools should not generally separate pupils by reference to protected characteristics, such as sex, race, or faith', this approach is enabled by policy guidance permitting sex-segregation for 'gender-affected activities in which the physical strength, stamina, or physique of the average girl (or boy) would put her (or him) at a disadvantage (DfE, 2018, p.5). The practice of sex-segregating pupils is indicative of educational traditionalisms in the UK (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005; Green, 2000; Smith and Parr, 2007), and was subsequently found to be the delivery approach cited in all UK-based studies cited in Chapter Two. One aspect of enabling policy recommendations, this gendered finding speaks to the concept of gendered civilised bodies and illustrates how young people are segregated in secondary PE on the grounds

of their assumed physical aptitude, fostering ideologies that the female body is physically weaker and more fragile than the male body (Velija and Hughes, 2019).

During interviews PE teachers were asked to comment on delivering sex-segregated PE classes, capturing and representing the general consensus amongst teachers, Mr Walker explained:

> We have done [mixed-sexed] classes in the past but from my experiences they [boys and girls] don't mix very well. We have tried to do mixed-ability [and] mixed-gender. We have tried to [ability] setted [and] mixed-gender. Sometimes it can work, to a degree. But the payoff isn't worth what you have to go through to get it to work. What we have found is that boys don't really want to interact with the girls and the girls don't want to interact with the boys. It is a strange culture when they are together.

This explanation reveals how the sex-segregated delivery model implemented at LTS was constrained due to cultural, experiential, and socially informed reasons, rather than more policy informed concerns of fairness, safety, and/or risk associate with assumed sex differences (DfE, 2018; GOV.UK, 2023a). Despite this, such policy guidance was used to contour school senior leaders' requests for a co-educational structure, as discussed by Mrs Hanson:

> I have a lot of conversations with management about the fact they think if you start them [pupils] in mixed-sexed PE in lower year groups then they will be fine, no! [emphasis added] I understand the point about making everything non-gender specific. In terms of the curriculum we offer, we are quite good at that. The only thing we don't do is boys dance, and they [management] are trying to make sure we do that as well.

Whilst the school's senior leadership team may have been influenced by increasing calls for co-educational PE delivery (Wilkinson and Penney, 2023), quests for greater gender equality (DfE, 2023), and knowledge that primary PE (ages 5-11 years) is often delivered to mixed-sexed classes (Hills and Croston, 2012; Wilkinson and Penney, 2023), such expectations example a tension balance that teachers encountered when deciding how PE should be structured and delivered within a mixed-sexed secondary school. Navigating this tension balance, PE teachers drew upon established pedagogic conservatism (Kirk and Macdonald, 1998), their occupational (gendered) socialisation (Green, 2002), and their bespoke experiential knowledge to maintain the consensus-based gendered delivery model. Such gendered considerations and nuanced practices were present beyond core PE, findings shortly qualified when exploring assessment PE and extracurricular school sport.

One further distinguishing feature in how PE is delivered is the use of indoor and outdoor spaces, which require transitions during lessons (i.e., moving between spaces and activities). Whilst all other curricular subjects at LTS were taught in classrooms or indoor studios (i.e., art studio or drama studio), PE lessons took place in the following indoor spaces: a sports hall, a gymnasium, a fitness suite, a swimming pool, as well as the following outdoor spaces: tennis courts, a multi-use games area, and a large sports field marked with

several pitches (i.e., football, rugby, rounders, athletics track, and cricket square). Observations revealed that indoor spaces were most often used during the winter months with outdoor spaces used for the rest of the academic year, with teachers placing importance on outdoor education whenever possible. Indoor spaces were also used in case of adverse weather conditions (i.e., heavy rain, high winds, or severe heat). The short notice of such changes required lesson adaptations, arguably unique to PE. It is within this context of these different and diverse spaces that pupils' peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations manifest and are exposed.

While Mr Walker designed the core PE programme of study to enable all pupils to experience a wide range of sports, observations revealed several age and gender-based nuances in what sports and physical activities pupils were taught and how PE teachers delivered lessons. All KS3 pupils were taught: athletics, badminton, basketball, benchball, cricket, Danish longball, dodgeball, football, gymnastics, health-related fitness, orienteering, rugby, swimming, tennis, and volleyball. The only notable gendered differences were that girls were taught dance, netball, and rounders, sports not offered to boys, findings which concur with the results published in Hingley *et al.'s* (2023) government-funded report. From this suite of activities, all KS3 pupils were taught two different sports each week, with activities changing each half-term, accumulating to a minimum of 13 sports delivered during the academic year. This diverse suite of activities evidences shifts away from PE's history of a narrow offering of traditional gender-appropriate team sports (Flintoff and Scraton, 2015; Hargreaves, 1994; Waddington, Malcolm and Cobb, 1998). The removal of such gendered constraints alongside the enabling of girls to partake in sports previously considered male preserves (Dunning, 1999), and the fact that this shift has not been actioned in the opposite in the other direction of boys (i.e., dance, netball, and rounders), perhaps signals an equalising trend which acknowledges the male-centred dominance in PE provision (Kirk, 1998).

Observations of KS3 core PE lessons revealed that teachers generally followed a skill-based games pedagogical model (Capel, 2012; Mawer, 2014), which often involved: a sport-specific warm-up, a period of group-based learning, a series of small-sided games, and a collective evaluation of learning. Before activities commenced, teachers usually provided pupils with the lesson aims and objectives, exemplifying a formalised approach utilised in most subjects. Male PE teachers often asked highly skilled boys to provide skill demonstrations, whilst female PE teachers tended to provide skill demonstrations themselves, with girls rarely observed doing so. Showing furthered gendered differences, observations revealed that competition was central to boys' peer group dynamics, as boys often competed against their peers during warm-ups (i.e., who could do the fastest lap of the pitch), during skill development phases (i.e., who could take the most catches or hold the longest rally), as well as during small-sided games, evidencing how competition ran throughout the lesson. Although male PE teachers often encouraged boys to focus on skill development and to seek personal improvement, many boys appeared more interested in comparing their competencies to their

peers. Competition was observed to be less important to girls' peer group dynamics, as girls were often observed encouraging and complementing their peers' performances, rather than challenging them as witnessed during boys PE lessons. Collectively, these procedural and value-based practices demonstrate how some gendered practices continue to be reproduced in secondary PE and how highly proficient bodies, particularly male bodies, continue to be highly valued within the PE figuration.

In comparison to the largely consistent KS3 programme of study, the KS4 PE curriculum at LTS was more nuanced, perhaps partly constrained by the shift to one weekly lesson. Following a similar structure to KS3, Year 10 pupils were taught one sport each half term, with a reduced variety of activities, a finding discovered elsewhere (Bramham, 2003; Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Smith, Green and Parr, 2009). At LTS, this shift resulted in athletics, dance, gymnastics and swimming being omitted from the programme of study. Whilst reasons for such omissions were not qualified by PE teachers, the following three critically informed speculations can be made: (1) due to the dominance of team-based games in KS4, (2) pupils' preferences for such team-based games as opposed to more individual pursuits, and (3) the fact that these activities serve to heighten focus on pupils' maturing (gendered) bodies (McVeigh and Waring, 2023; Forestier and Larsson, 2023; Hingley *et al.,* 2023; Porter, Morrow and Reel, 2013). Regardless of the rationale for the narrowing of activities, PE teachers often ensured competition was a central element of girls' and boys' KS4 lessons, adhering to the partly constraining NCPE aims (DfE, 2013).

Showing further age-based nuance, Year 11 pupils self-selected their activity at the beginning of each PE lesson. This more democratic process involved pupils selecting from up to four sports offered by their PE teachers, with the activities which generated the most interest being delivered, a method also identified by Smith, Green and Thurston (2009) when examined 15–16-year-olds experiences in PE. At LTS, observations revealed that boys were often offered a choice of basketball, cricket, Danish longball, dodgeball, fitness, football, and tennis. Football, whether that be indoor or outdoor, was offered every lesson and selected in most lessons (approximately 90%). In contrast, girls were consistently offered a choice of basketball, benchball-dodgeball (a blended version of both games), fitness, netball, rounders, or tennis. General observations revealed that girls most often opted for benchball-dodgeball, netball or rounders, suggesting that embedded gendered practices remain, yet at LTS gendered differences in sport provision were partly pupil informed. The procedural shift from Years 7-10 to Year 11 evidence how teacher-pupil relations became more negotiated as pupils entered the final year of secondary school, with practices providing pupils with more agency, subsequently less constrained and more enabled. This shift, however, was still determined and agreed by PE teachers, demonstrating how more formalised teacher-pupil power relations remained. In addition, the gendered differences in sports offered to boys and girls provides insights into PE teachers' gendered sporting biographies and shared (gendered) habituses (Green, 2002; Elias, 2001). Collectively, these findings appear

indicative of gendered differences in expectations of girls' and boys' use of their bodies in PE, with value attached to displays high sporting competence in boys PE, a finding not discovered in girls PE.

The centrality of competition across core PE provisions at LTS is not surprising given the aims of the NCPE, whereby competition is a central feature (DfE, 2013). In 2010, the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, set out to embed competitive sport at the centre of the PE curriculum (DfE, 2010), a trend which remains. Whilst partly guided by the constraining policy, the embeddedness of competition with the PE figuration at LTS can also be explained by PE teachers' shared sporting habitus (Elias, 2001; Green, 2008) and pupils' preferences for competitive PE (Nielsen *et al.,* 2018). From a figurational perspective, social habitus refers to the acquired and unconscious nature of shared traits forming the 'second nature' character of behaviour and emotions which a group of interconnected individuals share (Elias, 2001). At LTS, all the PE staff shared a sporting habitus, as Mr Wharfedale, Mr Wilkinson, Mr Shaw and Miss Turner all played amateur football, Mr Harris had previously played professional football, Mrs Hanson and Miss Jones played recreational netball, and Mr Wharfedale also played semi-professional cricket. PE staffs' warmth towards team-based sports and competition was further evidenced through daily discussions of sporting headlines and monthly departmental trips to watch the local professional rugby team. It is also important to note the commonality of football with boys PE and netball and rounders in girls PE reflected a shared gendered social habitus amongst PE teachers, findings which help explain the gendered nuances of KS4 activity provisions and subsequent gendered peer group dynamics and gendered behavioural norms, discussed in more detail from here on.

The final aspect of PE provision to be discussed here is that of examination PE, specifically General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) PE. GCSE PE is an optional curricular subject offered to pupils in KS4 and involves a combination of written and practical assessments (Green, 2008). Whilst the specific requirement for pupils to study GCSE PE were not ascertained, those who opted for this subject tended to be more sporty pupils, those who were highly proficient in one or more sports and enjoyed participation. In contrast to core PE, GCSE PE classes were co-educational, a finding that appears to reflect the general structure of examination PE in English secondary schools (Green, 2008; Velija and Kumar, 2009; Wilkinson and Penney, 2023). Despite being co-educational in structure, observations of practical GCSE PE lessons revealed that approximately twice as many boys than girls were enrolled, a finding supported by Mr Wilkinson's account:

> If I use my Year group as an example, I have three girls and 22 boys. It is difficult other than racquet sports to find a sport or an activity that will suit all of the students, where boys and girls can play safely together. The girls will always want to stay together.

This reflection illuminates some of the tensions that PE teachers encounter when delivering disproportionate co-educational PE, specifically concerns of pupil safety, as referenced by the DfE (2018), and gendered peer group dynamics. Sharing similar considerations, Mr Wharfedale stated:

> I will be honest, they are sometimes the most difficult lessons to plan and organise because you have got a real mix [of pupils]. Especially in GCSE [PE] because you have got lovely, lovely girls who are very intelligent, who work hard and are lovely. It is difficult to know what sports to go with because you have got some boys who are so competitive and just want to play football. I spend a lot of time doing netball, I sold it to the boys in terms of it is a team game, it is a competitive team game. But sometimes it can be a non-starter.

Illustrating how many older boys embody a shared sporting habitus, with strong ideological preferences for competitive football to be delivered, a finding not considered for girls, Mr Wharfedale's account demonstrates the need for negotiation with pupils to ensure co-educational PE lessons are productive. This finding reveals how shifts from single-sex to co-educational PE and from compulsory to optional forms of PE contribute to the chains of interdependencies between PE teachers and pupils becoming more complex, requiring teachers to adopt a more dialogic approach to ensure buy-in. This finding also shows how PE teachers are more constrained by pupils' peer group dynamics and shared gendered habituses during co-educational PE than during single-sex provision, whilst also indicative of changes in teacher-pupil relations as young people progress through secondary school. Supporting teachers' reflections, observations revealed that PE teachers often enabled pupils to form sex-segregated groups during GCSE PE practical lessons, which mitigated concerns of pupil safety and avoided potentially problematic peer group dynamics, Collectively, these findings help further explain why PE teachers at LTS strongly advocated sex-segregated PE provision, irrespective of pressure 'from above' within the broader school figuration.

In sum, this section has detailed how various aspects of PE at LTS were structured and delivered, documenting age-based, gendered, and situational nuances. Through analysing such findings, it was possible to demonstrate how the PE figuration at LTS was enabled and constrained by national polices (DfE, 2013, 2014a), non-statutory governmental guidance (DfE, 2018, 2019, 2021; GOV.UK, 2023a; Hingley *et al.,* 2023), subject-specific pedagogic traditions (Green, 2002, 2008; Hills and Croston, 2012; Waddington, Malcolm and Cobb, 1998), teacher-pupil power relations, and teacher and pupils' gendered habitus and gendered sporting preferences and traits. Observations revealed how most boys, regardless of age, often sought competition during lessons, using sporting competence as a distinguishing factor. Subsequently, as many boys enter the PE figuration expecting to compete with and against their peers, often enjoying the competitive nature of PE, many boys shared a gendered habitus in relation to competition (Elias, 2001). In contrast, competition was observed to be less significant within girls' peer group dynamics and female PE teachers' pedagogical practices, whereby in-group solidarity and active engagement often took precedent. Given these gendered differences in structure, delivery, and peer group dynamics, from here on in boys and

girls PE are understood as figurations, both forming the broader LTS PE figuration. Therefore, when discussing the structural aspects of PE (policy, kit requirement, and spaces), the organisational aspects (year-group specific, mixed-ability, and sex-segregated classes), and the practical aspects (programmes of study and pedagogical approaches) the term figurational dynamics will be used. The positioning of boys and girls PE as figurations informs the separate presentation of discussions concerning teacher-pupil relations and pupils' peer group dynamics.

5.2 Pedagogic practices, teacher-pupil relations, and pupils' peer group dynamics in PE

Having detailed age-based and gendered nuances in provision, this section focuses on teacher-pupil relations and pupils' peer group dynamics. As proposed by Green (2001, 2008), to understand the everyday realities of PE it is important to examine the complex and fluctuating interdependencies and power relations between key people, namely teachers and pupils, who directly form the PE figuration. The examination foregrounds discussions concerning pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within and across the PE figuration at LTS. Combined with the previously discussed figurational dynamics, these discussions provide a more adequate understanding of the tension balances which underpin complex social processes, practices, peer group dynamics, and behavioural norms that are reproduced daily within secondary PE.

When considering the role that teachers play in pupils' behavioural norms, it is useful to consider schools as 'civilising institutions' (Gillam and Gulløv, 2014). In this sense, schools are places where emphasis is placed on young people learning socially prescribed and culturally specific behavioural and emotional self-restraints, intra- and inter-personal competencies, and subject-specific knowledge (Dolan, 2016; Gillam and Gulløv, 2014; Monaghan, 2014). Such emphasis is espoused in policy, for example, the National Curriculum policy stresses the importance of a holistic education through promoting 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development of pupils' (DfE, 2014a, p.4). Therefore, not only are PE teachers tasked with physically educating young people, but they also contribute to a broader moral education. At LTS, PE teachers were observed embodying such sentiments in their everyday practices, especially when teaching Year 7 classes. Whilst observed developing pupils' physical literacy and sporting competence, PE teachers were frequently observed reiterating the importance that Year 7 pupils adhered to school-wide behavioural expectations, embodied the school's values, displayed emotional resilience, and maintained maximal effort in active participation. Due to their expansive nature, some pupils occasionally breached these behavioural expectations, which often evoked a whole class dialogic reformative approach, rather than individualistic punitive tactics. Rarely enforcing school-wide behavioural policy procedure (verbal warning, code, second code, detention, isolation), PE teachers often discussed what constitutes (un)acceptable behaviour with pupils, evidencing a more informalised approach to behaviour management than perhaps what was followed in the broader school figuration. For instance, Mr Wilkinson explained:

> We will try and get them [Year 7 pupils] to engage in a civilised way. So yes, PE is about energy and excitement and moving fast. But it is also about working with each other and trying to be a bit more social. I will always try and relate it to when they are out and about, at clubs and stuff, "would you behave like that in a gym or at your sports team? If you wouldn't please don't do it here". I will always bring it back to that they are in a class, in a school, so please behave for me in a way that you would in a normal classroom environment.

Acknowledging some of the behavioural nuances and subsequent pedagogic approaches within PE in comparison to other curricular subjects, Mr Wilkinson's account demonstrates how normalised PE practices may offer pupils de-routinising experiences for sociality and behavioural experimentation (Dunning, 1999; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b), also evidencing how pupils are expected to adhere to form formalised obedience-centred behavioural self-restraints (Elias, 2000). Explaining social constraints placed on Year 7 pupils, Mrs Hanson noted, 'I do go in quite strict with them because I need to train them for the rest of their education'. Rationalising such an approach, Mr Shaw explained:

> Sometimes students get the idea that PE is a time to mess around [and] have a laugh with their mates. But they still have to realise that it is still a lesson and even though it is in an outdoor environment and not in a classroom, they still have to keep the same standards they would in a classroom.

These teacher narratives suggest that PE's distinctive figurational dynamics may contribute to some younger pupils viewing PE as a more informalised subject than other traditionally classroom-based lessons, enabling them to be more social and engage in group-based learning. Subsequently, PE teachers attempted to accustom younger pupils with PE-specific behavioural expectations alongside more formalised school-wide etiquettes (i.e., addressing teachers as 'Sir' and 'Miss', observing silence when teachers spoke, and embodying school values). Such socialising and discipling mechanisms were regularly observed as teachers halted pupils' active participation to reiterate behavioural expectations, implementing social constraints when deemed appropriate:

Fieldnote 14th February 2022 – Year 7 Boys Dodgeball

> At the beginning of the lesson Mr Walker explained to the boys he was going reward them for their hard work across the half-term, answering calls for dodgeball to be delivered. During the first game there were several incidents of boys tussling for balls, numerous cries of "you're a cheat", and regular bemoaning of teammates when eliminated. Each time Mr Walker witness or overheard such behaviours he blew his whistle and ordered the entire class to stop and sit down in silence, a practice which occurred three times during the first 10 minutes of participation. One each occasion, Mr Walker reminded the boys of how they should behave in PE and stressed that poor sportsmanship would not be tolerated. When observing more physical incidents [e.g., fighting over a ball], Mr Walker reminded the whole class of the school 'hands off' policy, reiterating that pushing, shoving, or any other physical acts would not be tolerated at LTS.

This type of disciplinary tactic was impalement regardless of the activity instead of sanctioning pupils via the school-wide behaviour management policy, which was only used in extreme circumstances (i.e., a pupil

swearing at a teacher, peer violence, or consistent refusal to participate). Such constraints and dialogic approaches to behaviour management served as a constant reminder to all pupils that PE was not a time to 'mess around' and instead that lessons were a time to learn in civilised, yet highly energetic and highly social manner. Such pedagogic approaches enabled PE teachers to maintain positions of increased power and authority over younger pupils, characterising standardised teacher-pupil relations, whilst also partly enabling pupils to experiment with more informalised and subject-specific behavioural norms and etiquettes.

In contrast, PE teachers were rarely observed deploying similar behaviours management tactics when teaching older cohorts, whereby PE teachers often embodied more individualist, yet equally informalised, pedagogic approaches. Arguably part explained by shifts from a skill-based learning model to a team-based games approach, PE teachers were rarely observed imposing strict social constraints on older pupils nor interrupting participation for behavioural reminders, instead often allowing pupils to work through moments of tension. Comparing age-based differences in her relationships with pupils, Miss Turner noted:

> Year 7 pupils definitely look up to you and take your word as gospel. Whereas Year 10s and 11s you kind of have a chat with them and get them on side, you definitely have a more relaxed tone with the Year 10s and 11s.

Such sentiments were echoed by Miss Turner's colleagues, supporting observations that more relaxed and more emotionally expressive teacher-pupil relationships were enabled to develop in KS4. These more informalised teacher-pupil relationships were enabled through PE teachers loosening behavioural constraints and expected behavioural self-restraints when teaching older cohorts, indicative of more informalised social processes (Wouters, 2007). Many PE teachers reported how as pupils progress through secondary school they form closer bonds with them via increased levels of mutual identification, perhaps partly informed by pupils' habitus development during a particularly impressionable phase of socialisation (Elias, 2001). Furthermore, the pedagogic shift from skill-based learning to a team-based games-oriented delivery model also provided pupils and teachers increased opportunities for sociality during lessons, further enabling closer social bonds to develop.

When pupils were asked to describe their relationships with PE teachers, responses revealed that many pupils perceived their relations with PE staff as generally positive, with several older pupils lauding the more informalised nature of their relationships. Despite this, some older pupils reported that their PE teachers displayed favouritism towards more competent sports performances and/or pupils who participated in multiple forms of PE (i.e., core PE, GCSE PE, and extracurricular sport), as articulated by Alice, Annie, and Molly (Year 10):

> Alice: There tends to be people who are good at PE who tend to be favoured by the PE teachers.

> Annie: Usually with the PE teacher, they usually are with the same people.
> Molly: It is the group who do sports outside of school, like the netball group.
> Annie: Yeah.
> Alice: It is the GCSE [PE] students that are actually there, or the other people that don't do GCSE PE but do a particular sport that the teacher knows about that sport, they know they do it and they tend to favour them.

Using pupils' perceptions to qualify observations, in practice teacher favouritism may have been manifested through male PE teachers regularly selecting the most competent sports performers as skill demonstrators or team captains, or by female PE teachers engaging in more frequent and more informalised conversations with certain girls, often those who studied GCSE PE or regularly participated in extracurricular sport. Moreover, upon entering the LTS PE department, several PE teachers were quick to point out pupils who represented the county or professional academies in various sports, rarely, if ever, drawing my attention to less-competent pupils, a finding which could also be interpreted as favouritism. Arguably one reason for such highlighting is that the PE teachers were proud of their pupils' sporting success, which they undoubtedly contributed to, also taking pride in the school's reputation for sporting excellence. Another potential reason is that the PE teachers were aware of my sporting biography, my sporting habitus, particularly my role as a regional cricket coach, and were eager to introduce me to the four pupils who represented the county in cricket.

Whilst perceptions of PE teachers favouring more sporting pupils, particularly male PE teachers favouring boys who embody hegemonic masculine ideals, have been presented in non-UK based studied (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), these findings build upon such discussions by considering the unintended social and psychological consequences of some pupils participating in multiple forms of PE. Specifically, at LTS, participation in GCSE PE and/or extracurricular sport provided sporty pupils and PE teachers with increased opportunities for sociality, opportunities less available to those pupils who solely participated in core PE, which equated for up to five hours difference of PE provision each week (i.e., three GCSE PE lessons and one/two extracurricular activities). Moreover, pupils who studied GCSE PE or participated in extracurricular sport were often highly competent and enjoy sport, indicating that they may have shared a sporting habitus with their PE teachers (Elias, 2001; Green, 2002). Whilst innocent, the visibility of closer social bonds and mutual identification between sporty pupils and PE teachers in core PE, perceived by some as favouritism, became problematic for pupils' peer group dynamics when navigating banter and bullying, findings to be discussed in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

Shifting attention towards pupils' peer group dynamics within the PE figuration at LTS, ethnographic insights revealed a combination of age-based and gendered nuances. When asked about girls' peer group dynamics, PE teachers' interview responses were consistent, noting how 'in Year 7 all the girls would interact with each other, generally'. You wouldn't have any issues of who you put with who' (Miss Jones). Most girls shared this perception, as Natalie (Year 10) explained 'everyone was really nice in Year 7, like you could literally go

and talk to anyone without any judgement and sit with anyone and it wouldn't matter'. Natalie's account epitomised girls' reflections on their peer group dynamics in PE, indicating that younger girls tend to be friendly, inclusive and supportive towards one another. Demonstrating how peer relations are not fixed and static, interview and focus group responses revealed that as girls progress through secondary school their peer relations become more fractious and difficult to manage in PE. Specifically, the decision of how best to group girls became an increasingly tension-bound consideration for PE teachers when aiming to deliver high-quality PE. Evidencing how friendship-based groupings are considered essential for girls' participation, Miss Jones stated:

> They only work with their friends, the majority of them [older girls]. Those who are not competitive and particularly like PE will only try if they are with their friends. When it gets to Years 9 and 10 you have to be meticulous and pick people to go with certain people because they have either fallen out or they can't be near each other, so that is time consuming as a teacher.

Reiterating this narrative, Mrs Hanson described the process of grouping KS4 girls during core PE to require 'military precision'. Probing into why friendships are important to older girls' peer group dynamics during core PE lessons revealed that tensions between differing friendship groups can be problematic for pupils and teachers, as first explained by Miss Turner, 'they [girls] kind of stick to who they know. They have formed friendship groups, and they are too shy or too intimidated by those in other groups to mix'. Providing similar reflections, Ellie, Abbie and Laura (Year 11) shared:

> Ellie: I feel like especially if we are allowed to choose our groups then you are always going to be with your friends.
> Abbie: I think it makes me work better when I am with my friends.
> Laura: Like you feel more encouraged and comfortable.

Further explaining why friendship-based groupings become increasingly important to girls' peer group dynamics in PE, Natalie (Year 10) stated:

> Now [Year 10] people have their groups, and it is more likely that there is more rivalry, people have people who they don't like and then that's the rivalry and then there is judgement, people just seem a lot nastier as you get older.

Combining such narratives with observations of KS4 girls core PE lessons, ethnographic insights revealed that the grouping of girls became increasingly important for both teachers and pupils throughout the five years of secondary school. For teachers, enabling girls to self-select their performance groups and/or teams appeared to increase most girls' engagement levels in and enjoyment of PE, something teachers often referred to as desire but constant struggle. For girls, working alongside their friends increased their confidence levels and mitigated opportunities for direct peer conflict and verbalised judgements. The reported increased feelings of comfort, encourage, and motivation to participate in PE when girls are grouped with friends in PE have been reported elsewhere (Hills, 2007; Lamb, Oliver and Kirk, 2018), however these findings add to such

discussions by highlighting the emotional (i.e., trust, love, dislike) and social (i.e., rivalry, verbalised judgement, peer gaze) dimensions of girls' grouping preferences and practices in secondary PE.

At LTS, female PE teachers' practices appeared centred upon creating a social climate within which girls' felt comfortable and encouraged, subsequently enabling girls to self-select friendship-based groups. Through a figurational lens, this pedagogic approach enabled and/or maintained girls' 'we-group' formations, which Elias (2001) notes primarily developed out of a need for individuals to protect their own self-interests, seeking physical, social, and emotional self-protection. The friendship groups which girls preferred to participate alongside were bonded together through kinship that extended beyond the PE figuration, although older girls' focus group responses revealed that such bonding can be tested through perceived peer judgment and rivalry. In seeking to explain such tensions, Elias (2001, p.219) recalled how emotional ties which underpin 'we-group' formations can often take a 'love-hate' form. The reported peer conflicts between girls' friendship groups are arguably indicative of girls competing against each other not only physically, but also to socially protect or promote their status within their peer 'we-group' alliances. PE teachers appeared to be aware of girls' personalities and peer group dynamics, understanding that their interpersonal skills were required to maintain girls' engagement in core PE.

The age-based fluctuations within girls' peer group dynamics partly mapped across the boys PE figuration, whereby male PE teachers discussed how peer relations become more tension-bound as boys progress through secondary school. However, contrasting to girls' peer group dynamics, ethnographic insights revealed that perceived levels of sporting competence and attitudes towards PE became increasingly important and differentiating features within boys' peer group dynamics, as explained by Mr Walker:

> I think you get alpha males who can dominate a class or a changing room space. These tend to be in PE the ones who are most able, usually it is the ones who are most able in a particular sport, rather than the ones who are just good at many sports. You get a lot of inbetweener boys who are followers, who try and follow the behaviour of those alpha males. If you speak to the alphas, even if you speak to them on a one-to-one basis, they are very pleasant. They are quite nice to talk to. But then if you get them in a group mentality, those alphas then to take over the group negatively.

Suggesting that the 'inbetweeners' may try and embody the behaviours and identities embodied by the 'alphas', those located at the top of the social hierarchy, Mr Walker's explanation provides valuable insights into boys' power relations and the value 'we'-identity within the boys PE figuration at LTS (Elias and Scotson, 1994). While 'sporty' boys are often discussed as the most powerful, most dominant, or most desired pupils within boys PE (Bramham, 2003; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), ethnographic insights revealed that boys who displayed high levels of competence in football, rather than sport in general, embodied 'I'-identities that were most valued within the 'we'-identity of the boys PE

figuration at LTS. Providing further insights into other distinguishable groups within boys PE, Mr Harris reported:

> I don't know what you would particularly call them, the pupils that don't particularly like sport are another group of students that you would find as a dynamic as well. They tend to keep themselves to themselves, they don't want to put themselves out into the open forum to open themselves if they make a mistake, so they are less likely to try hard.

This finding reveals that boys who do not embody a sporting habitus or identify with the prevailing 'I-we'-identity may form a 'they-group' (Elias, 2001), a group who may be less social and suitably passive during PE lessons, removing themselves from group-based interactions and from the performance spotlight to avoid peer judgement (Lygstad, Hagen and Aune, 2016). In contrast to girls PE, such peer group dynamics were more easily observed in boys PE whereby three distinct peer groups (sporty, inbetweeners, and reluctant) were regularly formed. In girls PE, there were more friendship-based sub-groups, forming up to eight pupil groups per PE class, with sporting competence serving less social and identity-based significance. Overall, ethnographic insights revealed that boys were more willing to work across friendship groups and interchange between groups when necessary (i.e., teacher team selection), whereas girls' groupings were more fixed, protected, and tension bound. These findings have strong links to and provide necessary context from which to discuss how young people performed and navigated behaviours of banter and bullying, so are therefore revisited during Chapters Six and Seven.

In sum, this section has shed light on teachers' pedagogical approaches, teacher-pupil relations, and pupils' peer group dynamics within and across the PE figuration at LTS. The empirical evidence presented disclose age-based and gendered nuances in pupils' peer group dynamics, demonstrating how through the years pupils develop and increasingly prioritise strong feelings of attachment to homosocial 'we-group' alliances (Elias, 2001; Nielsen and Thing, 2019a). Findings reveal how during Year 7 pupils' peer group dynamics and generally collegiate, inclusive, and friendly, becoming more distinguished, fractious, and in-group based in Year 10 and Year 11, demonstrating how young people's identities and peer group dynamics develop over time. In the boys' PE figuration, sporting competence and embodiment of a sporting 'I'-identity and habitus are highly valued within the prevailing 'we'-identity, enabling sporting boys to portray desirable 'I-we'-identities, whilst less-sporty boys may be grouped under a 'they'-identity (Elias, 2001). In the girls PE figuration, sporting competence and sporting ideologies are coupled with more psychological and emotion-laden factors, with friendship-based groupings becoming increasingly important to peer group dynamics with more diverse and divided 'we-group' formations emerging, with 'they'-identities forming across differing groups, rather than across the whole class. These age-based and gendered figurational dynamics provide a necessary platform and are further discussed when examining pupils' experiences of banter and bullying in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, as well as pupils' changing room etiquettes in Chapter Eight.

5.3 The extracurricular sport figuration: procedures, practices, and 'we-group' formations

The final facet of PE provision at LTS to be examined is extracurricular sport, including interschool sport fixtures and competitions. The term 'extracurricular sport' denotes the provision of sporting activities outside of the compulsory school timetable, whereby participation is often optional and not register bound (Capel, 2012; Green, 2000). In contrast to core PE, there is no formal policy specifying what a high-quality extracurricular programme should look like, nor guidance of how or how often extracurricular sport should be delivered, subsequently PE teachers are more enabled to structure and deliver extracurricular activities. Whilst not mandated, and therefore not automatically constraining, the DfE (2023a) recently published guidance for English state schools, recommending that all pupils should have the opportunity to participate in competitive sport as part of an extracurricular offering. Although there is some literature exploring extracurricular sport provisions in England (and Wales) (Green, 2000, 2008; Penney and Harris, 1997; Smith, Thurston and Green, 2007), there is less available evidence of how participation in extracurricular sport influences teacher-pupil relations, pupils' peer group dynamics, or PE-specific behavioural norms. This knowledge gap, combined with the identified perception of teacher favouritism towards sporty pupils, make extracurricular sport a fertile ground for theoretically informed exploration. Therefore, in seeking to provide more adequate insights into pupils' peer group dynamics as a whole, this section explores the often-neglected feature of PE provision of extracurricular sport. From here, extracurricular sport at LTS is viewed as a figuration, structured within the broader PE figuration.

At LTS, extracurricular sport clubs (participation oriented) and sports practices (performance oriented) were delivered daily during lunchtime and after the formal school day had ceased. Lunchtime activities generally lasted up to 30 minutes, while afterschool practices could last up to 90 minutes, but generally lasted an hour. Due to time constraints and the use of the sports field for recreational play, all lunchtime activities were conducted in indoor spaces, with pupils only required to change into their trainers, rather than full PE kit. Afterschool practices were delivered in both indoor and outdoor spaces, and pupils were required to change into full PE kit. Despite the more informalised structure of extracurricular sport (i.e., opt-in nature), PE teachers' placed emphasis on pupils wearing correct attire for afterschool practices, seldom enabling pupils to wear alternative clothing, indicative of more formalised embedded procedures. The extracurricular sport timetable largely mirrored the structure implemented in KS3 core PE, predominately sex-segregated and year-group specific, with activities alternating each half-term. While teachers noted how school leaders partly constrained the structure and delivery of core PE, no evidence was gathered to suggest that the senior leadership team sought to influence the provision of extracurricular sport at LTS. Conversations with Mr Walker (Head of Practical PE) revealed that he devised the extracurricular sport timetable in accord with five key considerations: (a) pupils' sporting preferences, (b) teachers' sporting biographies, expertise, and willingness to deliver, (c) access to specialist equipment and facilities, (d) seasonal factors (i.e., cricket and

athletics during the spring term), and (e) scheduled interschool fixtures and competitions. After considering these factors, Mr Walker also designed the extracurricular timetable to provide all pupils opportunities to participate in a wide range of sporting activities throughout the academic year, mindful that not all pupils would enjoy all activities.

Observational insights revealed gendered trends relating to activity provisions, teachers' delivery methods, and pupils' participation rates. Boys were able to participate in the following sports: basketball, cricket, fitness, football, rugby (league and union), and volleyball, while girls were able to participate in the following sports: dance, netball, rounders, leadership, fitness, trampolining, rugby league, and 'girls' football. Whilst all these listed activities were sex-segregated, Year 7 and Year 8 pupils were also able to attend the following co-educational lunchtime clubs: badminton, spikeball, tennis, and table tennis. All co-educational clubs regularly involved individual non-contact sports, whereas sex-segregated activities tended to be team-based sports. Whilst not formally qualified by Mr Walker, such timetabling could be partly explained by teachers' discussions of (gendered) peer group dynamics and broader safety concerns (DfE, 2018) presented earlier in this chapter. Due to time constraints (i.e., gatekeeper allocated 20-minute focus group slots), pupils' perceptions of the extracurricular sport schedule were not formally sought during focus groups, however several girls provided reflections on this topic when closing discussions, as evidenced by Molly, Fran and Alice (Year 10):

> Molly: The guys [boys] do different sports to us [girls].
> Fran: We don't get to do cricket. We get put with things like trampolining and cheerleading, like more dance-based. Like more girl things. Even though we would like to be doing more cricket and rugby.
> Alice: They do full contact rugby, we are not allowed to play that. We have to play tag.
> Fran: Just because we are girls you have to be more delicate.

Here, the girls' reference to perceived feminine activities and requirements of feminine etiquette (i.e., more delicate) demonstrates their awareness of gendered inequities and evidences their frustrations towards such gendered social constraints imposed on them. None of the boys voiced their discontent, or warmth, towards their provisions of extracurricular sport at LTS, a gendered finding discovered elsewhere (Smith, Green and Thurston, 2009). At a national level, the UK Government appear concerned by such continuations of embedded gendered practices, recommending that schools should employ a designated extracurricular coordinator to oversee the equitable provision of school sport, stressing that girls should have the same access to sport as boys (GOV.UK, 2023a). These recommendations imply that long-standing gender inequalities in secondary PE remain despite schools being governed by the Equality Act 2010 (GOV.UK, 2015) which is designed to legislate against such inequalities.

Despite the gendered differences in the extracurricular offering, ethnographic insights revealed that girls' and boys' participation rates in extracurricular sport activities were generally equal, with age becoming a more distinguishing factor. Observations revealed that Year 7 lunchtime clubs were most highly attended, with up to 40 pupils regularly attending badminton, tennis and table tennis sessions. With such numbers, pupils rotated on and off the courts, enabling all attendees a chance to participate. In contrast, observations revealed that generally five to ten older pupils regularly attended the scheduled lunchtime sessions (basketball, fitness, and spikeball). These participation trends extended into afterschool practices, with up to 30 Year 7 pupils often attended sessions, whilst rarely did any Year 10 or Year 11 pupils attend afterschool practices. Despite participation in extracurricular clubs and practices decreasing from Year 7 to Year 11, participation in interschool sport fixtures and competitions increased through the years, with older pupils having more opportunities to compete against other schools. Such observational insights were triangulated by PE teachers' interview responses, when asked girls' participation rates in extracurricular sport, Miss Jones reported:

> You won't get any in Key Stage 4 really compared to Year 7. Year 7 you get hundreds. For example, in trampolining I had over 80 people who wanted to sign up and wanted to do it, just for Year 7. For rounders pre-Covid, I would have two teams of Year 10s and two teams of Year 9s, so that is upper-school coming to practices and playing matches. And then you would have all your Year 7s and all your Year 8s as well, so it would be quite equal. Post-Covid, we are getting no Year 10s coming to practice.

Evidencing how these age-based differences mapped to boys' participation rates, Mr Shaw stated:

> I would say Year 7 participation is more predominant within extracurricular. For example, tennis club afterschool there was 20 students taking part, whereas previously I did a Year 10 basketball session afterschool and there was about a third there, maybe five or six students. So, I definitely think the participation rate for Year 7 compared to Year 10 is different, it is a lot higher in the lower bracket of the school.

Whilst gendered differences in extracurricular sport participation rates have been discovered elsewhere (Nielsen *et al.,* 2018), these findings demonstrate similar participation rates for boys and girls, but notable age-based differences. It could be argued that the reduction in pupils' participation in extracurricular sport from Year 7 to Year 10 is partly due to pressures outside of the PE figuration, for example the need for pupils to revise for other assessment-based subjects. However, these shifts could also partly be explained by pupils' habitus formation and attitudes towards PE as they discover and form more non-sporting habituses and balance other competing interests, contributing to opt-in to extracurricular sport is less personally and socially valued as pupils enter more figurations (Nielsen *et al.,* 2018), as articulated by Miss Turner:

> At the minute the Year 7s are really keen on trying new things and they are willing to try new sports that are coming up that they might want to see. They really, really want to get involved in extracurricular, you know when it comes to fixtures and stuff like that. But the Year 9s, 10s, and 11s will only ever do something if their friends are or if they were made to do it for GCSE PE moderation.

This quote emphasises the importance of peer group dynamics in pupils' decisions of whether to participate in opt-in extracurricular sport, a finding which may map into broader youth sport settings and partly explain decreasing participation trends (Sport England, 2022; Youth Sport Trust, 2023). As documented above, friendships became increasingly important for girls' engagement in core PE, a finding which maps into extracurricular sport participation at LTS. Therefore, it is argued that the tensions between differing friendship groups may influence girls' attitudes to PE and extracurricular sport, influence their behaviours within the PE figuration, and arguably in other sporting figurations. These findings are significant when considering widely documented concerns regarding girls' post-16 years dropout rates in sport and physical activity (Slater and Tiggemann, 2011; Sport England, 2022; Telford *et al.,* 2016) alongside evidence that boys' and girls' participation rates in PE and sport can decline during secondary school (Ofsted, 2023; Sport England, 2022; Youth Sport Trust, 2023).

Turning attention to teachers' pedagogical approaches and teacher-pupil relations within the extracurricular sport figuration, observations of lunchtime clubs, afterschool practices, and interschool sport competitions revealed that teachers tended to embody a differing teaching pedagogy to when delivering core or GCSE PE. Specifically, teachers rarely placed emphasis on pupil engagement, seldom set learning objectives, and often interacted with pupils in more relaxed, informal manners (i.e., laughing and joking, use of nicknames), often displaying high degrees of sociality with pupils, an observation qualified by Mr Walker:

> I think they [pupils] are encouraged to recognise that it is a slightly more relaxed atmosphere. They are not in a lesson. There are set expectations but there are not set objectives in terms of lesson objectives. So, there is a slightly more relaxed, informal atmosphere, which is a good thing. Expectations should still be high but there should be a difference in terms of it is less formal. Fixtures and practices, extracurricular school sport is slightly less formal than lesson time.

Citing the removal of constraining policy aims, those imposed under the NCPE (DfE, 2013), Mr Harris explains how less constrained and more informalised patterns of behaviour and social relations are enabled within the extracurricular sport figuration at LTS. In practice, shifts towards informality involved pupils and teachers engaging in more frequent and more personal conversations, teachers occasionally joining in sporting activities, and pupils, particularly boys, regularly bantering peers and teachers. These structural (i.e., opt-in nature) and experiential (i.e., teachers' pedagogical approaches) shifts can be seen as somewhat of an informalising process (Wouters, 2007), a process which enables less constrained and less formalised behaviours to be manifested, fostering a momentary process of functional democratisation whereby power differentials between teachers and pupils somewhat narrowed (Elias, 2000). These shifts appear indicative of what Wouters (2014, np) coined the 'formality-informality span', the 'synchronic gradient between formality and informality'. This concept proves useful explain differences of behaviour and etiquettes in more formal and informal social situations, specifically the structural, procedural, and social shifts from compulsory core

PE to voluntary extracurricular sport. Whilst teachers imposed less strict social constraints on pupils during extracurricular activities, pupils were expected to demonstrate behavioural and emotional self-restraints, evidencing how pupils were expected to navigate between appropriate degrees of formality and informality (Wouters, 2014).

In practice, structural and procedural shifts in the direction of informality were understood to enable more informalised teacher-pupil and pupil-peer relations to develop, as explained by Mrs Hanson:

> You will find that in extracurricular sport it is those [pupils] who want to be there, so they are more likely to be engaged. It is just that different relationship with you and the pupils. I think the way you are influences the way they interact as well. You are turning into more of a coach than a teacher, don't you? So, that influences how they interact with you and how they interact with each other.

Highlighting the voluntary nature of extracurricular sport, Mrs Hanson illustrates how PE teachers face less challenges fostering engagement than faced within core PE, a shift which enables teachers to embody a more relaxed role, such as that of a sports coach, enabling differing relationships to develop. These teacher-pupil relations are arguably strengthened through teachers and pupils sharing a sporting habitus, partly enabling close degrees of mutual identification and social cohesion to develop (Elias, 2001). Further demonstrating how increased opportunities for sociality provided for teachers and pupils to strengthen their relationships, Mr Wharfedale stated:

> You can really get a good rapport [with pupils]. So, I have a really good Year 11 football team who I get on with really well and they get on with each other really well and they communicate well with each other. They really do have a great attitude.

Supporting such sentiments, observations revealed that PE teachers tended to form closer relationships with pupils who regularly participated in extracurricular sport activities, especially those pupils who represented the school as part of a sports team. In practice, these perceived closer relations involved pupils and teachers regularly exchanging banter in all forms of PE, having regular conversations in the changing rooms and communal school spaces (i.e., corridors and outdoor areas), and demonstrating an awareness of each other's sporting and personal biographies beyond the school figuration, with such observations rarely captured amongst pupils who did not participate in extracurricular activities. These findings map to the DfE's (2023) suggestion that participation in a school sport team can help build a special cultural connection with the school, in this case with peers and PE teachers, rather than the school per se. However, this trend may be problematic given the aforementioned perceptions of teacher favouritism towards sporty pupils, a finding which will be developed in Chapter Seven when examining pupils' navigations of bullying.

Pupils' focus group responses provided further evidence that participation in extracurricular sport, particularly interschool sport fixtures, enables closer relationships to develop. Discussing peer group

dynamics in PE, Cooper (Year 11) stated, 'the football team and cricket team are a lot closer than those who are not fussed about PE and sport'. The perception that sporty boys form closer relations within the PE figuration can be explained by considering how these pupils share a sporting habitus and embody 'I'-identities which align with the dominant 'we'-identity of the PE figuration (Elias, 2001). These identity and emotion-laden considerations enable sporty pupils to form closer degrees of mutual identification, increased social cohesion, and subsequently form stronger social bonds and 'we-group' alliances than their less sporty peers, those who may embody a 'they'-identity within the PE figuration.

Whilst ethnographic insights revealed that PE teachers and pupils were able to form closer relationships during extracurricular activities, teachers were also cautious to avoid homogenising sporty pupils' relations and behaviours, as Mr Walker explained:

> There can be a different dynamic. I think the best way of summing it up would be if you are looking at the football dynamic compared to the cricket dynamic of boys' sport. The boys' mentality completely changes depending on the sport. So, if I was to take a group of students to football then they are more likely to be argumentative. Whereas if you take them to cricket, if there is a mistake they are less likely to say something or argue. Many reasons for that, cultural issues, the way they are brought up, the culture of the sport, the culture of their parents who have done the activity, the culture of what they see and hear on a daily basis from the Premier League or the cricket. The way they are supposed to act at those sorts of things.

Mr Walker's explanation provides a reminder young people's identities, social relations, and behavioural norms are shaped by the broader (and multiple) figurations of which they are enmeshed (Elias, 1978). Whilst it is difficult to determine the exact extent that such differing behaviours are rationally and intentionally informed, young people seem to affiliate varying degrees of acceptable modes of behaviour across differing social/sporting situations, which can arouse various emotional responses and identity-related meanings. Through deep immersion in such activities and observations of affiliated behaviours, it is possible to see how young people's performances of sporting identities shift across different forms of PE and extracurricular sport provisions.

The final discussion point in this chapter relates to teachers' and pupils' social relations and behaviours during minibus journeys to and from interschool sport fixtures and competitions. While such journeys were not considered before commencing fieldwork, observations captured when accompanying pupils and teachers to sports fixtures revealed how this unique aspect of PE provision enabled more informalised behaviours to be enacted and stronger social bonds to form. To contextualise the empirical findings to be presented, brief descriptions of the LTS minibus and journey social processes are provided. The minibus contained 16 seats, enabling 15 pupils to accompany a PE teacher to any given fixture or competition. Observations revealed that generally 13 pupils would travel with one PE teacher to sporting events, leaving two seats at the front of the

vehicle free, enabling me to attend fixtures. Of the 16 interschool fixtures/competitions I attended, journeys generally lasted 20-30 minutes, however on three occasions journeys lasted over an hour each way. During these journeys, pupils tended to be highly social, chatting in small groups and whole groups, with older cohorts often involving their PE teachers in conversations. Outside of the formal parameters of the school, ethnographic insights revealed that pupils and PE teachers engaged in more informalised behaviours and lines of communication than when situated on school grounds:

Fieldnote 6th April 2022 – Year 11 Boys Football Fixture

> As 10 boys entered the minibus they appeared in good spirits, laughing and joking amongst each other, bantering Nick for his choice of Crocs and socks. Whilst awaiting the arrival of two boys, four of the boys began quizzing Mr Wharfedale about which car he owned (as the minibus was parked in the staff carpark). When Mr Wharfedale pointed out his car, two of the boys blatantly stated, "that's a hairdresser car", followed by a burst of laughter. Whilst taking the mick out Mr Wharfedale's car, the boys referred to him as 'Wharfedale'. As the boys continued to laugh and joke about the car, Wharfedale laughed along before replying "shut up, you set of clowns". As the journey commencing the boys began playing music via a portable speaker, activated by their phones. The music contained several expletives, which the boys voiced when singing along. Wharfedale requested the boys to "tone it down" as the swearing became repetitive, however the boys continued singing. Approaching the school where the fixture was held, Wharfedale demanded the music was turned off and reminded the boys they were representing both him and LTS, emphasising that the boys should not let him down.

Such minibus journeys provided boys and their male PE teachers with an opportunity for a 'masculine breather' (Frydendal *et al.,* 2022; Nielsen *et al.,* 2014), with some boys occasionally engaging in banter which may be viewed as informal, sexist, or misogynistic. In this instance, boys use of banter, associating Mr Wharfedale's car with femininity, illustrates the de-routinising and more informalised experiences enabled between pupils and PE teachers who shared a sporting habitus (i.e., selected for a school team). As a 'sporting free zone' (Ottesen and Thing, 2019, p.54), the minibus often served as a space without traditional teacher-pupil obligations and demands, providing unique socialising opportunities which in turn appeared to mostly strengthen pupils' peer relations and teacher-pupil relations. Collectively, such circumstances enabled more collegiate homosocial bonding to take place than when boys were physically competing against each other in PE class.

Teachers' interview responses supported observations captured within the minibus, describing girls' behaviours during journeys to sports fixtures, Miss Jones stated:

> They all get giggly. Nobody wants to sit at the front, they all want to sit at the back, and that is even when you get to Year 10. They all get their phones out, they all take pictures, they are all having sweeties. They are all wanting to put something on the radio other than Radio 2, but the caretaker has always got it set to that. So, yeah. All having fun.

This account further illustrates how more informalised and de-routinised behaviours were enabled during minibus journeys, evidencing a loosening of behavioural restraints (i.e., use of mobile phones). Combining Miss Jones's report of girls' giggling with observations of boys' bantering, empirical insights demonstrate how minibus journeys often fostered a sense of camaraderie, collegiality, and togetherness between pupils, and teachers, who participated in interschool sports fixtures/competitions. Offering gendered comparison, Mr Walker stated:

> I have had the luxury of taking both boys and girls this year and the girls seem a lot quieter on the bus, although they still seem to be having fun. They still seem to interact with each other, but they do tend to be a lot calmer. The boys tend to be excitable, it could be nervous energy. It could be that they are amongst their peers in a confined space. The dynamics can change depending on the sport again.

Qualifying this reflection, observations revealed that girls rarely engaged in group-based singing, a practice regularly enacted by boys during bus journeys, with girls tending to use their mobile phones more than boys. These gendered behaviours and peer group dynamics largely encapsulated the gendered differences in girls' and boys' peer group dynamics in core PE. Arguably, these findings demonstrate how many sporty pupils embody a shared gendered habitus, whereby it becomes second nature for boys to be engage in banter and for girls to socialise in more in-group and discrete manners. The extent to which Elias's (2001) conception of habitus proves useful in explaining gendered differences in young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms, specifically their communication styles in PE, will be further applied Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

In sum, although extracurricular sport is considered synonymous with PE and widely viewed as an extension of compulsory provisions (Green, 2000; Penney and Harris, 1997; Wilkinson and Penney, 2016), at LTS there were notable structural and experiential nuances between core PE and extracurricular sport. Less constrained by nationalised policy (i.e., the NCPE), the extracurricular timetable was predominately guided by PE teachers' ideologies, sporting habituses, and professional socialisations (i.e., bespoke knowledge of pupil preference) (Green, 2000). Enabled by a lack of constraining policy and pressure from senior leadership, PE teachers largely delivered differing traditional (gendered) team-based games and aerobic experiences to boys and girls. Whilst extracurricular sport clubs and practices were designed to enable pupils to participate in a combination of recreational and competitive sports and active leisure pursuits, arguably the more informalised structures, less behavioural constraints, and additional socialising opportunities significantly altered teacher-pupil and pupil-peer relations within the broader PE figuration. As such, extracurricular activities offered pupils and teachers a unique opportunity to strengthen homosocial social bonds and develop closer mutual identification, which may be perceived by some of those not partaking or selected for the school team as favouritism within the broader PE figuration.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined the structures, social processes, and relationships which underpin and form the everyday realities of PE at LTS. This examination evidenced how PE a relatively unique secondary school subject, enabling subject-specific social processes, relationships, and behavioural norms to be manifested. PE provision grouped pupils by biological sex and in mixed-ability classes, which required changing into subject-specific attire before looks took place in a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces. Despite competition and active participation being central to teachers' pedagogical approaches, ethnographic insights revealed age-based and gendered nuances in what sports were delivered (KS4), how these activities were taught, and how pupils' peer group dynamics influenced delivery. In KS3 PE, teachers adopted a skill-based learning model, placing emphasis on pupils' holistic education and internalisation of expected behavioural and emotional self-restraints. In contrast, during KS4 PE lessons teachers adopted a more relaxed informalised approach, with activity provision partly guided by pupils' gendered sporting preferences. Ethnographic insights also revealed how pupils' peer relations become more fractious and tension-bound with age, with friendships often central to girls' peer group dynamics and differences in sporting competence proving important to boys' peer group dynamics. Finally, this chapter demonstrated how more informalised practices, behaviours, and relations were fostered within the extracurricular sport figuration, partly enabled through the removal of constraining national policy. Participation in extracurricular sport was found to enable closer social bonds and mutual identification between sporty pupils and PE teachers, which may manifest in perceived favouritism within other PE provisions. Collectively, these empirical findings demonstrate the advantage of examining all aspects of secondary PE provision, opposed to discussing PE in the round, as the discovered age-based, gendered, and situational nuances PE procedures, practices, teacher-pupil relations, and peer group dynamics reveal how PE provisions are complex and often fluctuated, enabling a more adequate understanding of secondary PE to be presented.

Analysing these empirical themes through a figurational lens, PE teachers' pedagogic approaches were experientially, as well as structurally informed, part enabled and constrained by age-based, gendered, and situational nuances in pupils' peer group dynamics and prevailing 'we'-identities and 'we-group' alliances. Conversely, pupils' behavioural norms, peer group dynamics and relations with PE teachers were part enable and constrained by PE teachers' pedagogic approaches. These interdependencies are not static or natural, but instead are constantly created, negotiated, and managed, partly due to pupils' impressionable habitus development and changing identity formations as they progress through secondary school. As such, many young people shaped and navigated their peer group status, behaviours, and emotional expressions in accordance with what they perceive to be the dominant 'I'- and 'we'-identities within the relatively unique PE figuration. In the boys PE figuration, with age, sporting competence and embodying a sporting habitus became increasingly important aspects of the dominant 'we'-identity. In contrast, in the girls PE figuration

sporting competence was coupled with in-group friendships, fostering divisions and tensions between friendship groups. Across both the boys PE and girls PE figurations, extracurricular sport and/or GCSE PE enabled pupils and teachers to form closer social bonds and develop increased mutual identification. During these more informalised PE practices, sporty pupils were able to create a sense of togetherness within their peer groups, strengthening the dominant 'we'-identity and 'we-group' alliances (Elias, 2001). However, an unintended consequence of the varying social processes across multiple forms of PE provision is the distinguishing between those sporty pupils with a dominant 'I-we'-identity and those not so sporty pupils with a less desirable 'they'-identity within the PE figuration. Collectively, this theoretically-informed analysis is now further applied when examining how banter manifested, was enabled and constrained, and viewed by pupils and teachers within the PE figuration at LTS.

Chapter Six - 'Boys are always bantering': The prevalence, manifestation and navigations of banter in PE

This chapter explores the prevalence, manifestation, and pupils' and PE teachers' navigations of banter in PE at LTS, aiming to provide more adequate understandings of one key aspect of young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms. Building upon findings presented in Chapter Five, this chapter demonstrates how PE provides pertinent subject-specific contexts from which to explore pupils' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of banter, particularly given the high degrees of sociality and de-routinising processes, procedures, and normalised practices offered. Firstly, it is necessary to present how banter is not an inherently masculinised form of communication, as depicted by some, and that girls and female PE teachers also engage in banter during PE lessons and extracurricular sport activities, albeit in differing ways to their male peers and colleagues. From here, the manifestation of banter within boys and girls PE is examined, shedding light in the gendered differences in pupils' and teachers' use of reciprocated forms of humour. Further exploring reciprocity, insights are provided of how pupils and PE teachers navigate between socially (re)established degrees of (in)appropriateness when bantering. Such discussions are significant as they illuminate the challenges in differentiating banter from verbal bullying in often competitive, highly social, and dynamic PE and school sport settings.

This exploration is timely and necessary as the (in)appropriateness of banter in English educational and sporting figurations is becoming increasingly contested (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Adams, 2020; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; DfE, 2023; Grey-Thompson, 2017; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020). Despite growing academic and political interest, to date, there is little empirically and/or theoretically grounded explanations of how secondary school pupils construct, experience, and navigate banter within PE and school sport settings. Moreover, whilst there is some evidence how young people (ages 11-16 years) conceptualise and practice banter in sporting figurations (Adams, 2020; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b), data tends to be drawn from male samples, with, to my knowledge, no evidence of how girls perceive, experience, and navigate banter in single-sex PE or school sport. Therefore, seeking to address empirical and theoretical gaps in knowledge concerning this topic, this chapter more adequately explains the role of banter within young people's peer group dynamics, empirical insights are combined with figurational concepts of habitus and identity (Elias, 1978, 2001), emotional expressions (Elias, 1987b; Goudsblom, 2016), and power relations (Elias, 1978; Elias and Scotson, 1994). This analytical approach provides a more adequate understanding of how subject-specific structures and practices, key social processes, and behavioural norms may manifest socially, psychologically, and emotionally significant performances of banter.

6.1 Pupils' conceptualisations and the prevalence of banter in PE

This thesis's aim to explore young people's peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within secondary PE through daily observations quickly revealed how banter was central to older pupils (Years 10 and 11) peer group dynamics and, some, teacher-pupil relations within the PE figuration at LTS. To ensure accuracy and trustworthiness, these observations were qualified against academic (Dynel, 2008; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Nichols, 2018), political (Grey-Thompson, 2017), and monolingual (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) definitions of banter, as detailed in Chapters One and Two. Such definitions did not feature in any behavioural policy documents at LTS. Therefore, although such definitions were used to determine observational findings, in order to view banter in the round, it was also necessary to gain pupils and teachers perceptions of banter, starting with the former.

As called for by Steer *et al.* (2020), during focus groups pupils were invited to define banter, which generated several age-based and gendered nuances. Many younger pupils were unfamiliar with the word banter, for instance Owen (Year 7) stated, 'I have never heard the word before'. Younger pupils' uncertainties were further captured when conducting participant recruitment for focus groups, after being briefed about the project, several of the girls asked me, 'Matt, what is banter?' [Research Diary Entry, 31st March 2022]. Whilst many younger pupils were unfamiliar and uncertain, others speculated what may constitute banter, as evidenced by Imogen and Chloe's (Year 7) discussion:

> Imogen: Is it like gossiping?
> Chloe: Or like rude arguments about people?
> Imogen: Or when you are gossiping and sort of chatting about other people.
> Chloe: It could be like spreading rumours, maybe... [short pause] banter seems like a bad word, like normally bad things. Some people can be like "that's rude" or some people can be like "that's hilarious".

Unable to provide a lexicon definition, Imogen and Chloe described forms of communication that carry more negative connotations (i.e., arguing, rumour spreading and gossiping), arguably demonstrating an awareness of how banter may be understood as humorous and/or offensive (Dynel, 2008; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Wardman, 2021). Despite many Year 7 pupils' uncertainties of what constituted banter, some boys provide provided definitions that closely aligned to academic, dictionary, and policy-based definitions (Dynel, 2008; Evans, 2021; Grey-Thompson, 2017). Sharing their understandings, Reece (Year 7) described banter as 'having a laugh and a joke with your friends', and Toby (Year 7) suggested it is 'making a joke about your friends'. Joking and friendship were features which mapped into many of their older peers' definitions, who often defined banter as reciprocated joking between friends, as evidenced by Alice (Year 10) who recognised banter as 'equal and probably with your friends, it's like joking'. PE teachers provided similar definitions, with Mr Walker describing banter as 'light-hearted jovial comments that everybody findings funny'. Taken

collectively, most older pupils' and PE teachers' conceptualisations of banter included three key characteristics: (a) humour, (b) reciprocation, and (c) friendship, a finding which is corroborated by Steer *et al.'s* (2020) research.

Irrespective of gender, when defining banter pupils and PE teachers placed importance on strong relationships, specifically friendships. Evidencing this shared perception, Olive (Year 7) noted, 'if you know the person then you trust that they know it is joke', Ellie (Year 10) suggested, 'it [banter] is with someone who you know and are friends with, sometimes it is offensive if not', and Shay (Year 11) explained, 'it [banter] only happens between people who are quite close, like people who know each other quite well. When it is not between friends that is when I'd say it is not banter as they wouldn't take it as a joke'. Collectively, these assertions illustrate pupils' acute awareness of the subjective nature of banter (Dynel, 2008; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Steer *et al.,* 2020), indicating that strong degrees of mutual identification, social bonds, and trust are required for banter to be received as (arguably) intended, that is to be funny. This finding maps to evidence captured from adult samples which have demonstrated how banter is often predicated on social closeness (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Lawless and Magrath, 2021). Here, however, pupil insights build upon such conclusions by demonstrating how a comment can be variously understood depending on the social bonds between those involved. As such, it appears that the key to banter is not only what is said, but who it is voiced by and to who it is intended to be heard. The extent to which friendly 'banter' may be interpreted as humorous, rather than offensive, may be tested when peer comments involve mockery, baiting, sledging, or jovially framed insults, which require the auditor to appraise intent. While social closeness may enable young people to appraise the intent behind a peer's comment and, therefore, attach meaning to a banterous comment, the type of banter delivered may also be significant, a finding which is now developed by considering the gendered nuances of pupils' social constructions of banter.

Discussions of how the 'jovial' or 'humorous' aspect of banter is socially constructed revealed gendered differences. Capturing boys' shared understandings of banter, Mickey (Year 10) stated, 'it's taking the piss out of your mates and then having a laugh about it', while Robbie (Year 10) considered banter to be 'insults that are like shaped into a joke'. References to mockery and humorous ridicule are present in discussions of how adult males performs banter in other sporting environments (Adams, 2020; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022), providing insights into the often outwardly offensive, yet inwardly humorous, nature of males' use of banter. At a conceptual level, the nature of mockery and/or humorously delivered insults may lead to subjective judgements of how reciprocation is achieved, given the often-one-way nature of such communication styles (O'Dwyer, 2022; Plester and Sayers, 2007). However, boys qualified that reciprocation is achieved through elicited laugher from the both the recipient and other overhearing members of a friendship group. In contrast, girls seldom referenced mockery or insults when socially constructing banter, instead denoting how banter should be manifested through inoffensive joking.

Capturing a shared sentiment, Ellie (Year 11) described banter as 'joking with your friends when it is not going to cause offence, and everyone finds it funny'. Comparisons of boys' and girls' descriptions revealed that boys' social constructions of banter seemed more blatant, quick witted and unashamedly offered, whereas girls' banter was vaguer and more cautiously considered. Pupils' conceptualisations of banter are now used to explore reflections on the prevalence of banter within and across the PE figuration at LTS.

The prevalence of banter in PE

During focus groups all pupils were asked, '*to what extent, if any, does banter take place during your PE lessons?,* to which many younger pupils responded, 'not at all really' (Toby, Year 7), whilst others suggested 'I don't think I have ever heard a joke in PE' (Owen, Year 7). In contrast, older pupils reported that often occurs during core PE lessons, with Mickey (Year 10) answering 'every lesson', Natalie (Year 11) reporting 'it [banter] happens a lot, like an awful lot', and Eleanor (Year 11) suggesting that banter 'happens all the time'. PE teachers corroborated these age-based findings, with Miss Jones acknowledging that banter is more prevalent 'in upper school than lower school, definitely', with Mr Wharfedale denoting how 'in Year 10 and 11 there is a lot [of banter] going on'. Building upon these appraisals, male PE teachers also noted how banter between teachers and pupils is highly prevalent during KS4 boys PE lessons, as Mr Wilkinson explained, 'they [older boys] do use it [banter] a lot, the staff probably do as well, you know'. In the main, observations supported these prevalence-based interview responses, whereby Year 7 pupils were rarely observed bantering peers or teachers, while Year 10 and 11 pupils, particularly boys, were regularly observed laughing, joking, and mocking their peers, and occasionally their teachers. These findings demonstrate that as young people progress through secondary school various forms of banter become increasingly prevalent in PE, building upon Mierzwinski and Velija's (2020b) exploration of KS3 boys' PE by demonstrating how prevalence trends continue in KS4, also providing insights into changes in peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations.

Through a figurational lens, age-based difference in banter's prevalence can be partly explained by the everyday social processes, pedagogical practices, and relationships detailed in Chapter Five. Briefly recalling these findings, PE teachers imposed strict social constraints on Year 7 pupils, attempting to accustom younger pupils with obedience centred behavioural self-restraints, reducing social constraints for older pupils (Elias, 2000). Shifts in the direction of informality within teachers' pedagogical approaches enabled more informalised behaviours, higher degrees of sociality, and greater emotional expression to be manifested (Wouters, 2007). These more informalised opportunities could be realised by the gradual strengthening of social bonds and degrees of mutual identification which pupils had developed over numerous years. The enabling of stronger social bonds and greater degrees of trust, alongside the development of a more shared appreciation of what banter is, appeared to provide key reasons for such age-based differences in prevalence. The increasing prevalence of banter can also be partly explained by young people's personal development

during secondary school, whereby they may become more socially and emotionally aware of their own and their peers' tolerance towards humour and offence, indicative of the individual civilising processes pupils experience during this impressionable development phase (Gillam and Gulløv, 2014; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b).

Despite prevalence-based interview responses been generally consistent, probing revealed some contradictions and nuances, specifically that banter may be a more gendered form of communication than initially reported. For instance, Mrs Hanson stated, 'the girls don't and the boys do, but only higher up in school'. Corroborating this perception, Natalie and Abbie (Year 10) articulated:

> Natalie: You tend to see the boys a lot more often doing the bantering.
> Abbie: Yeah. Usually, boys like have to. I am just saying this from a stereotypical point of view, but boys are more interactive and like to joke around quite a lot. Whereas girls are a lot more picky and I would say quite emotional, that's stereotypical. I know boys can be emotional too, but it depends on the person.

Supporting these suggestions, Fran (Year 10) stated, 'guys [males] just take banter because it is a guy thing to do, boys are always bantering and making fun out of each other'. Collectively, such insights into boys' and girls' gendered behavioural norms and emotional expression and self-restraints when bantering are supported by existing literature (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Lumsden, 2019; Whittle, Elder-Vass and Lumsden, 2019). Taken collectively, such findings provide insights into the gendered differences of boys' and girls' peer group dynamics and emotional expressions, with boys often collegiate and emotional stoic, whilst girls appear to be more segmented in their peer relations and more emotional expressive when interacting with their peers.

Through a figurational lens, these findings shed light on the gendered nuances of girls' and boys' shared gendered habitus and embodiment of gendered identities, the age they become more distinguishable, and the effects this can have on peer group dynamics (Elias, 2001). Recalling Chapter Three, the concept of shared, or collective, habitus proves useful when exploring how figurations of people can develop and embody the same views, tastes, and dispositions (Elias, 2001; Mennell, 1998). As demonstrated here, such sharedness can become nuances along the axis of gender, with emotional self-restraint and degrees of sociality became second nature for boys, and emotional expression and in-group interactions gradually became second nature for girls. For boys, this gendered habitus involved regularly bantering, enjoying reciprocated mick taking and/or jovial insults, and displaying emotional self-restraint when receiving banter. For girls, their gendered habitus involved more reserved forms of interaction within their peer groups, possibly demonstrating greater degrees of emotional self-restraint and exercising greater degrees of foresight compared with their male peers. This particular theoretically-informed analysis may partly explain why banter is becoming increasingly considered as a predominately male form of communication in sporting figurations (Adams, 2020; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Nichols, 2018). At LTS, gendered findings were too repeated, engrained, and

generalisable to denote them as gendered identity-based performances, and instead were more subconscious behaviours and deeply engrained behavioural norms. It is also important to note that these gendered findings may only be reported in PE figurations, which are often single-sex environments, and where gendered habituses are comparatively more enabled than other co-educational subjects. As such, this analysis demonstrates how the subject-specific figurational dynamics of secondary PE enable nuances in girls' and boys' gendered habituses to be made visible.

Examining different degrees of prevalence across the PE figuration, pupils were asked the extent to which banter occurred during co-educational GCSE PE lessons and extracurricular sport activities. Pupils consistently responded that banter rarely occurs during co-educational PE provisions, as evidenced by Jasmine and Aimee (Year 10):

> Jasmine: I would say there is a bit [of banter in GCSE PE] but not as much [as in core PE].
> Aimee: No, not as much.
> Jasmine: And it tends to be with the same gender.
> Aimee: Yes, it does. When it is towards the opposite gender then the person might get the joke but the person who it is towards doesn't and it can come out of context.

One possible reason for this contrast could relate to previously presented findings concerning girls and boys differing humour styles. Additionally, the co-educational structure of GCSE PE lessons lengthens the chains of interdependencies between girls and boys, which, in this instance, influences the extent to which normalised behaviours, such as banter, which would otherwise be sub-consciously reproduced in PE settings become more cautiously considered. Probing revealed that banter exchanged during co-educational PE lessons was more likely to be manifested within boys' peer groups that girls' peer groups, and rarely exchanged between boys and girls. Here, it is important to recall that approximately twice as many boys than girls were enrolled in GCSE PE at LTS, thus providing boys more opportunities to engage in homosocial interactions, such as banter, during these lessons. However, further qualifying why banter may be performed by boys more than girls during co-educational PE lessons, Jasmine (Year 10) noted, 'they [boys] seem, they are more confident with each other'. Citing confidence, Jasmine suggested that boys are more verbally expressive and less self-conscious of how a humorously intended comment may be received than their female peers, a finding corroborated by observations of co-educational GCSE PE practical lessons whereby boys were often bantering overtly, whilst girls were often more reserved in their peer group interactions:

Fieldnote 5th February 2022 – Year 10 GCSE PE Netball

> Before the first activity, Mr Wilkinson asked the group to pair-up to complete a passing and shooting drill. All pupils paired up with a same-sex peer, with all the boys using one court, and all the girls using a different court. Several of the boys commented that they were going to 'smash' other pairs, whilst the girls just proceeded to begin the activity. Mr

Wilkinson joined in with the boys due to odd numbers. After completing the drill, Mr Wilkinson organised two sex-segregated games. The boys were highly competitive, celebrating each point scored, and taking the mick out of each other when missing a shot. When Mr Wilkinson missed a shot, Finley (a highly competent pupil) shouted, "call yourself a PE teacher", which elicited laugher from sir and the boys. On the second court, the girls were more reserved in their interactions, only exchanging quiet comments amongst their teammates, with no comments directed towards Mr Wilkinson when he later joined in the girls' game.

Taken collectively, these findings reveal that the degree to which boys and girls socially interact and compete with/against each other during co-educational PE lessons largely enables and maintains the sex-segregated nature of banter. These findings also demonstrate how gendered behavioural norms and enactments a gendered habitus (i.e., boys engaging in banter) map across PE figurations, further demonstrating the deeply engrained nature of boys' learnt behaviours. Jasmine's suggestion of boys being more confident during co-educational PE lessons is supported by existing explorations of co-educational secondary PE, whereby girls have been found to be more anxious and self-aware of their gendered identities than their male peers (Hills and Croston, 2012; Metcalfe, 2018), as well as explorations of banter in broader mixed-sexed sporting environments, whereby banter has been found to be often initiated and more regularly manifested by males (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Clark, 2018). Whilst there is some evidence of males engaging in sexist and misogynist banter in mixed-sexed sport settings (Clark, 2018), no evidence of this was captured at LTS, perhaps due to the predominately sex-segregated nature of peer group interactions and the presence of a teacher to police such behaviours.

Gendered differences in the prevalence of banter extended into the extracurricular sport figuration at LTS. Observations of extracurricular sport clubs, practices, and interschool sport fixtures (including bus journeys) revealed that older boys and male PE teachers regularly joked, insulted, and mocked each other, whilst girls and female PE teachers were less frequently observed laughing and joking, and seldom overheard humorously mocking or insults one another. Such observations were supported by interview data, as several of the sporty boys – those who study GCSE PE and/or participate in extracurricular sport – suggested that banter is a highly prevalent and important form of communication within the established sports culture at LTS, as evidenced by Nick (Year 11):

> I can speak of my experiences on the school team [boys football team], we like to banter each other a lot, especially if we win games. But then if a couple of people have had a bad game, we like to take the mick out of them and stuff like that.

Nick's account reveals how sporty boys not only exchanged banter when celebrating a victory, but also as a way to soften the blow of a defeat, subsequently serving dual purposes, both of which aid degrees of social cohesion within the peer group (Budden *et al.,* 2022). Observations captured during extracurricular sport activities and bus journeys revealed that older boys would regularly make light of their peers' positive

performances, mock their peers' poor performances, and joke with their teachers when doing so. These insights reveal how reciprocated forms of mockery and/or ridicule were understood as way of expressive pride, group acceptance, and shame, manifested during periods of joy and disappointment, strengthening 'we-group' bonds between sporty boys and male PE teachers, findings which help explain why existing discussions of the normalised nature and importance of banter within male sporting environments (Budden *et al.,* 2022; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Nichols, 2018). Such prevalence and types of banter was rarely overheard when observing girls' extracurricular activities (including minibus journeys), whereby interactions tended to be less open and more in-group based. Moreover, none of the girls who participated in extracurricular school sports reported that banter was highly prevalent amongst their sport teams, with many indicating banter rarely took place. Subsequently, sporty boys appeared to view the PE figuration as an opportunity to engage in banter, to perhaps perform and test a 'male identity' and embraced such opportunities. In contrast, girls less regularly engaged in banter and the role of banter appeared to hold less value for girls' performance of desirable gendered identities and friendship group formations. Collectively, these findings demonstrate further gendered differences in pupils' peer group dynamics within the PE figuration.

Seeking to examine if prevalence-based findings were specific to their PE figuration, pupils were asked to report on the extent to which banter takes place in other core curricular subjects. Offering comparative data, Mickey (Year 10) stated:

> In PE, you probably do it [banter] a lot more, like you have more of a laugh in PE than in maths, because in maths you get told off a lot more. Whereas in PE it is a bit more free and they [PE teachers] don't tell you off as much.

Further evidencing how PE-specific figurational dynamics enable pupils to perform banter, Mark (Year 11) stated, 'I think PE is just more of a free place where you can speak at ease, it's good', before Nick (Year 11) added, 'because we are in the older years it is all about focusing on your work and getting stuff done, that is why PE is a bit of a break and a chance for people to enjoy it'. Enabled by PE teachers, older pupils viewed banter to provide cathartic values, serving as a form of academic escapism, with cathartic values of banter depicted in broader sports literature as a 'masculine breather' (Budden *et al.,* 2022; Frydendal *et al.,* 2022). With core PE arguably serving as a form of academic escapism, partly due to having no formal assessment, it appears that banter provided cathartic values for many older (particularly male) pupils providing a temporary release from other pressures within the school figuration. The boys' interview responses serve as useful reminders of PE's inherently social dynamic, whereby more de-routinised and informalised behaviours are structurally, relationally, and experientially enabled (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b). Such evidence also reveals how older boys seemingly entered PE expecting to have fun, have a laugh, and be allowed to banter each other, and in some instances their PE teachers, which further explain why banter was considered more

prevalent in PE than in other curricular subjects. As Elias and Dunning (1986) proposed in relation to sport, it appears that core PE provided many older pupils enabling opportunities to seek pleasurable excitement, often manifested through banter, which such quests for excitement arguably gendered given the presented findings and existing explorations (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b).

PE's relatively unique figurational dynamics were further emphasised when pupils were asked to reflect on the locations in which banter is most frequently manifested. Responses evidenced a combination of similarities and differences in the 'hotspots' for banter within boys and girls PE. Beginning with similarities, boys and girls reported that banter is highly prevalent during moments of non-active participation, specifically when waiting to participate in team-based games. Evidencing this, Annie (Year 10) noted, 'it's when we are all sitting in groups or like standing waiting to bat' and Iggy (Year 10) stated, 'if you are doing cricket, when you are waiting to bat at the side, then banter happens a lot because you are waiting for your bat'. Observations of KS4 core PE lessons supported these narratives, with older pupils often observed laughing and joking whilst queuing to bat, when watching a small-sided game, or awaiting instruction from their teacher. With pupils seeking entertaining whilst not actively participating, these findings suggest that young people may use banter as a form of boredom busting (Plester and Sayers, 2007; Ritchie, 2014), serving further cathartic functions. These findings also partly help the age-based nuances of the prevalence of banter within PE, as KS3 core PE lessons tended to follow a skill-based learning, rather than team-based games, approach, providing fewer moments of non-active participation and, therefore, less need for boredom busting behaviours.

Denoting gendered differences within such findings, many of the boys identified the changing room as a 'hotspot' for banter, a finding not replicated by the girls. Capturing sentiments shared by many older boys, Robbie (Year 10) suggested, 'it [banter] probably happens most in the changing rooms', and Nick (Year 11) reported, 'banter happens most in the changing rooms, I'd say'. These prevalence-based insights were supported by observations captured within the boys' changing room, whereby older boys were often overheard laughing and joking with their peers, with some sporty boys also regularly exchanging humorously framed comments with their PE teachers once changed and awaiting instruction. Identification of the changing rooms as a location in which banter is highly prevalent resonates with existing evidenced captured from adult male populations (Hugman, 2021; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). Girls were also asked to '*to what extent, if any, does banter take place within the PE changing rooms?'* Capturing a unanimous response, Eleanor (Year 11) stated, 'I wouldn't say it does at all, no'. Whilst the gendered nuances of pupils' changing room etiquettes will be examined in Chapter Eight, these findings provide further evidence of gendered differences in girls' and boys' peer group dynamics within the PE figuration, specifically that boys most boys are often highly social and collegiate during all periods of PE lessons, whilst girls tend to be more reserved and segmented in their friendship groups. Existing literature

helps explain why banter is rarely manifested in the girls' changing room, as there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that girls are often self-conscious and anxious when changing attire, concerned fuelled by fears of peer judgement (Fisette, 2011; Frydendal and Thing, 2020; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008), findings arguably explaining why girls may be more reserved within this unique school space.

Finally, pupils and PE teachers were asked to reflect on which pupils are most and least likely to engage in banter during PE. A finding consistent across all focus groups and interviews was that sporty pupils, those who are highly competent in a particular or multiple sport(s), were most likely to engage in banter within the PE figuration. Evidencing PE teachers' shared reflections, Mr Walker noted, 'usually speaking, it is the highly able, more competent pupils who tend to use it [banter]. Those who have been in a sporting environment for a long period of time'. Corroborating this finding, Freddie (Year 11) suggested, 'I would say your more sporty people do it [banter]', while Jasmine (Year 10) stated, 'the people who are better at sport banter all the time, the people who understand the sport might be more advanced than others'. In contrast, pupils who were perceived to lack sporting competence were reported to rarely engage in banter, as Sean (Year 10) indicated, 'the people who aren't good at sport probably don't say as much'. In the main, observations of boys and girls core PE lessons supported this narrative, with sporty pupils – those who studies GCSE PE or regularly represented the school in interschool sport fixtures/competitions – were frequently observed exchanging humorous comments, whilst less-sporty pupils – those who tended to avoid the performance spotlight – were rarely observed initiating banter with their peers or PE teachers.

Through a figurational lens, these findings evidence how sporty pupils, who embody 'I'-identities highly valued within the dominant 'we'-identity within the PE figuration, may experience greater self-confidence and freedom of expression than their less-competent peers, who may embody a 'they'-identity (Elias, 2001). As sporting competence was highly valued within the prevailing 'we' identity at LTS, pupils who display competence appear to be more willing to exploit the available socialising opportunities to banter during PE lessons. Arguably, these findings demonstrate the value of banter within older pupils', particularly boys', peer group dynamics, whereby delivering banter may be a fruitful tactic to promote ones' 'I'-identity and show embodiment of desirable 'we'-identity by making peers and/or PE teachers laugh through a humorously framed comment. Moreover, aware that banter is often enabled within the PE figuration, sporty pupils could deliver humorously framed comments without fear of repercussions, which may occur within classroom-based lessons. Furthermore, as indicated by Mr Walker, engaging in banter may be something that has become normalised through boys' participation in other sporting pursuits, evidencing how sporty boys become accustom with banter across multiple figurations, indicative of a shared sporting habitus (Elias, 2001; Green, 2002).

In sum, this section has shed light on young people's conceptualisations and the prevalence of banter within the PE figuration at LTS. Evidence has revealed age-based and gendered nuances in how young people understand the term 'banter', which is significant as the term is often used as a generic term which incapsulates various forms of humour, including joking, ridicule, mockery, baiting, sledging, goading, and insults. Through a figurational lens, the prevalence-based findings can be explained by considering the nuanced structures, pedagogic approaches, and relationships between the KS3 and KS4 PE figurations at LTS. By placing pupils and PE teachers in their figurations, this section has revealed how fluctuating teacher-pupil, and pupil-peer relationships partly enable and constrain the age-based differences in the prevalence of banter. In positions of increased responsibility, authority, and power, PE teachers' pedagogic practices are central to the enabling and constraining of banter within the PE figuration. Adopting more informalised less-constraining approaches when teaching older pupils, PE teachers' pedagogic practices part explain why banter in PE is more prevalent amongst older pupils. This finding can also be explained by pupils increased levels of mutual identification and stronger degrees of social cohesion that they establish as they progress through secondary school, enabling older pupils to understand their peer's sense of humour and, therefore, reciprocate playful banter. Involvement in single-sex PE lessons during this impressionable phase of habitus development is found to foster gendered nuances in how pupils conceptualise banter, how regularly they voice banterous comments, and why they do so, to which further attention is now paid.

6.2 The manifestation and functions of banter in PE

This section focuses on how banter was manifested, examining the social, psychological, and emotion-laden functions of banter within pupils' peer group dynamics and identity management within the PE figuration at LTS. Given the gendered nuances in how pupils conceptualised and their likelihood of using banter, discussions concerning how banter manifested within boys and girls PE figuration are presented separately. However, comparisons will be offered, demonstrating gendered similarities and differences of how pupils and PE teachers enacted banter. This focus on enactment is then placed into the context of banters impacts on young people's peer group dynamics within and across the PE figuration.

Beginning with how banter manifested in boys core PE, observations revealed that performative errors or overzealous celebrations often served as primary catalysts for peer mockery and jovially framed insults. Such incidents were most frequently observed during Year 10 and 11 lessons when dodgeball, Danish longball, and football – all competitive team-based games – were delivered. Such forms of banter took the form of boys laughing at a peer's failure, questioning their peer's ability, and mimicking a performative error, with comments including: 'you couldn't catch a cold', 'my nan could have scored that', and 'the "B" team is over there'. Such comments were often directed towards performing pupils by observing pupils, a regularly opportunity enabled by the team-based games pedagogic model adopted (Mawer, 2014). Corroborating these

observations, Thomas (Year 10) noted, 'it is just mistakes, isn't it? Just silly little things', whilst Brad (Year 10) elaborated:

> Say like we were doing football earlier and someone made a mistake or something, one of your mates might say something and you would say something back, and that is where the banter would start. Maybe you have missed a penalty, you have a laugh about them missing a sitter, then they would say something back.

Echoing such sentiments, Mr Walker stated, 'you will find that students are quick to take the mick out of each other if someone has done something wrong in that particular activity'. The extent to which such commentary turned into banter was not solely peer group based, but also extended into teacher-pupil relations, as Mr Walker further explained:

> As they [boys] get older, they have got more confident, and I like to think that my lessons are relaxed enough where they can do that [direct banter towards me]. If I make a mistake and the kids give me grief for it, then fair enough. But I like to make sure they know where the line is and if it stays within PE and doesn't spill out into any other lessons then I am more than happy with that.

Such accounts demonstrate the relatively inclusive nature of banter in the sense that regardless of status (i.e., pupil or teacher) performative errors were often greeted with humorously framed insults or mockery during KS4 boys PE lessons. However, Mr Walker's account evidence how such opportunities may be more enabled in PE and would, perhaps, not be as well received in other curricular subjects. Collectively, these insights demonstrate how enabled and normalised peer commentary was often quick-witted, episodic and performance-related, evoking replies that led to the manifestation of banter. The extent that such normalisation and manifestation could lead to less inclusive comments and replies, detrimental impacts on social relations and effect peer group dynamics is further detailed in Chapter Seven.

Whilst its legitimacy partially explains the normalising of banter in KS4 boys PE, it does not explain why banter appeared to hold significant social value within boys' peer groups within the PE figuration. Observations revealed that many older boys, and their male PE teachers, regularly actively involved themselves in performance-related banter, whether than be as a speaker, active observer (i.e., laughing along or jeering), or recipient. In practice, this involved boys and teachers making humorously framed comments, smiling, and laughing upon hearing performance-based comments, and/or providing more active non-verbal signs of appreciation (i.e., fist-bumps, high-fives, applauding), indicating that banter was highly valued within boys PE. Such behaviours were particularly prevalent when football was delivered, with a specific example now provided:

Fieldnote 20th January 2022 – Year 11 Boys Football

> Due to space constraints in the gymnasium, the 25 boys were divided into five teams, with two teams competing at once. During the first game, as Jason prepared to take a freekick, a spectating pupil, sitting on the outer benches, shouted, "he couldn't hit a barn door that lad", which elicited laugher from the rest of the spectating boys as Jason missed the target. Several other spectating pupils then made comments about Jason's footballing ability. Shortly after a ripple of performance-based comments, Jason scored a goal and ran around the entire gymnasium with his finger to his lip, as if to silence his peers. Mr Wharfedale and many of the boys laughed and applauded Jason's celebration, with his teammates giving him fist-bumps and pats on the back. During the next game one of the boys was coined "Karius" by his teammates after conceding a "howler" [a term used by the boys for a bad mistake]. By the end of the lesson many of the boys had been given nicknames of professional footballers who are famous for "having a mare". Several members of the football team were now addressing Mr Wharfedale as "Howard", with Nick explaining to me that this was due to Sir's poor refereeing ability and receding hairline, comparing him to the professional referee, Howard Webb.

Capturing the performative, pantomimic, and highly social nature of KS4 boys core PE lessons, such observations evidence how some pupils opted to question their peer's abilities preceding an action (i.e., taking a freekick), make fun of their peer's sporting failures following an action, and used non-verbal forms of communication (i.e., hand gestures) to acknowledge and/or reciprocate banter. Although such interactions could be considered negatively loaded, as questioning a peer's capabilities and/or highlight a performative error could be viewed as forms of character defamation (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Wardman, 2021), such forms of banter appeared to serve inclusionary homosocial bonding purposes (Budden *et al.,* 2022; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Nichols, 2018; Robinson and Anderson, 2022). Indeed, during team-based games pupils and teachers were able to perform certain behaviours (i.e., banter or sledging) in a socially accepted, and meaningful manner, serving prosocial functions. It is difficult to determine the extent that pupils' banter was driven by this function, or the cathartic experiences and form of academic escapism banter offered or involved elements of both. What was clearer was that the outcomes of banter, which served to strengthen social cohesion between older boys and their PE teachers (Budden *et al.,* 2022; Hugman, 2021; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Nichols, 2018) in a manner arguably less enabled in other curricular subjects. This differentiation was further confirmed by Mr Walker admission that there was an unwritten social contract between boys and male PE teachers that performance-related peer commentary and the use of nicknames should remain within the PE figuration. Collectively, these findings further evidence how normalised PE procedures and practices provided pupils and teachers with socially enabling, de-routinising and cathartic experiences whereby stronger relationships and closer bonds could develop.

Whilst banter in boys PE was most often initiated by spectating pupils, perhaps as a form of boredom busting, boys were also observed directing outwardly humorous forms of peer commentary to their peers when actively participating in competitive team-based games. Understood as form of sledging (Duncan, 2019;

Joseph and Cramer, 2011), some sporty boys regularly directed performance-related comments to their fellow sporty peers positioned on opposing teams. In such instances, boys questioned their opponent's physical capabilities and sporting mentalities, serving as a verbal extension of physical competition. Duncan (2019) reports that the aims of sledging are to be funny whilst distracting an opponent, and distraction was at the forefront of some boys' considerations when exchanging banter in PE, as explained by Sean (Year 10):

> Say you are doing dodgeball, I would always try and wind up my mates on the other team because it is like more intense, not more intense, but in a game you might want to try and sort of offend your friends.

Several older boys also noted how they may banter their friends to add extra competitiveness or to gain a competitive advantage, with sledging serving as an accessible, legitimate and effective tactic of engaging, distracting or overcoming peers. It should be noted that observed revealed that boys tended to only sledge peers who displayed similar levels of sporting competence to them, rarely, if ever, directing performance-related sledging towards less-sporty pupils, who themselves rarely delivered in performance-related banter. This finding can be partly explained by the fact that the stated intention of boys sledging was to gain an advantage, a tactic sporty boys rarely required over less-competent peers. Male PE teachers also used sledging as a tactic, as explained by Mr Wilkinson:

> I think it's [sledging] part of sport, you know. Sometimes using banter as a way of encouraging or you know, for example if a ball goes really high in the air you, you might say "he is going to drop it. He is going to drop it". It's just a bit of banter.

Seeming aware of its connotations and effects, male PE teachers were occasionally observed sledging sporty boys in an attempt to motivate them to re-engage in lessons which may have become too easy and mundane for them, a regular occurrence and strategy more utilised in mixed-ability class structures. Like boys, male PE teachers seldomly sledged less competent boys, instead using praise driven motivational tactics. Through a figurational lens, male PE teachers use of this tactic appeared to gain its effect by momentarily questioning sporty boys' 'I'-identities in relation to the dominant 'we'-sporting identity, which was highly valued in the boys PE figuration (Elias, 2001). By adopting this tactic, PE teachers appeared to understand who boys would internalise and react to such comments, a reaction seemingly driven by their wish to prove their ability to withstand such challenges and pressures, proving their sporting competence and sporting mentality when doing so. The fact that teachers did not put such a challenge or pressure onto less competent pupils demonstrates their understandings of sledging's more negative effects on engagement and its potential to expose a more desirable 'they'-identity. Whilst empathetic in this sense, male teachers more selective use of amicable sledging could contribute to perceptions of teacher favouritism towards sporty pupils, as evidenced in Chapter Five, which would seem part of a 'we-group' alliance, something that is not attainable by 'they-group' members.

Extending evidence of how performance-related banter served identity-based purposes, some boys appeared to use this form of banter to navigate their positioning within the social hierarchy. When discussing how banter manifested in core PE, Nick (Year 11) described how:

> It's just joking around, saying you played bad, I thought you were good, I thought you were this, I thought you were that. Especially with the ones who like to give it large before the game, you know who I am on about [nudges Mark who was sat next to him]. Mr Wharfedale, we like to banter him because he gives it all large and then when he messes up it makes him look like a clown.

Observations supported Nick's account, with sporty boys often the centre of banterous interactions either as orators or auditors during sporting pursuits and pre- and post-activity when inn the changing rooms. The use of non-confrontational banter as a mechanism of questioning a peer's ability before, during, or after participation appears to be a discrete means of challenging a peer's perceived inflated 'I'-identity against the prevailing 'we'-identity (Elias, 2001). In this sense, whilst sporty boys were able to parade their highly valued sporting identity within KS4 boys PE figuration, their sporty peers often used performance-related banter as a method of retaining parity within the social hierarchy. The use of banter for this purpose may partly explain why less-competent boys were rarely observed or reported to engage in banter during core PE lessons. Arguably, less-competent boys were aware that their 'I'-identity was closely aligned to a socially undesirable 'they'-identity within the PE figuration. Therefore, they adopted more suitably passive roles in both physical participation and verbal communications, seeking to avoid performance-related mockery or ridicule from their more competent, and more socially powerful, sporty peers. This type of rationalising, alongside a formed or forming sporting (or not sporting) habitus, may explain the prevalence differential between sporty boys and their less-competent peers when it comes to sledging and other forms of banter within the PE figuration.

The manifestation of banter in girls PE

In contrast to boys PE, observations of girls PE generated less evidence of publicly voiced performance-related banter between pupils and PE teachers. Instead, observations revealed that humorously framed comments were less confidently spoken and were manifested within smaller friendship groups, often involving between four and six girls. As girls' interactions tended to be in-group based, rather than whole class based, it was often difficult to overhear what was discussed. Therefore, capturing exactly what most frequently served as the catalyst for banter during girls PE lessons proved challenging. However, although often inaudible, observations revealed that girls friendship-based conversations often elicited laugher and further discussions indicated that such group-based dialogues may have included forms of banter. Such an assumption was supported by focus group responses, with Natalie (Year 10) stating, 'it [banter] pretty much only happens between friends and within friendship groups', Eleanor (Year 11) noting, 'in PE banter is mostly between your friends. You don't say it with people who you aren't really friends with', and Jasmine (Year 10)

reiterating, 'I think it's [banter] within friendship groups, wherever the friendship group goes then there it is'. It was particularly important for Year 10 and Year 11 girls whose friendship-based groupings were observed carrying increased social and emotional significance. This consensus and trend not only maps to how girls conceptualised banter, but also how they placed much importance on being grouped with their friends when in the girls PE figuration, as discussed in Chapter Five. In this sense, PE teachers' awareness and enabling of girls self-selecting their peer groups, alongside older girls' strong preferences to do so, contributed to segmented groups of girls who could often share in-group comments, accompanied with laughter, in a much more discrete manner than boys more openly performed commentary.

Despite gendered differences in the networks in which banter was manifested, girls provided similar examples to their male peers regarding the content of banter during PE lessons, stating that humorously framed comments are often performance related. Evidencing this, Olive (Year 7) stated, 'you can say, especially in athletics, "I am going to beat you and I am going to go faster than you [laughs]" it's like a joke because it doesn't even matter'. Reiterating this narrative, Imogen (Year 7) explained:

> Sometimes I hear people like do it [banter]. Like if someone did, if we were doing a jumping thing and someone did a small jump then someone might be talking to their friends and say, "that isn't very good" and "they are not very good at jumping". That would be like banter.

Recalling how several Year 7 girls conceptualised banter as a gossip-based or negatively loaded form of communication, these accounts imply that younger girls may exchange performance-related comments, that their friends find funny, which are centred upon a peer's sporting (in)adequacy, who is outside of their close-knit friendship group. Imogen's assertion implies that girls may exchange banter during moments of non-active participation, phases of PE lessons in which they can observe their peers' performances whilst not actively taking part themselves. Older girls provided vague responses regarding the topics of banter in PE, Eleanor (Year 11) stated, 'in sport you are mostly making it [banter] about the sport, about the sport you are playing'. Whilst revealing how banter may be performance related, when probed girls failed to provide more specific examples of banter exchanged within PE lessons or extracurricular sport activities. Whilst perceived by some girls as banter, such forms of in-group peer commentary are more closely aligned in exclusionary behaviours (Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Rivers and Ross, 2021), such as gossip (Elias and Scotson, 1994), which are arguably less humorously intended.

Whilst unable or unwilling to provide specific examples of banter manifested, perhaps due to attempted humorous comments often been derogatory in nature, several older girls were more forthcoming when discussing the functions of banter during PE lessons. Discussing why girls may engage in banter during PE, Abbie (Year 10) stated, 'I think it can be quite motivating, almost. Like if someone is making a joke about it, it makes you want to do better, if they are saying they are going to beat you'. Qualifying how banter may

foster competition and increase participation, Lydia (Year 10) explained, 'it [banter] makes it [PE] like more fun and makes you want to do sport'. Seemingly aware that performance-related banter may motivate some girls to participate in PE, Miss Jones explained why she uses banter during girls PE lessons:

> To some extent I would use banter to engage students and encourage them to participate and obviously we [female PE teachers] know a lot more about them because you have that time to have those conversations with the girls rather than in a classroom setting. So, you can use your own personality if you want to put it under the banter bracket to try and engage them and motivate them, to put a smile on their face.

When probed, Miss Jones reflected on how older girls generally respond to teacher-initiated banter in PE:

> Nine times out of ten they love it, they absolutely love it. Not in a way that somebody else would hear to make fun out of them. It is usually in a one-on-one type of situation where I might say something and it gets them going.

Combined, these assertions reveal how and why female PE teachers may use subtle forms of banter to re-engage girls in PE, also explaining why teacher-pupil banter was rarely overheard when observing girls PE lessons. Although Miss Jones shared her male colleagues' perceptions that banter serves a fruitful motivational tactic, the methods in which PE teachers manifested banter with boys and girls were different. Noting how banter is understood as an enjoyable and affectionate form of communication Miss Jones's first quote implies that female teachers require strong degrees of mutual identification and social cohesion with girls before initiating performance-related banter, a finding not stressed by male PE teachers. The data also illustrates how female PE teachers more carefully consider their use of banter in girls PE, cautious to ensure that their comments are only heard by a particular pupil, rather than the whole group as discovered in boys PE. Perhaps one reason for this is teachers' knowledge of the fractious nature of girls', particularly older girls, peer group dynamics and the belief that performance-related banter may become weaponised if overheard by other girls (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Wardman, 2021). Arguably, these findings demonstrate female PE teachers' awareness of girls heightened sensitivities and concerns of peer judgement, which are well document in the existing literature (Fisette, 2011; Hills, 2007; Hills and Croston, 2012), and less tolerant attitudes towards teachers mocking and/or questioning their sporting competence. Such concerns were not voiced by male PE teachers who, on occasion, openly encouraged older boys to engage in performance-related and humorously-framed forms peer commentary. Arguably, these gendered differences in how PE teachers utilised banter within single-sex PE lessons were informed by their own experiences of banter in PE, their on-the-job socialisation, and their bespoke knowledge of pupils' gendered peer group dynamics.

Through a figurational lens, these discovered gendered similarities and differences in pupils' and PE teachers' use of banter within the PE figuration provide insights into the gendered nuances of young people's identity management in PE and sport settings. As banter was most frequently centred upon sporting mishaps or performative failures, it is argued that many young people find their peers' performative errors funny or

something to make fun out of, initiating subtle forms of ridicule or 'gentle ribbing' (Grey-Thompson, 2017, p.16) to highlight their friend's momentary deviation from the subject-specific expectations and desirable identities. The presented findings suggest that the ability to make others laugh whilst highlighting someone else's failure may serve as a fruitful tactic for young people to strengthen their 'I'-identity and their position within the dominant 'we-group' (Elias, 2001). In boys PE, for the pupils whom banter is being directed towards, the ability to brush off (via laughing) a performative-related comment and to return a quick-witted replied or enact a funny gesture appeared important for maintaining their social status within the prevailing 'we-groups' (Elias, 2001). Contrastingly, in girls PE banter generally manifested within small friendship groups, arguably strengthening some girls' 'we-group' alliances, whilst potentially fostering further divisions between friendship groups due to the behind the hand nature of banter. PE teachers appeared privy to these social and psychological functions of banter in boys and girls PE, initiating banter within pupils in nuanced ways. The extent to which these functions of banter impacted upon young people's peer group dynamics and identity management strategies in PE are now discussed by exploring the role of self-deprecative humour.

Self-deprecative humour in PE

Thus far ethnographic insights have revealed several gendered similarities and differences in how banter was manifested in girls and boys PE at LTS. Although discussions have mostly centred upon interactions initiated by a pupil or teacher, pupils were also observed and reported initiating banter focused on their own performative failures or perceived inadequacies, representing forms of self-deprecation. Denoting such methods, self-deprecative humour is understood to provide a cushioning effect for the speaker by making light of one's own inabilities (Andeweg *et al.,* 2011; Hunter, Fox and Jones, 2016; Wardman, 2021). Although no questions regarding self-deprecation were asked during focus groups, several of the older pupils referred to self-directed humour when discussing how banter is manifested in PE. For example, Lucy (Year 11) suggested, 'a lot of the time you can just make a joke about yourself', and Ellie (Year 10) noted, 'you can make a joke about yourself. It's good because if you are laughing in PE and you make a mistake then you can kind of laugh it off and with your friends then it is not as bad'. The girls' articulations evidence that some young people may opt to humorously self-deprecate following a performative error, an act which may be embarrassing for some young people, with joking within their peer group understood as a defence mechanism against feelings of embarrassment and shame. Older boys also voiced similar sentiments, with Freddie and Elliot (Year 11) suggesting:

> Freddie: I think it is a way out. Just having a laugh and getting told off because they are not good at sport. So, it hides the fact that they are not good at sports if they are just messing about and making jokes about themselves.
> Elliot: It shows that they don't care and no one can say anything about it [their ability].

Such discussions evidence some older pupils' acute awareness of how self-deprecation may demonstrate emotional stability and resilience, a desirable, and perhaps necessary, character trait within the PE figuration. In one sense, a young person making light of their own inadequacies, real or perceived, contradicts the striving to embody a sporting habitus affiliated with the prevailing 'we'-identity within the PE figuration (Nielsen and Thing, 2019a). In another sense, pupils may use self-depreciation as a form of 'I'-identity protection by avoiding arguably more identity-threatening peer commentary associating their performance with an undesirable 'they'-identity by better controlling the narrative and showing emotional resilience. In doing so, pre-empting such peer comments may serve as a means of bypassing feelings of shame induced by a performative failure in PE (Scheff, 2014; Frydendal and Thing, 2020). Arguably, pupils would not be required to self-deprecate so overtly in any other curricular subject, given the highly visible nature of competence within PE and the high degrees of sociality enabled through everyday subject-specific procedures and practices. The need to adopt this form of humour can be furthered explained when considering that pupils as progressing through a particularly impressionable phase of their identity and habitus development, in search of social acceptance within their peer group and as a form of self-protection. Furthermore, seemingly offering twenty-first century stoicism, older pupils use of self-deprecative humour for this purpose arguably evidences their acute awareness of 'I'-, 'we'-, and 'they'-identities and the importance of preserving desirable 'I-we'-identities (Frydendal and Thing, 2019a). One reason why such self-preservation tactics were seldom observed or reported by younger pupils may be due to the required levels of social intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional resilience needed.

In sum, the findings presented in this section have detailed how young people and PE teachers utilise various forms of banter within the PE figuration. In boys PE, performative errors during competitive team-based often served as the catalyst for banter between pupils, whilst male PE teachers' also utilised forms of sledging to motivate the most competent sports performers. In girls PE, banter was often manifested within smaller friendship groups, making it difficult to understand the nature of humorously framed comments. Female PE teachers also utilised more subtle lines of communication when bantering with girls, evidencing gendered nuances in how banter was manifested across the PE figuration at LTS. finding consistent across the PE figuration was pupils utilising self-deprecative humour as a method of preserving their 'I' identity and social status within the dominant 'we-group' (Elias, 2001). Collectively, these findings evidence how banter is performed in boys and girls PE, addressing a gap in the literature identified in Chapter Two. Analysis of such findings also demonstrates how banter serves a combination of social, psychological, and emotional-laden functions for young people in educational and sporting environments. Whilst largely normalised within the PE figuration at LTS, how banter was deemed (in)appropriate in PE and extracurricular sport is now examined.

6.3 Appraising and navigating the (in)appropriateness of banter in PE

The findings presented thus far have demonstrated that banter was highly prevalent, largely normalised, and generally legitimised within the PE figuration at LTS. Despite these findings, pupils and teachers were cautious to qualify how the (in)appropriateness of banter is socially constructed and often assessed upon a metaphorical line of acceptability. This recognition is pertinent given growing academic and political concerns of how the term 'banter' may be used as an excuse for verbal bullying (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; DfE, 2023; Evans, 2021; Grey-Thompson, 2017; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022; Steer *et al.,* 2020), racism and racial microaggressions (Burdsey, 2013; Hylton, 2018), gender discrimination and sexism (Adams, 2020; Clark, 2018; Nichols, 2018), and homophobia (Phipps, 2020; Lawless and Magrath, 2021). As debates surrounding the 'line of acceptability' of banter intensify, scholars have argued that the (in)appropriateness of banter becomes blurred in sporting figurations, such as PE, given how banter is often normalised, legitimised, and highly prevalent (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Hickey and Roderick, 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). To date, however, there is little evidence of how pupils and PE teachers identify and navigate (in)appropriate banter in PE and school sport settings, an empirical gap this section aims to address. This chapter's focus is also timely considering the *Keeping Children Safe in Education* report, which details how 'downplaying certain behaviours as "just banter", or "part of growing up", or "boys being boys" can lead to a culture of unacceptable behaviours' (DfE, 2023, p.10). Whilst this section provides valuable ethnographic insights and theoretically underpinned analyses of how pupils and teachers identify and navigate banter upon lines of acceptability, from the outset it is important to quality that across the entire data set there was no evidence of banter, or other verbal communications, containing any homophobic or racist undertones. Therefore, when appraising the (in)appropriateness of banter within the PE figuration discussion focuses on blurred lines between banter and verbal bullying.

Considering the (in)appropriateness of banter, observations, particularly those captured from older cohorts, revealed that PE teachers often allowed pupils to exchange performance-related peer commentary under the condition that comments appeared funny and not damaging, and that pupils' participation levels remained consistently high. Interview responses revealed a shared perception that the (in)appropriateness of banter is assessed upon a metaphorical line of acceptability, as denoted by Mr Wharfedale:

> In Year 10 and 11 [PE lessons] there is a lot going on. Like in football lessons, you hear a lot. Like in Danish longball with the Year 10s today, there was quite a lot flying around then. There is a very fine line between it sometimes, but if it's light-hearted, it's fun and people enjoy it, I don't mind it at all. A bit of competitiveness adds a bit of interest.

Understood as an extension of physical competition, there was a shared belief amongst pupils and PE teachers that banter fosters and is a part of competition, sociality, and emotional expression, which collectively contributed to banter being accepted. However, this acceptance was dependent on comments being well-

intended and humorous to all, which meant that banter could often be predicated upon a fine line of acceptability (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020). However, PE teachers were uncertain where the metaphorical line is situation as, when probed, Mr Harris stated, 'I think it is a real grey area in sport in general, not just in school. Pupils shared such uncertainty, as Natalie suggested, 'I think banter is something to skirt around, it is fine to tell jokes, but you need to know where the point is'. Further probing revealed that the (in)appropriateness of banter fluctuates depending on the interdependencies and social bonds between those involved and the social situation in which comments are voiced. Discussing the line of acceptability, Natalie (Year 10) contented that 'it depends contextually', and Abbie (Year 10) expressed, 'I feel like there is definitely, definitely a line, but I think it depends on the person and the friendship group as to where the line is'. Teachers shared such perceptions as Mr Wharfedale noted, 'it's hard. It depends on the comment, and it depends on the situation'. These responses reveal how pupils' and teachers' appraisals of (in)appropriateness are dependent on the strength of relationships between those involved (i.e., speaker, auditor, audience). Buglass *et al.* (2020) and Lawless and Magrath (2021) shared similar findings, respectively noting how banter is assessed upon the rules of engagement of the audience and that banter should be viewed as something fluid given the complexities of language and interpretation. Within competitive PE lessons, these situation-specific assessments are likely to give rise to subjective judgements regarding what is (in)appropriate, as reported by Eleanor and Beatrice (Year 11):

> Eleanor: People must think we are horrible to each other, but we are not.
> Beatrice: Because some of the stuff we say, some other people might not say it to their friends but that is just their personalities together.

Highlighting the subjective nature of humour (Billig, 2005; Buglass *et al.,* 2020), the social and emotional significance of banter may only be understood by those directly involved, making it difficult for peers and teachers to assess (in)appropriateness. As Beatrice alludes, the ambiguous and largely individualistic nature of humour means that the (in)appropriateness of banter is something that is socially constructed on a micro level, between small groups of interdependent individuals (i.e., friends), rather than on a meso level (i.e., a PE class or a school) or macro level (i.e., regional or national). In this sense, the (in)appropriateness of banter is predicated upon the shared knowledge of learned barriers, the strength of a relationship, as well as broader social climates (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman *et al.,* 2022). Combined, these social, psychological and emotion-laden considerations help explain why young people and teachers believe that banter should only be exchanged between friends or, at the very least, between individuals who have high degrees of mutual identification and well-established social bonds. These findings may also be significant to young people's broader peer group dynamics, as pupils who lack mutual identification and social closeness may interpret humorously intended comments as offensive and/or hurtful.

Despite such complexities and relational fluctuations in judgements of the (in)appropriateness of banter, PE teachers and pupils were more prescribed in identifying topics which are deemed inappropriate and unacceptable in all social situations. Specifically, interview responses revealed a unanimous perception that outwardly humorous comments pertaining to an individual's identity (including appearance, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) or their family members were inappropriate and should be viewed as failed forms of banter (Rivers and Ross, 2021). Evidencing these shared sentiments, when discussing when banter breaches the line of acceptability, Miss Turner stated, 'it would be any discrimination, like sexuality discrimination, racial discrimination, anything like that', whilst Ethan and Ben (Year 7) respectively suggested, 'it could be like religion' and 'it could be like race or where you come from'. References to personal characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 (see GOV.UK, 2015) were provided by teachers and pupils, irrespective of age, gender or ethnicity, a finding which appears indicative of current social climates. Comments pertaining to an individual's appearance were also considered inappropriate, discussing when the line of acceptability is breached, Mr Walker stated, 'when it gets too personal or maybe related to their physical appearance. Something nothing to do with the incident'. Pupils also explained that 'jokes about someone's family or something personal' (Nick, Year 11) would be considered inappropriate. Whilst not unique to this study (Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Steer *et al.,* 2020; Wardman, 2021), these findings evidence how banter should be episodic (Grey-Thompson, 2017), as personal characteristics, appearance, and family are largely enduring and static features. These findings map to broader society and specifically shifts towards more inclusive and equitable social relations, with any forms of discrimination now considered morally repugnant, heavily tabooed, and, in some instances, unlawful.

The strength of social bonds between those involved in interactions was also considered important when pupils and teachers appraised the (in)appropriateness of banter within PE. Recalling that friendships were central to pupils' conceptualisations of banter, Shay (Year 11) noted, 'when it [banter] is not between friends that is when I'd say it's probably not banter because they probably wouldn't take it as a joke'. In accord, many pupils cited how social closeness helps mitigate humorously framed jokes, insults, or mockery evoking feelings of emotional distress for the auditor. Indeed, it appeared that increased degrees of mutual identification and social cohesion between the orator and the auditor enabled more personally targeted comments to be exchanged, with pupils trusting that their friends were not intended to cause offence. However, some pupils and PE teachers warned how friendships may further blur the lines of acceptability of banter, as Laura (Year 11) explained, 'I feel like banter is with someone who you are friends with but then there is a line where it can sometimes become offensive'. Sharing a similar perception, Mr Wharfedale noted:

> When it [banter] is with your mates, when it is with someone you spend a lot of time with, but they might be conscious about something and you keep bringing it up and they don't like it, but because you are mates, they don't want to say anything about it and then you carry on. That is when the line is hard.

Whilst pupils and PE teachers stressed the importance of friendships when socially constructing banter, collective responses revealed that friendships may foster subjective judgements regarding the (in)appropriateness of banter. In attempt to maintain their social positioning within their 'we-groups' young people may mask their emotions when hurt by a friend's commentary. Emotional stoicism may lead their peers believing that their comments are funny, through elicited laughter, whereas, in reality, they are inducing feelings of affective harm for their friends. Through a figurational lens, these findings imply that young people may place increased importance on maintaining their 'we'-identity at the expense of their own 'I'-identity, an argument also presented by Frydendal and Thing (2019a). These findings also suggest that showing offence to friend's humorously intended, yet outwardly offensive comment may evoke a form of 'they'-identity for young people. Taken collectively, these findings evidence how appraising the (in)appropriateness of banter requires a combination of social, psychological, and emotion-laden considerations, and given such complexity, subjective judgements are likely to be inconsistent.

As the extent to which pupils' and PE teachers' appraisals of the (in)appropriateness of banter are likely to be subjective, it was considered important to understand how young people and teachers identify when banter breaches socially constructed lines of acceptability. Collectively, responses revealed that pupils judge (in)appropriateness by appraising their peer's facial expressions and/or behavioural reactions. Explaining how young people may realise a humorously intended comment has caused offence, James (Year 10) noted, 'you can just tell from their [recipients] facial expressions and how they are reacting', while Elliot (Year 11) stated, 'you can just see it on their face that they don't like what you are calling them'. Such responses evidence how pupils rely on non-verbal cues from their peers to identify when their comments are causing, with no pupils mentioning verbal requests. Subsequently, the onus is on the orator to assess their peer's emotional state when bantering, a process which may require high levels of social and emotional intelligence, again fostering subjective and likely inconsistent judgements. When probed, pupils explained how they may alter their behaviours when identifying that comments are causing anguish or offence, as reported by Sean (Year 10):

> Some people get really annoyed and you have to basically take your foot off the gas and just leave them. If you see someone becoming physically upset or like you know you are going to get a reaction out of them because you are saying something that will offend them... [short pause] you might be saying something in banter than you meant as a joke but they might have found it quite upsetting and once you know that you have their weakness it probably turns into bullying if you carry on.

Evidencing the importance of mutuality and reciprocal nature of banter, Sean further demonstrates how the (in)appropriateness of banter is judged upon the emotional reactivity of the auditor. However, some pupils behavioural and emotional self-restraints, particularly older boys, may make it difficult for their peers and PE

teachers to assess the (in)appropriateness of an outwardly humorous comment. Revisiting the gendered findings presented earlier in this chapter, Fran (Year 10) explained:

> Guys [males] just kind of take it [banter] because it is a guy thing to do. Boys are always bantering and making fun out of each other. Like guys don't show that many emotions because of other guys.

Here, Fran suggests that many of her male peers may mask their emotions when receiving potentially hurtful peer commentary, a finding which is supported by other studies of adolescent boys' navigations of banter (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b; Whittle, Edler-Vass and Lumsden, 2019). Taking a passive approach (Buglass *et al.,* 2020), young people may opt for embodying emotional stoicism when offended by a peer's comment given the normalised nature of banter within the PE figuration, a finding which is particularly pertinent within boys PE. Moreover, by concealing their emotional sensitivities young people can preserve their peer group status and positioning within the dominant 'we-group' (Elias, 2001). Aware of the expected (gendered) behavioural norms and expectations within the PE figuration, boys may opt for stoic response perhaps aware of the social consequences of not conforming. In contrast, evidence suggests that it may be easier for girls to identify when banter has become offensive, and therefore inappropriate, given suggestions that many girls are more emotionally expressive than their male peers. Comparing girls' and boys' emotional reactivity, Lucy (Year 11) suggested:

> Usually boys like have to like, I am just saying this from a stereotypical point of view, but boys are more interactive and like to joke around quite a lot. But girls are more picky and get quite emotional.

Whilst partly explained by the gendered nuances of young people's shared gendered habitus (Mennell, 1998), the broader implications for appraising and identifying the (in)appropriateness of banter in PE can be explored at an emotional level. As evidence suggests that the (in)appropriateness of banter is often predicated through an assessment of the orator's immediate non-verbal responses and visible emotional expressions, Elias's (1987b) *Essay on Human Emotions* provides a useful conceptual framework from which to assess the significance of emotional reactivity. Elias (1987b) proposes that a human being's emotional response has three key components: a physiological component, a behavioural component, and a feeling component. Pupils reported how they can identify how a humorously intended comment has been received by assessing the peer's facial expressions and/or behavioural reactions. As such, pupils rely on visual cues of their peer's emotional state, utilising physiological (i.e., showing anguish) and behavioural (i.e., walking away) components. However, some pupils' stoic responses make it difficult for peers to assess their emotions, as judging an individual's emotional state, the feeling component of emotions, is challenging as 'what one shows itself on one's outside, for instance on one's face, is merely a derivative or expression, and one that is often distorted of what one is feeling' (Elias, 1987b, p.356). As Elias (1987b) warns, warns, visible expressions of emotions do not necessarily reflect an individual's feelings. Therefore, judging the harm caused by a comment

made under the guise of banter may require a more sophisticate assessment than appraising facial expressions and/or other non-verbal cues. These challenges may be heightened for boys given the reports of emotional self-restraint and stoic responses when receiving banter.

Thus far, findings have demonstrated how the (in)appropriateness of banter is socially constructed, highly subjective, and often challenging to identify, all of which help explain why banter is becoming increasingly associated with verbal bullying (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Evans, 2021; Grey-Thompson, 2017; Steer *et al.,* 2020; Newman *et al.,* 2022; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). Given the complexities and challenges in identifying (in)appropriate banter and the normalisation of banter within the PE figuration, pupils and PE teachers were asked the extent to which pupils can identify and navigate banter that breaches lines of acceptability. Responses revealed that with age pupils become better equipped to assess the (in)appropriateness of banter, as Laura (Year 11) articulated:

> I think it develops over the years as you get more understanding because in Year 7 you probably won't even know anything about it [banter]. But getting into Year 11 and probably Year 9 you get to understand it, but it is not always a talked about thing between friends. It is more talked about between the school and pupils.

Acknowledging how pupils rarely voice their thoughts on the (in)appropriateness of banter within their peer groups, Laura's account provides further insight into how the pupils socially construct an unwritten contract of what is and is not acceptable, a process which requires high degrees of mutual identification, trust and social cohesion.

In sum, the findings presented in this section have demonstrated how although banter was largely normalised and legitimised within the PE figuration at LTS, judging the (in)appropriateness of banter is highly subjective and fraught with challenges. Corroborating with existing literature, pupils and PE teachers shared the perception that the (in)appropriateness of banter is predicated upon a metaphorical line of acceptability. Whilst certain comments relating to an individual's identity and/or family were viewed an unacceptable (Abell et al., 2023; Rivers and Ross, 2021; Wardman, 2021), pupils' appraisals of the (in)appropriateness of banter centred upon the strength of relationship between those involved and the emotional reaction of the auditor, therefore lines of acceptability are socially constructed and situation-specific. Given such considerations, alongside the high levels of social, psychological, and emotional intelligence required to appraise the (in)appropriateness of banter, it is unsurprising pupils and teachers may struggle to identify when banter breaches socially constructed lines of acceptability.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the age-based and gendered nuances of the prevalence, manifestation and navigation of banter within and across the PE figuration at LTS. Boys' and girls' conceptualisations of banter were nuanced, with boys associating banter with reciprocated forms of jovial humour and/or mockery, whereas girls viewed banter as inoffensive joking between friends. These findings are significant as they reveal that the term 'banter' is variously understood, often involving humorous forms of mocking, joking, insulting, sledging and ridicule. Across the PE figuration, banter was found to become more prevalent as pupils progress through secondary school, a trend part informed by more informalised pedagogical practices and teacher-pupil relations, and young people's growing maturity. Evidence revealed that many young people enter the PE figuration expecting to be enabled to banter with their peers and, for some, their teachers, a finding reported to be unique to PE. A closer examination of the boys and girls PE figurations, pupils' peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations revealed multiple gendered nuances pertaining to how and why banter is manifested within PE and school sport environments. Boys were expected to engage in banter and be emotionally stoic when receiving humorous, yet derogatory, forms of peer commentary when participating in PE. In contrast, girls were more cautious when bantering and only exchanged humorous comments within friendship groups to avoid causing offence. These findings illustrate gendered nuances within young people's humour styles, as well as their individual and shared social habituses (Elias, 2001; Mennell, 1998). Exploration of how PE teachers and pupils navigated degrees of (in)appropriateness when bantering revealed that banter is often appraised upon a socially constructed line of acceptability, which may only be relationally and emotionally understood. Importantly, results have revealed that assessing when banter may blur into verbal bullying is fraught with complexity, nuance, and tension. Indeed, attention now provides a more detailed analysis of how bullying was manifested within the LTS PE figuration.

Chapter Seven - 'We tend to see more lower-level stuff': Marginalisation, gossip, and the manifestation of uneven power relations in PE

Chapter Six revealed that young people may struggle to identify and navigate the socially constructed metaphorical lines of acceptability between banter and bullying due to their peer's emotional self-restraints and the high degrees of social and emotional intelligence required to differentiate (in)appropriate forms of banter. These findings provide necessary context from which to explore how pupils and PE teachers experience and navigate bullying within secondary PE. Whilst others have examined this topic (see Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Jachyra, 2016; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a, 2020b; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), further examination is required to more adequately understand how subject-specific structures and practices, key social processes, teacher-pupil relations, pupils' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms may enable socially, psychologically, and emotionally damaging behaviours to be manifested. Elias and Scotson's (1994) model of established-outsider relations is applied to analyse how the structural (i.e., delivery of PE), relational (i.e., teacher-pupil relations and pupils' peer group dynamics) and situational (i.e., behavioural norms) figurational dynamics of the PE figuration contribute to uneven power relations. Furthermore, Elias's (2001) personal pronoun model is utilised to analyse how the relationship between emotions (i.e., fear, shame and embarrassment) and identity management processes (i.e., stigmatisation and self-preservation) impact upon how pupils navigate bullying within the PE figuration. Combined, these two models enable the sociogenic and psychogenic dimensions of bullying behaviours to be analysed within and across the PE figuration at LTS. Discussion begins by exploring how young people conceptualised bullying and how prevalent bullying in PE was at LTS.

7.1 The social construction and prevalence of bullying in PE

In England, the government mandate that all state-funded secondary schools, such as LTS, to have a behaviour policy which details measures on anti-bullying (GOV.UK, 2024). This legal obligation makes clear that all schools should make their anti-bullying policy accessible to all pupils, teachers, parents, governors, as well as members of the public. At LTS, the anti-bullying policy denoted bullying as 'the repetitive, intentional hurting of one or more people by another person or group of people, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power'. This definition largely maps to the UK Government's (2024) definition, as well as many academic conceptualisations of bullying (Evans, 2021; Horton, 2011; Olweus, 1993, 1997; Rigby, 2008; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014). This policy-based definition largely informed pupils' responses when asked what they understood the word 'bullying' to mean. However, probing such replies generated several issues concerning repetition, harm, and power imbalances. Irrespective of age or gender, repetition was central to pupils' understandings of bullying, with the word, or derivatives, cited by all but three focus group

participants. For instances, Olive (Year 7) stated, 'bullying is done like repetitively', Natalie (Year 10) noted, 'it's like repetitive, people just do it over and over', and Freddie (Year 11) replied, 'it's constant, constantly making them [victim] feel bad'. Despite this consensus, when probed, pupils never critically questioned how repetition may be determined in respect to amount or time, with only Thomas (Year 10) offering that 'it [bullying] needs to happen over tine', and Elliot (Year 11) citing 'over a long period of time'. When asked, PE teachers failed to address how repetition is determined with Mr Walker stating, 'people say nasty things that aren't very nice, that is not bullying. But if it is repeated over time, that is when it is bullying'. Whilst these insights demonstrate how isolated incidents should not be labelled bullying, without further acknowledgment and understanding of how many times within a certain period subjective judgements of what constitutes repetition in reference to bullying are likely to prevail but be inconsistent (Horton, 2011; Ybarra, Espelage and Mitchell, 2014). Such inconsistencies could be exacerbated given PE's timetable whereby pupils spend two hours (KS3) or one hour (KS4) each week.

For most pupils, bullying also required an intention to harm. For example, Erin (Year 7) stated bullying is 'anything that is offensive and meant to be hurtful', Ellie (Year 10) considered it as 'purposefully making them [victim] feel bad', whilst Shay (Year 11) noted how it involves 'hurting someone, like you know you are hurting them'. Inherent in pupils' examples of intent is 'goal-directedness', with intention to cause emotional harm (GOV.UK, 2024; Volk, Dane and Marini, 2014). However, when probed, many pupils reported challenges of assessing the intention of a peer's behaviour, particularly when judging whether verbal comments were bullying or banter. For instance, Connor (Year 11) stated, 'you can never know how badly you are hurting someone because you could just like bully, say like not meaning things and they could interpret it differently', whilst Natalie (Year 10) considered how 'people might take it [banter] the wrong way, they might say it's bullying when it's not'. By the age of 14 years, pupils were aware that comments could be deemed funny by the orator, hurtful by the receiver, and make bystanders laugh, illustrating subjective perceptions of what is funny and what is hurtful (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Newman, Mahmood and Rumbold, 2023). Considered alongside the masking of emotions discussed in Chapter Six, these findings evidence a challenge of determining intent within a peer's comment(s) and how a comment(s) has been received (Mishna, Pepler and Wiener, 2006; Volk, Veenstra and Espelage, 2017). Like with repetition, without an agreed social contract concerning appropriate humour and a shared understanding of what types of comments could cause offence, subjective judgements concerning intent are likely to prevail but be inconsistent.

Finally, the UK Government's (2024) definition of bullying draws reference to how bullying is 'often aimed at certain groups', whilst Olweus (1993) stated that asymmetric power relations are central to bullying processes. Whilst power imbalances feature across some political and academic conceptualisations (Forsberg and Horton, 2022; Horton, 2020; Olweus, 1997) and within the LTS anti-bullying policy, only one pupil

mentioned power imbalances when defining bullying, with Patricia (Year 10) stating, 'it's like an imbalance of power'. The almost seldom reference of power within pupils' discussions concerning bullying is perhaps not surprising given the use of the word 'power' to denote characteristics within a relationship is a semantic trend used mainly by academics. Whilst pupils failed to cite the word power, their descriptions of bullying illustrated their acute awareness of how power imbalances may be manifested within the PE figuration, a finding detailed after the prevalence of bullying is explored.

When asked to reflect on prevalence of bullying during core PE lessons, pupils' responses were relatively consistent, but revealed gendered nuances. Beginning with boys' discussions, responses unearthed a prevailing narrative that PE-based bullying becomes less prevalent with age, as articulated by Nick and Mark (Year 11):

> Nick: I think it was worse in lower years, Years 7, 8, and 9.
> Mark: We have grown up more now.
> Nick: Yeah, we have grown up more now and we understand each other a lot more so it doesn't really happen a lot now.

Reiterating this assessment and offering potential explanations, Freddie and Elliot (Year 11) suggested:

> Freddie: It [bullying] used to happen a lot in Year 7. Like it doesn't really happen now. It's just more chilled out, we have a laugh. But in Year 7 and midway through Year 8 it happened a lot.
> Elliot: It was a bit brutal. If you weren't popular, you had it.
> Freddie: Because obviously people in Year 10 and 11 you are a lot more mature.
> Elliot: You are a lot more controlled, and you can just hold it back.
> Freddie: It is so much different. Like I said, it doesn't really happen anymore. You might get the odd joke where people take it the wrong way.

These reflections demonstrate how boys' peer group dynamics and personality structures fluctuate and develop during the particularly impressionable phase of identity and habitus development (Elias, 2001), developments they appeared aware of. More specifically, boys associated reductions in bullying with their increased abilities to demonstrate behavioural self-restraints, manage their emotional impulses, and to mutually identify with their peers – central tenets in what Elias (2000) described as an individual civilising process. Indicative of broader long-term behavioural and psychological developments that have taken place across Western societies, these findings demonstrate how through the schooling process boys, in this case, are challenged and are increasingly expected to exercise control over their first nature drives (i.e., more instinctive behaviours) in order to develop and exhibit their second nature more learned and conscious behaviour (Gillam and Gulløv, 2014). In this case, this may involve boys adapting their communication styles according to the peer group, perceived peer's ability to receive, withstanding and accept comments, and the broader behavioural expectations within the school. However, as discovered in Chapter Six, boys may opt for emotional stoicism when being bantered in PE, masking their true emotions, and therefore making it difficult

for peers to judge if humorously intended comments have caused emotional harm. Subsequently, while perceived levels of banter may increase with age, boys often second-nature self-restraint over their emotions may contribute to a paradox where comments that may have previously been considered verbal bullying are now brushed off as playful and competitive banter. These findings also suggest that with age boys may become more adept at navigating between behavioural expectations and behavioural experimentation within PE, developing an awareness of how and when a humorously framed, yet disparaging and/or insulting, comment can be delivered without teaching reprimand.

In contrast to their male peers, many girls suggested that PE-based bullying becomes more prevalent with age. Providing comparative data, Natalie (Year 10) stated:

> I don't think bullying happened that much because everyone was really nice in Year 7, like you could go and talk to anyone without any judgement and sit with anyone and it wouldn't matter. Whereas now [Year 10] people have got their groups and it is more likely to happen because there is more rivalry.

Here, Natalie attributes an increase in bullying with changes in girls' peer group dynamics across the years of secondary school, which involve cynical and harmful behaviours, such as peer judgement, becoming more prevalent. Whilst peer judgement, or fears of peer judgement, has been well documented as an issue in girls PE (Hills, 2007; Hill, 2015; Fisette, 2011), these findings build upon existing discussions by revealing how judgement becomes increasingly problematic in girls PE with age. In this regard, fluctuations within girls' peer group dynamics across five years of secondary school, specifically increasing tensions between friendship groups, contribute to bullying becoming increasingly prevalent. This finding suggests that girls are less likely to be bullied due to their 'I'-identity (i.e., appearance or sporting competence), but more likely to be bullied due to how their 'I'-identity correlates with broader 'we'- and 'they'-identities reproduced within close-knit friendship groups. Considering the gendered differences discovered here, girls may be able to develop and exhibit their second nature more learned and conscious behaviour earlier than their male peers (Gillam and Gulløv, 2014), yet older girls may be more willing to intentionally to breach expected behavioural expectations with targeted bullying becoming more prevalent with age.

Despite the gendered nuances in pupils' assessments, PE teachers unanimously indicated that bullying in PE is rare at LTS, and when it does occur it is likely to be a continuation of behaviours manifested outside of PE. Evidencing this narrative, Mr Wilkinson stated, 'all schools will have bullying, but we don't see a lot of it and when it does occur it tends to be a whole-school issue, not isolated to PE'. Supporting this view, Mr Harris noted, 'occasionally there are incidents, but I would like to think they are reasonably few and far between'. In one respect, these sentiments serve as a reminder that PE lessons do not take place in a social vacuum and pupils' peer group dynamics within PE lessons are undoubtedly influenced their interdependences and social relations within and across other figurations. However, there is some evidence

that school-based bullying is heightened in secondary PE, particularly within changing rooms (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Gerdin, 2017a; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Supporting these findings, PE teachers acknowledged that bullying may take place outside of their gaze, as evidenced by Mr Walker:

> I can't say that I have seen any bullying taking place in any lessons or in the changing rooms. I am not to say that it hasn't happened, it probably has happened, but from what we see and hear it rarely does.

Combined, pupils' and teachers' assessments of the prevalence of bullying offer little clarity into the extent to which such behaviours took place during PE lessons at LTS. Perhaps evidencing how PE teachers and pupils shared differing perceptions of what constitutes bullying, arguably due to the subjective nature of assessing repetition and intent when observing behaviours, teachers' reflections also suggest that pupils rarely report bullying. Therefore, this may imply a stance that if unsure of whether a behaviour is bullying young people tend not to report, which may lead to the normalisation of abusive behaviours (DfE, 2023), a finding explored later in this chapter.

Seeking to understand how bullying is manifested in the PE figuration, pupils and teachers were asked to reflect on the locations in which PE-based bullying is most prevalent, an important consideration given the multiple spaces used in PE. Although pupils and teachers provided differing judgements regarding prevalence, their responses were unanimous in that bullying is most prevalent within the changing rooms. Evidencing this, Erin (Year 7) stated, 'I think the changing rooms because there is so much noise. It's really hard to identify bullying there', while Mr Shaw explained:

> I would say the changing rooms because there are times when a teacher isn't in the changing rooms, because the teacher is in the office sorting something out. So, whenever the students feel the teacher isn't watching them that is their opportunity to have a bit of banter, to direct a bit of bullying towards other students.

Such accounts demonstrate how pupils and teachers shared the perception that temporary removal of a powerful teacher's gaze may momentarily alter pupils' peer group dynamics, enabling socially dominant pupils to bullying peers considered less powerful within the PE figuration. These findings also reveal the intended, controlled, and calculated, arguably goal-directed, nature of changing room bullying, as pupils may carefully consider when they can bully without teacher intervention and/or reprimand. This depiction of the changing rooms as a possible hotspot for bullying is not a unique finding to this thesis, with evidence captured across several Western nations (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Jachyra, 2016; Li and Rukavina, 2012; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; Wei and Graber, 2023). Within such research, despite being aware of possibly enabling bullying, PE teachers were reluctant to enter changing rooms due to sensitivities towards adults gazing at semi-naked children (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Gerdin, 2017b;

Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). This reluctance is telling considering that pupils believed that teacher presence within changing rooms would deter or constrain any cases of bullying, with Brad (Year 10) stating:

> If there is a teacher there [changing room] people won't be, like it is a deterrence really which stops people because they know if they bully in front of people who have authority over them then they could be punished.

Such reports demonstrate pupils' perceptions that bullying is morally and ethically repugnant, knowing that they will be punished for such behaviours when manifested in front of an authorative teacher, also showing the controlled, calculated and goal-directed nature of changing room bullying. Further evidencing this significant of teacher presence, some pupils explained that bullying was also more likely to take place during transitionary periods of PE lessons, as Imogen (Year 7) explained:

> Sometimes we have to put our football boots on or like line up on benches outside and there are sort of no teachers if they are getting equipment out and then people are like chatting and someone could bully someone because there is no teacher there.

Transitional periods during lessons are relatively unique to PE, with few, if any, other curricular subjects requiring pupils to change attire, walk from changing rooms to other indoor/outdoor spaces, wait for teachers to collect equipment, and navigate between different activities. Observations revealed that pupils would often walk to differing PE spaces in small groups, with teachers often leading from the front, thus offering brief opportunities for heightened sociality whereby bullying could be manifested outside of a teacher's gaze. Arguably, the unique figurational structures of PE (i.e., multiple spaces and transitions) offer more enabling opportunities for bullying to arise than other curricular subjects, where teachers can observe/overhear pupil interactions within a more routinised and constrained classroom environment. Pupils were clearly aware of this figurational contrast and could choose to exploit increased enabling opportunities should they wish.

PE's uniqueness was further emphasised by pupils when discussing why bullying may be manifested during active participation, as Jade (Year 7) explained:

> I think the field would be the place because there is so much space there and the teachers have to keep an eye on everyone but everyone is running around and you can't really hear and see where everybody is and that is the place where the teacher isn't looking.

It is important to recall that core PE lessons involved up to 30 pupils and one PE teacher, meaning that when lessons were delivered outside activities were often strewn across multiple pitches (i.e., two football pitches or four tennis courts), whereby several group-based activities and/or small-sided team games were simultaneously taking place. Given this spatiality, alongside various weather conditions, capturing peer group comments proved challenging as an ethnographer and PE teachers, a situation pupils of all ages were aware acutely aware. From a figurational perspective, the significance of teacher presence on pupils' behavioural self-restraints and peer group dynamics is intriguing. Demonstrating an acute awareness of how teachers'

professional status places them in a position of increased power and authority, pupils are unlikely to bully in front of a teacher due to a fear of punishment. However, evidence suggests that bullies do not share similar concerns when escaping a teacher's gaze, implying that bullies may experience increased power advantages within their peer groups, a finding which would map to academic conceptualisations of bullying (Horton, 2011; Olweus, 1997). Moreover, these findings suggest that some young people are seldom concerned by their peers perceiving them as a bully and are perhaps aware that their peers are unlikely to intervene and/or report their domineering behaviours (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014). Overall, these findings reveal how young people may consciously and cautiously when to bully their peers, indicating the premeditated and cynical nature of PE-based bullying, and demonstrating how by the age of 11 years young people are able to enact behavioural self-restraint when fearing reprimand.

Whilst pupils and teachers shared the perception that PE-based bullying was most likely to occur during moments of non-active participation (i.e., whilst changing attire or transitioning between spaces), reflections on the risk-factors to bullying in PE somewhat contradict these findings. In Chapter Two, bullying in PE was found to manifest via weight-based stigmatisation (Li and Rukavina, 2012; Peterson, Puhl and Luedicke, 2012; Wei and Graber, 2023), homophobia (Brackenridge, Rivers and Gough, 2007; Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Morrow and Gill, 2003; Müller and Böhlke, 2023), with poor motor skill proficiency (Bejerot, Edgar and Humble, 2011; Bejerot et al., 2013; Jimènez-Barbero et al., 2020; Noret et al., 2015) also identified a risk factor. However, at LTS, pupils and PE teachers seldom mentioned appearance, gender, or sexuality-based factors, instead reporting bullying is based on perceived sporting competence, as denoted by Ethan and Reece (Year 7) who respectively stated, 'if they are not good, not as good as your bully, not as good as them', and 'if they are really bad at something'. This finding mapped across all year groups, as Mickey (Year 10) explained:

> The person who is receiving [bullying] is not as good at sport in PE, whereas the person doing the bullying would be better at sport. They kind of bully them because they are not as good. Whereas when you are better at it you can have that higher ground.

This quote suggests that some pupils may utilise competence-based bullying as a method of self-promotion (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a), highlighting a peer's perceived inadequacy to elevate their superior sense of self. As documented in Chapter Five, sporting competence was highlight valued within the boys PE figuration, part forming the prevailing 'we'-identity (Elias, 2001). Moreover, sporty boys who embodied a sporting habitus, one which they shared with their male PE teachers, were often afforded increased power opportunities (i.e., team captains or skill demonstrators), opportunities seldom afforded to less-sporty pupils. Such sociogenic (i.e., normalised pedagogical practices) and psychogenic (i.e., valued sporting identities) considerations help explain why perceived low sporting competence is a pertinent risk factor to bullying within the boys PE figuration.

Further probing into why perceived poor sporting competence is risk factor to PE-based bullying revealed that failures during team-based games would frustrate, annoy, and anger some more competent boys, as explained by Toby (Year 7), 'if their [sporty peer] team loses or something they will get angry because they won't be doing very well, because they [less competent peer] is not very good at sport'. PE teachers reiterated this narrative, Mr Wharfedale suggested, 'I would say any bullying would be where it is a more of a talented sportsman who goes about abuse, not abuse, well in a way it is verbal abuse towards other people who cannot perform at their levels'. This quote captures how PE teachers' assessments of verbal commentary are subjective and how such assessments are likely to be inconsistent, as Mr Wharfedale was unsure how to label performance-based derision. The finding that perceived low sporting competence is a risk factor to bullying within secondary PE is not unique to this study, as evidenced in Chapter Two (Bejerot *et al.*, 2013; Noret *et al.*, 2015; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Whilst there is some evidence that perceived high sporting competence may lead to bullying in school sport (Hurley and Mandigo, 2010; Noret *et al.*, 2015), such findings were not drawn from this study, perhaps explained by valued placed on sporting competence and embodiment of a sporting identity within the boys PE figuration. Through a figurational lens, these findings not only demonstrate the value that sporting competence holds within the boys PE figuration, but also how some sporty boys may be unable to restrain themselves from voicing a derogatory and hurtful comment following a less-sporty peer's performative error within a highly competitive social climate. The way competence-based bullying was manifested in the boys PE will be explored later in the chapter, as attention now shifts to risk factors to bullying in the girls PE figuration.

Showing similarities to their male peers and colleagues, girls and female PE teachers identified perceived low levels of motor skill proficiency and sporting competence as risk factors to bullying in PE. Evidencing this, Eloise (Year 7) indicated that, 'I think most places for bullying would be PE and art, because in PE you can bully someone for not being able to run or do the activity', Patricia (Year 10) reported, 'I think in PE you can be bullied because of like your weakness that you have got in PE', and Ellie (Year 11) stated, 'I think there is another problem with people who are good at sport, often they do rub it in other people's faces'. A finding which maps across both the girls and boys PE figurations, sporting competence and motor skill proficiency were highly valued at LTS, as well as being highly visible and measurable competencies. Whilst highly valued by PE teachers and some girls, sporting competence provided enabling opportunities for pupils to parade and celebrate their sporting identity, whilst rewarding sporting girls with increased social statuses and power resources (Elias, 2001). Such sociogenic (i.e., bullying) and psychogenic (i.e., identity self-promotion) enabling opportunities are only significant given the valuing of sporting competence within the PE figuration. However, unfortunately, such values are not necessarily inclusive to all as pupils generally had differing ability levels and judgements of competence can be relative to peer group perceptions.

Intrigued by the extent to which subject-specific competence was a risk factor to bullying in other curricular subjects or in the broader school figuration, pupils were asked to explain why some young people may be bullied in other areas of the school. Responses revealed that competence-based bullying is relatively unique to PE, with perceived intelligence and/or academic attainment considered unlikely to evoke bullying in school. Voicing a shared perception, Shay (Year 11) suggested, 'in school I wouldn't say it is the less academic people [who are bullied]. I wouldn't think that if you are in a lower set then you are always getting picked on or bullied because you are not smart'. Important to recall, at LTS all core PE classes were mixed ability in structure, which may highlight differences in pupil competence within lessons more than in ability setted lessons. Pupils shared the view that differences in appearance are a risk factor to school-based bullying, Brad (Year 10) stated, if you are bullied, they will probably pick on a difference and point out difference in appearance' and Lydia (Year 10) noted, 'I think some of it may be appearance, if the person doesn't look like your average person in their eyes, they might bully them for that'. Appearance-based bullying is documented to be a significant issue within secondary schools (Harris *et al.,* 2018), especially within PE (Fisette, 2011; Li and Rukavina, 2012; Peterson, Puhl, and Luedicke, 2012), however it was not reported to be an issue in PE at LTS. Whilst appearance may be highlighted during PE lessons, arguably behavioural differences (i.e., competence) are not as explicit in more standardised and mundane classroom-based lessons. Interestingly, the findings presented in Chapter Six revealed that largely normalised and legitimised banter was performance-related, whilst appearance related comments were considered (in)appropriate. The findings also revealed that pupils and PE teachers may struggle to identify when performance-related peer commentary blurs from banter in–to bullying given the normalisation of peer commentary in PE and sport, perhaps explaining why sporting competence is the most pressing risk factor to bullying in PE at LTS. Subsequently, performance-related verbal bullying in PE may be one unintended consequence of the normalisation of playful, yet competitive, 'banter' with some young people failing to comprehend the damage humorously framed, yet derogatory, forms of mocking, ridicule, or jokes could have to a peers' identity and emotions. Furthermore, centrality of competition within PE policy and practice arguably heightens young people's awareness of their peer's competence, a finding that appears relatively unique to PE.

In sum, these findings demonstrate that pupils who display higher levels of sporting competence are likely to experience power advantages over their less competent peers, with uneven power relations occasionally manifested through performance-related bullying. These findings evidence how sporting competence is central to the dominant 'we'-identity within both the boys and girls PE figurations, mapping across all year groups. In mixed-sexed and often competitive PE lessons, sporty pupils were able to present desirable 'I' and 'I-we'-identities, whilst less-sporty pupils appear to embody a 'they'-identity (Elias, 1978, 2001). Competence-based bullying was reported to be unique to PE with evidence suggesting this risk-factor does not transcend across the school figuration, whereby more identity centred (i.e., appearance) risk factors were

associated with bullying. As such, risk factors for bullying in PE appears to be more subject-specific and more tangible than risk factors in the broader school figuration, with perceived sporting competence used as a significant differentiator between those who bully and who are bullied. Competence-based bullying is perhaps one unintended social consequence of figurational structures (i.e., mixed-ability classes) and dynamics (i.e., valued 'we' identities and behavioural norms), with competence-based bullying described as an outcome of competitive frustrations and identity expression.

7.2 The manifestation of bullying and established-outsider relations in PE

Having discovered that sporting competence was highly valued within the PE figuration at LTS and that perceived differences in competence underpin asymmetric power relations between groups of pupils, the social processes and peer group behaviours which contribute to the manifestation of bullying in PE are now explored. Pupils and PE teachers agreed that direct forms of physical bullying (i.e., punching, kicking, shoving) were extremely rare at LTS, a finding corroborated as no repeated physical acts were observed. This finding supports Mierzwinski and Velija's (2020a) assertion that shifts in thresholds of repugnance towards physical violence have contributed to a reduction in physical forms of bullying in PE within English schools. Evidence suggests that verbal bullying, marginalisation and social exclusion are becoming increasingly problematic issues within secondary PE (see Munk and Agergaard, 2015; Thomas *et al.,* 2016; Wei and Graber, 2023), appears to reflect broader societal trends, whereby instances of physical bullying are decreasing, yet more socio-relational forms of bullying are on the rise.

Manifested bullying in boys PE

Reflecting on manifested bullying in PE, several older boys reported how their less-competent peers are often marginalised to subordinate and undesirable positions, specifically goalkeepers and/or substitutes, representing a form of social exclusion. Recalling how competitive team-based games, particularly football, were a staple diet in KS4 boys PE, this games-based structure provided sporty boys enabling opportunities to marginalise and exclude their less-competent peers. Explaining how bullying is manifested, Thomas (Year 10) stated, 'you kind of push them [less-sporty peer] around, I guess. Say in football, you tell them to go in goal every time or you tell them to go in certain positions'. When probed if such dominating behaviour would and/or should be viewed as bullying, Robbie and Brad (Year 10) replied:

> Robbie: Yes.
> Brad: If they want to go in goal, then no. But if it is like every time you have gone together [as a team] and worked out positions and no one wants to go in goal then someone just chooses them, then yes. If it is a whole group decision then it is not bullying, but if you are forcing someone to go in goal then they have no choice then it is a bit more bullying.

Most evident when football was delivered, such domineering behaviours often went unchallenged meaning that certain less-sporty boys often undertook less-desirable positions, which they were often reluctant to adopt. These marginalising processed served to distinguish and distance some sporty boys from their less competent peers, with the most competent performers (i.e., team captains) rarely, if ever, positioning themselves in perceived subordinate positions, a finding discovered elsewhere (Jachyra, 2016). Instead, sporty boys were frequently observed adopting desirable positions, such as freekick/penalty takers and/or bowlers during cricket, positions which placed them in the performative spotlight enabling them to exhibit their sporting prowess, providing increased opportunities to receive teacher praise, as well as peer banter. Practices of sporty boys self-selecting teams and positions and then persuading and pressuring less-sporty peers to take up less desirable roles and/or positions were commonplace and seemingly normalised within KS4 boys PE.

Competence-based differentiation was further evidenced through team selection processes, whereby PE teachers would often select the most competent boys, those who studied GCSE PE and/or participated in extracurricular sports, as team captains. As captains, sporty boys were often allowed to select their teams for the ensuring competitive game(s), habitually selecting peers in order of perceived sporting competence. Indeed, observations revealed that the same four or five boys were always selected last, distinguishing them from their peers. Moreover, when captains were picking their teams, already selected boys often commented on selections, manifesting both positively and negatively framed reactions:

Fieldnote 27th January 2022 – Year 11 Boys Football

The pupils were asked to line up at the edge of the pitch and Mr Harris selected two captains for the football game, both boys were members of the school football team and understood to be the best two footballers in the class. Mr Harris allowed the boys to select their teams, with the two captains alternating when selecting peers. Many of the selections fostered peer reactions and peer commentary, including "why have you picked him? He's crap" or "yes, pick him, he's good".

Such team selection processes enabled boys to differentiate between their peers based upon their perceived sporting competence, with praise directed perceived sporty boys, and chastising peer commentary towards less-sporty boys often going unsanctioned. Whilst older boys were often allowed to select their teams, teachers were also observed changing teams on the grounds of fairness, a process which further highlighted and differentiate boys based upon perceived sporting competence. Such processes were often uncritically accepted by all boys, with few incidents of sporty- or less-sporty boys complaining regarding their teacher's re-selections, arguably demonstrating how boys acknowledged that greater parity between each team's ability would make for a more competitive and enthralling contest. While male PE teachers appeared to trust sporty boys, providing them desirable and enabling opportunities as captains, such practices also enabled boys to differentiate peers based on competence, which fostered peer group divides of those who are competent and

those who are not. Showing nuance, such selection processes were rarely observed during KS3 boys core PE lessons. Arguably, one reason for this is Year 7 core PE lessons involved more skill-based learning, individual sports/activities, and less team-based games. However, teachers were regularly observed selecting sporty pupils, those who demonstrate elevated levels of sporting competence, to provide skill demonstrates and feedback, opportunities rarely afforded to less-sporty boys. Whilst not examples of manifested bullying per se, such normalised practices evidence how competence-based differentiation was commonplace within the boys PE figuration, manifesting unequal power opportunities for sporty and less-sporty boys contributing to the development of established-outsider relations (Elias and Scotson, 1994) and fostering perceptions of teacher favouritism towards competent boys.

While less-sporty boys had little opportunity to adopt leadership or privileged positions before activities commenced, competence-based differentiation continued during active participation. Most frequently observed during KS4 core PE lessons, some sporty boys delivered performance-based chastising peer commentary towards their less-competent peers. Whilst performance-based banter and sledging was normalised and largely legitimised within the boys PE figuration, performance-related peer commentary that is directed towards less-sporty boys, those who rarely engaged in banter, was considered to be inappropriate, exclusionary, and harmful (Booth, Cope and Rhind, 2023; Lawless and Magrath, 2021; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022). In contrast to the accepted forms of banter denoted in Chapter Six, peer commentary that included more disparaging and insensitive undertones, specifically the blaming of less-sporty boys for performative errors was depicted as a form of verbal bullying. Such interactions were regularly observed in KS4 boys core PE, whereby less-sporty boys, often positioned as goalkeepers, were regularly blamed and chastised for a team's defeat:

Fieldnote 31st January 2022 – Year 10 Boys Football

During a series of five-a-side games, several of the less-sporty boys were blamed for their team losing, which led to their team being rotated off the pitch. Whilst often short-lived, verbal slurs such as, "oh my god, you are shocking" were regularly directed towards the least competent pupils. Despite visible frustrated responses from targeted pupils, such comments were either ignored or met with calls of "just get on with it, boys" from Mr Wharfedale.

Considering the regularity that such defaming comments were observed during KS4 PE lessons negatively framed peer commentary was a normalised practice within the boys PE figuration. While male PE teachers were quick to intervene if any pupil frustrations manifested violent acts (i.e., pushing or shoving), such normalised verbal derision and/or marginalisation was part enabled by PE teachers' laissez-faire responses (Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), which often focused on continued participation instead of sanctioning sporty boys for chastising their less-sporty peers. This normalisation process was also part enabled by less-sporty boys seemingly internalising and accepting their perceived inadequacies, their outsider positionality,

their group disgrace, and their negative 'they-group' image, which further illustrated the figurationally-informed power differentials at play (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Less-sporty boys' acceptance may be due to their developed resilience to such chastising, which could involve embodying high degrees of emotional self-restraint when receiving performance-related 'banter' or verbal bullying. Again, as noted in Chapter Six, PE teachers were presented with few visual cues (i.e., negative facial expressions) that less-sporty boys had become visibly upset or emotionally harmed via peer-commentary, and given their desire to avoid interrupting physically active parts of the lesson, it can be contended that these sociogenetic (i.e., normalisation of performance-related banter) and psychogenic (i.e., emotional self-restraint) contributed towards what was considered as many male PE teachers 'laissez faire' attitudes towards verbal bullying.

Seeking male PE teachers views on how they thought bullying was manifested in boys core PE lessons, Mr Wilkinson stated:

> We might see some of the more lower-level stuff, "I don't want to work with him, he's rubbish". You know which is bullying in a sense. Boys not being considerate, not being aware that by actually saying someone is rubbish is quite harmful and isn't a good way of developing people.

In one sense, this comment demonstrates teachers' awareness of the emotional affects verbal bullying can cause, a sensitivity some boys lacked (i.e., not being considerate) and which may have led to manifested bullying. However, in another sense, classifying this type of bullying as 'lower-level' insinuates that such behaviours are less serious than direct verbal or physical attacks. This perception is problematic when considering the work of Symons *et al.* (2014), which discovered that verbal bullying caused more psychological and emotional harm than physical forms of bullying. Such peer commentary was observed as often coupled with exclusionary behaviours, as Mr Morley noted, 'it's [bullying in PE] generally like picking on someone or ignoring them. Sometimes it can go the polar opposite and the person who isn't seen as that good a particular sport, they tend to get ignored quite a bit'. Sharing this discernment, Mr Harris stated:

> Some pupils will take pleasure in picking on another pupil who can't do something as well as they can do it. Sometimes, occasionally, a pupil will say to another pupil "I don't want you on my team".

This finding demonstrates how a lack of sporting competence can draw unwanted attention, but also lead to a unwantedness within a peer group. Seemingly, some sporty boys choose this exclusionary method as a form of identity self-promotion (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a), as a form of pleasure (Gerdin, 2016), or perhaps to better control the figurational dynamic by exerting their power superiority (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Irrespective of the key driving force, this portrayal demonstrates intentional in some sporty boys' goal-directed chastising, defaming, and ostracising behaviours, which meets the definition of verbal bullying (Volk, Veenstra and Espelage, 2017).

Seemingly aware of the unwanted attention versus unwantedness, some less-competent boys were regularly observed removing themselves from the performance spotlight. Often adopting suitably passive roles within lessons (Lygstad, Hagen and Aune, 2016), several of the least competent performers positioned themselves on the periphery of competitive team-based games, actively avoiding involvement. Whilst boys at LTS did not truant from PE, as found elsewhere (Jimenez-Barbero *et al.,* 2020; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), such avoidance tactics meant these pupils had little active engagement or prolonged participation in PE. However, while seeking to avoid being blamed for a team's failure, this tactic could anger and frustrate some sporty boys, as described by Freddie and Elliot (Year 11):

> Freddie: Like Frankie, in basketball he just stands at the side of the pitch and does nothing.
> Elliot: Like I will deliberately get the ball and not pass to them and be like "get out of the way", that annoys people the most in PE when people are not trying and then it is visibly affecting your game and you get angry at them.

These findings suggest that irrespective of whether less-sporty boys take active participation in team-based games during core PE lessons or not, they may be subjected to chastising, defaming, and disparaging peer commentary from their more competent peers. Structurally constrained by the mixed-ability class structure and with little support from their teachers, some less sporty boys had little opportunity to escape these disparaging and marginalising behaviours. Structurally constrained by the mixed-ability class structure and with little support from their teachers, some less sporty boys had little opportunity to escape these disparaging and marginalising behaviours. It is important to remember that such a lose-lose situation was fostered due to sporting competence being highly valued and used as a categoriser and distinguisher by boys and male PE teachers.

Viewing boys PE as a figuration (Elias, 1978) the regularity of competitive team-based games and a sports centred PE curriculum enabled an established group of sporty boys to exercise power advantages over less-sporty outsider group peers (Elias and Scotson, 1994). PE-specific figurational structures and dynamics enabled some pupils dominate, chastise, and marginalise some of their less-competent peers. Male PE teachers contributed to such power imbalances by frequently selecting certain boys, specifically those who studied GCSE PE or participated in extracurricular sport, as captains and/or demonstrators, practices which strengthened established-group members group charisma and 'we-group' image, reinforcing ideologies of physical and social superiority. Established-group members group charisma was evidenced by captains selecting peers based upon perceived competence, selecting peers in similar orders irrespective of the sport delivered, with sporty boys often embracing each other once selected, evidencing their elevated levels of social cohesion (Elias and Scotson, 1994). In contrast, less-sporty boys were labelled with a collective group disgrace, often marginalised to perceived subordinate positions and blamed for a team's performative failure regardless of if at fault (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Feelings of group charisma and group disgrace were further fostered by teachers' tendency to invite the most competent boys to provide skill demonstrations, peer

feedback, and as elected captains, with perceived less-sporty boys seldom afforded such enabling opportunities. These social processes foregrounded established-group members defaming and/or disparaging peer commentary, with outsider-group members having little opportunities to control or resist such marginalising and alienating practices or counteract such ridiculing given their lack of sporting competence, a key visible and distinguishing power resource differentiator between the established and the outsiders in the boys PE figuration. As such, denser chains of interdependence could be formed between some sporty boys, particularly footballers, and their male PE teachers through strong degrees of mutual identification, respect, and a shared sporting habitus. Such social bonds were less available for less sporty pupils who often removed themselves form the performative spotlight and peer interactions, arguably in order to avoid defaming peer commentary, serving as a form of self-protection. In this PE figuration, peer commentary was predominately focused on sporting competence and performative failures, with no evidence gathered to suggested that less-sporty boys were subjected to gender or sexuality-based slurs, as revealed in Chapter Two (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011).

Manifested bullying in girls PE

In contrast to boys PE, marginalising practices and explicit performance-based peer commentary was found to be less normalised within girls' peer group dynamics and, therefore, featured less regularly in girls' and female PE teachers' depictions of how bullying is manifested. Instead, observational and interview data revealed that bullying in girls PE was manifested through more covert and judgemental forms. This gendered nuance may be partly explained by the differing figurational dynamics between girls and boys PE, with girls PE involving fewer competitive team-based games, fewer elected captains, and more friendship-based groupings. In further contrast to boys PE, girls core PE involved more individual activities (i.e., dance, fitness), which minimised the need for captains, and when team-based games were delivered - approximately 40 percent of lessons - PE teachers enabled girls to self-select their teams or groups. Occasionally female PE teachers selected the sportiest girls, those who studied GCSE PE or formed extracurricular sport teams), as team captains, who then selected their teams. Discussing such practices, Alice (Year 10) stated:

> A lot of the teachers know they [sporty girls] are the most athletic people because most of the people who are athletic and don't really show it get put in lower groups, they tend to get picked as team captains. So, you get it happens again when teams are liked picked. So, a lot of the more athletic people and popular people end up together even when the teams are picked for you.

Arguably, PE teachers more informalised practices of enabling older girls to self-select their groups/teams served the unintended social consequence of further differentiating pupils based upon their perceived sporting competence. With the sportiest pupils often elected as captains, established-group members were able to

monopolise key power resources within the PE figuration, which in turn fostered marginalisation of outsider-group members (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

Whilst such selection-based marginalising practices were reported and occasionally observed during girls PE lessons, the strong finding was that bullying was manifested via gossip-based peer commentary, as detailed by Mrs Hanson:

> Girls are good at disguising it [bullying], gossiping and giggling. Especially those non-doers, those persistent non-doers they are the worst for it. You have a lot of non-doers seemingly whispering behind their backs, that is your Chinese whispers, and it gets back to the person.

Observations of girls' core PE lessons revealed that during Year 10 and 11 lessons forms of truancy were an issue that PE teachers had to navigate daily. Described as 'non-doers', observations revealed that some girls regularly provided parental notes which excused them from PE due to injury or menstruation (specifically when swimming was delivered). When excused from active participation, girls would watch their peers participate and it was during these periods in which Mrs Hanson suggested bullying may be manifested through gossip-based behaviours. Such covert in-group conversations were rarely audible to me as an ethnographer, however teachers provided insights into what peer commentary may be centred upon, with Miss Jones stating:

> It is more about in expressional terms, like "oh my god, what is she doing? What is she wearing? Look at how red her face has gone". So, it is all the negative connotations which stick with the girls and then they don't want to be involved.

Here, performance is coupled with aesthetics as a key power resource, evoking negative peer commentary, which is understood to cause affective harm to some girls, which may lead to them self-excluding from activities (Kieffer, 2013). Such discrete forms of peer commentary were observed across all groups but more frequently evidenced amongst older girls, including sporty athletic girls monitoring their less sporty peers:

Fieldnote 18th March 2022 – Year 10 Girls Fitness

> Four sporty girls [all members of the netball team] were using the spinning bikes – situated along the rear wall of the fitness suite facing the centre of the room. These girls appeared to be closely watching six peers using free-weights, repeatedly making comments behind their hands, often laughing amongst each other. Noting this, the six girls changed their activity, leaving the fitness suite to use skipping ropes outside of the fitness suite building.

Such interactions were also reported by pupils, as Abbie (Year 10) noted, 'if there was any bullying it would be behind their backs. It would be like gossip and rumours', while Natalie (Year 10) suggested, 'it's [bullying in PE] probably like making fun out of people without them realising, that happens quite a lot. A lot more than direct bullying'. Such accounts support observational insights whereby instances of direct physical

and/or verbal bullying were seldom detected. These findings reveal clear distinctions from boys' peer-group dynamics and behavioural norms, with sporty girls less likely to directly defame, chastise, and/or marginalise their less-competent peers. Instead, girls' peer-group dynamics were more friendship-based with peer commentary being more in-group, discrete and, therefore, less confrontational. Important to note, such behaviours became more prevalent with age, which coincided with girls' friendship group formations and increasing tensions between friendship groups. Whilst such gossip-based peer commentary was labelled as bullying, technically, its private nature raises questions regarding the speaker's intention to harm given that disparaging comments are not intended to reach the victim when spoken. However, should gossip and rumours surface, they could induce considerable affective harm and foster further divisions between friendship-groups (James *et al.,* 2011; Kieffer, 2013). Given the behind-the-hand nature of girls' peer commentary, identifying, tracing the origins, and intervening in such forms of bullying is a difficult task for PE teachers, a challenged heightened by the group-based nature of girls PE lessons.

Through a figurational lens, sporty girls formed an established group who utilised gossip-based peer commentary concerning less-able outsider group members to strengthen their own 'we-group' image (Elias and Scotson, 1994). The effectiveness of gossip as a key power resource resided in its in-group, less direct, and more discrete manner, generally manifested through behind the hand comments and more overt laughter when observing a peer's performance. The extent to which gossip-based peer commentary contributed to sporty girls group charisma and less-sporty groups group disgrace (Elias and Scotson, 1994) was determined by outsider group members' reluctance to replicate performance-based and/or aesthetic based gossiping as a normalised communicative style. Furthermore, when sporty girls were the centre of gossip, they rarely altered their behaviours or engagement in PE, evidencing their increased group charisma and 'we-group' identity (Elias and Scotson, 1994). In contrast, less-sporty girls often ceased active participation when noticing peer commentary, removing themselves from the performative spotlight to avoid such embarrassing situations and performance-based ridicule, a finding also discovered in boys PE. Elias and Scotson (1994, p.89) recognised the social significance of gossip, stating that 'what is gossip-worthy depends on communal norms and beliefs and communal relationships'. In other words, gossip can only be understood within the networks of interdependencies in which it is manifested. Within the girls PE figuration, perceived sporting competence and performative aesthetics appear to be highly valued within the dominant 'we'-identity, a finding helps explain why peer commentary had performance and aesthetic based undertones.

In sum, this section details how bullying was manifested within boys and girls PE, evidencing notable gendered differences. Through examining boys and girls PE as figurations, findings have demonstrated how the gendered structure of PE, the subject-specific behavioural norms, and single-sex peer group dynamics collectively contributed to the value of sporting competence in boys PE and performance aesthetics in girls PE, explaining the gendered nuanced in manifested bullying. Applying the established-outsider relations

proved useful to demonstrate how established group members used peer commentary as an effective power resource to build, maintain, and/or strengthen social cohesion amongst sporty peers and distinguished themselves from the group disgrace they part attributed to outsider group members (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Whilst boys and girls manifested competence-based bullying in nuanced ways, boys' direct defamation and girls' gossip both had the outcome of outsider group members removing themselves from the performance spotlight. Regularly practiced by pupils and rarely challenged by teachers, such forms of peer commentary were seemingly normalised within the PE figuration.

7.3 Fear, stigmatisation and pupil's self-preservation when navigating bullying in PE

The final theme to be discussed in this chapter relates to how pupils navigated uneven power relations within the PE figuration at LTS, providing theoretically informed explanations into why young people rarely, if ever, challenge or report school-based bullying. Before providing ethnographic insights into pupils' and PE teachers' responses to negative peer commentary and marginalisation processes in PE, it is important to recall that it is government mandate that all state schools in England must endorse an anti-bullying policy (GOV.UK, 2024). The commitment to eradicating all forms of bullying and discrimination at LTS was made clear upon entering the school for the first time:

Fieldnote 4th January 2022

> Whilst waiting to be introduced to the Head of PE, the receptionist requested that I sat in the reception waiting room. My attention was immediately drawn to a feature wall, which displayed the schools core values, most recent Ofsted rating, and various awards and exhibitions, including sports trophies, artwork, and pupil testimonies. The feature wall also displayed a certificate awarded by Stonewall - the independent champion for LGBTQ+ rights – which celebrated the school's efforts and achievements in challenging all forms of discrimination.

The importance placed on challenging discrimination and anti-bullying was further evidenced through daily observations across the seven-month fieldwork period, with anti-bullying posters and quick response (QR) codes, designed for pupils to anonymously report bullying, displayed in most communal corridors and seating areas. A delve into the school-specific behaviour policy revealed that there was a 'top-down' expectation that all pupils should 'stand up' and 'speak out' against bullying and any forms of discrimination. The policy emphasised that pupils 'must SPEAK OUT and say something, you must tell a member of staff in school' [as presented within the policy document]. Guidance extended for staff members, stating that teachers are responsible for: 'being alert to social dynamics in their class; being available for pupils to report bullying; being alert to bullying situations; reframing from gender stereotypes when dealing with bullying; and reporting any instances of bullying once they have been approached'. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, some PE teachers are not always alert to bullying situations (O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), whilst others may not reframe from gender stereotypes when dealing with bullying (Jimémez-Barbero

et al., 2020; Peterson, Puhl and Luedicke, 2012). At LTS, whilst PE teachers appeared alert to social dynamics within their classes, their vague responses regarding the prevalence and manifestations of bullying suggests they may not always be alert to bullying situations, partly due to the spatial arrangements (i.e., changing rooms, transitions, vast open spaces) unique to PE. The prescriptive guidance detailed within the anti-bullying policy evidenced how all pupils and teachers were expected to be proactive should they observe bullying, or any forms of discrimination, revealing how abusive behaviours should not be dismissed as 'just banter', 'boys being boys' or 'part of growing up' (DfE, 2023, p.12).

Focus group responses revealed that pupils were acutely aware of the behavioural expectations bestowed upon them when witnessing bullying or discrimination. Discussing how pupils should respond to bullying, Imogen and Chloe (Year 7) suggested:

> Imogen: You should not just completely ignore it, you should like tell a teacher or something.
> Chloe: Yes, don't actually go and stop them bullying the person, just go and get a teacher.

The perception that pupils should report bullying to a teacher, that is to 'speak out', was shared by all pupils irrespective of age of gender, with many expressing that directly intervening was not an appropriate option. When probed around speaking out, pupils cited anonymous mechanisms and discussions with specialist school staff members, rather than teachers per se, as the *correct* method of reporting bullying. Noting this, Natalie (Year 10) stated, 'they have got posters up with a QR code and then they tell you loads to talk to your tutor and that, a support teacher. There is like special people for it, pastoral and that'. Taken collectively, these findings indicate that whilst pupils were expected to report any incidents of bullying, enabled to do so via several reporting channels, such reporting may happen after the episode, which may hinder a teacher's ability to assess the severity of the incident. Findings also demonstrate how pupils shared an appreciation that bullying is ethically and morally wrong (Palmer and Abbott, 2018; Thornberg *et al.,* 2016), understanding their moral duty to 'speak out'. In relation to reporting in bullying in PE, it is important to note that during lessons pupils did not have access to their mobile phones, constraining their ability to anonymously report via QR codes and were seldom observed requesting to speak to the pastoral team, therefore partly unable and perhaps unwilling to report via school-specified methods. During interviews PE teachers seldom referenced pupils utilising the QR codes to report PE-based bullying, perhaps evidencing how this method of reporting was seldom used to disclose information relating to their experiences in PE.

Whilst pupils understood what they 'should' do when experiencing/witnessing bullying, most pupils reported that rarely would they or their peers follow the guidance detailed within the school's anti-bullying policy. Indeed, focus group responses revealed that most pupils, irrespective of age or gender, were unlikely to 'stand

up' or 'speak out' against bullying in PE. Discussing why pupils are unlikely to intervene, Chloe (Year 7) stated:

> They might not want to actually get bullied themselves, they might think that if they stand up against the bully then the bully might come for me next time. So, they won't do it. Because the bullies are popular, the bullies might be popular. It's usually like that so then they have more support.

Recalling that bullying is often characterised by imbalances of power (GOV.UK, 2024; Olweus, 1993, 1997), Chole's account demonstrates an awareness of how popularity may serve as a key power resource, elevating a pupil's positioning in a social hierarchy and potentially providing support from peers, which may constrain pupils from challenging bullies. Evidencing how young people's emotions and desires for self-preservation constrain their responses to bullying, Owen (Year 7) noted, 'one of the main reasons why bullying is such a big thing is everyone is too scared to get involved in case it starts happening to them', while Patricia (Year 10) suggested:

> Bystanders don't want to get involved because they don't want to get bullied themselves. Let's say Alice is being bullied by Laura and I'm scared of Laura, then I might not stick up for Alice so quickly if I didn't have someone helping me because Laura might start bullying me as well. So, it's that. Bystanders are scared of being bullied as well.

With many pupils sharing an implicit fear of being bullied, in practice it seems young people's emotions and desires for self-protection may override their moral compass when observing bullying. These shared narratives evidenced how standing up against a bully is understood to be dangerous act for a young person, with intervention viewed to increase the likelihood that they will be bullied, a finding which resonates with the existing literature (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Wei and Graber, 2023). Through a figurational lens, these findings evidence the role of emotions in young people's prioritisation of their 'I'-identity when witnessing a peer being bullied (Elias, 2001). A fear of being bullied, which would damage an individual's 'I'-identity at a psychological and emotional level, appears to override pupils' acknowledged moral obligation to challenge bullying. Furthermore, the presented evidence demonstrates young people's acute awareness of the role of power differential which underpin bullying behaviours, with many pupils conceiving bullies to be particularly powerful within the PE figuration. Observational insights supported the narrative that intervention is not a viable option for pupils, with no evidence gathered regarding pupils at LTS requesting their peers to stop chastising their less-sporty peers or attempting to re-integrate marginalised pupils into activities. Therefore, pupils appear to rely on the aspect of anti-bullying policy which places responsibility on teachers, deferring their (pupils) responsibility to 'stand up'.

As young people are unlikely to intervene in episodes of bullying, the onus is on the victims and/or bystanders to 'speak out', that is to report bullying to a school staff member. PE teachers suggested that reporting, like

intervention, is unlikely, when discussing his experiences of pupils reporting bullying to him during his 15 years at LTS, Mr Walker stated:

> No one has ever actually come up to me and said, "I am being bullied" or "they are being bullied". It has been brought to my attention that someone hasn't been very nice or hasn't said very nice things, and depending on the severity, I will deal with it in lessons or take it further. But no one at Lord Taylors has ever come up to me and said, "I am being bullied" or "he's been mean to me for a week", or anything like that.

This finding mapped to girls PE, as Miss Turner, a teacher with over five years experience, replied, 'no, no I wouldn't say so. Maybe once a few years ago, but that is about it really'. Whilst this finding could be partly explained by the available reporting methods at LTS, the lack of reporting could also be partly explained by what could be construed as a 'culture of silence' (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Furthermore, the normalisation of peer commentary within the PE figuration may contribute to only extreme cases being reported, in which cases pupils may opt not to use the word 'bullying' (i.e., they are being mean), placing the onus on PE teachers to judge the severity of an incident that they may not have observed/overheard, making subjective judgements on intervention difficult. Should pupils report an incident but not label it as bullying PE teachers may adopt a more lenient approach, as accusations of bullying often prompt a zero-tolerance teacher response, which may contribute to a culture of silence as pupils seek to avoid unwanted peer and teacher attention (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a).

Pupil focus group responses provided insights into the social processes which fostered a prevailing culture of silence at LTS, with many young people sharing their reluctance to report bullying via any available reporting method, citing fears of social reprisals. Evidencing how such fear severed as a constraining consideration, Joe (Year 10) stated, 'if you report it [bullying] then they [the bully] might start bullying you'. Probing revealed that all pupils were conscious of avoiding negative peer labelling and stigmatisation associated with disclosing information to a teacher. Referring to such stigmatisation processes, Reece (Year 7) suggested, 'they might call you a grasser or something', Patricia (Year 10) indicated, 'no one really wants to talk to a teacher because then you get called a snitch and then attention gets turned on you', and Cooper (Year 11) reported, 'they [reporting pupil] are more likely to get bullied because people will say you have snitched and stuff like that'. Young people's implicit fears of being negatively labelled as a 'snitch', or other derivates of the word, appears to be somewhat universal within Western societies with many scholars presenting comparable findings (Aguilar *et al.,* 2021; Jiménez-Barbero *et al.,* 2020; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Wei and Graber, 2023).

Through a figurational lens, the process of being labelled a 'snitch', a 'grasser', or any other derivates of such terms, is understood to be incredibly damaging to a young person's 'I'-identity, as well as their 'I-we'-identity. These findings imply that 'snitching', the act of disclosing information, is commonly associated a socially

damaging 'they'-identity (Elias, 2001), which is significant given that secondary school is a period where pupils are seeking to understand, develop, and protect their 'I' and 'I-we'-identities (Nielsen and Thing, 2019a). The process of disclosing information to a teacher, who then may immediately punish a bully, appears to place young people at increased risk of being bullied, thus damaging their 'I'-identity given the psychological and emotional consequences of being bullied (Meseini and Salmivalli, 2017; Rigby, 2003; Thornberg *et al.,* 2016). In addition, negative peer labelling associated with reporting bullying is seen to jeopardise a young person's positioning within their peer groups, negatively impacting upon their 'we-group' alliances and friendships (Elias, 2001). Indeed, the significance of not being stigmatised with such labels demonstrates the importance young people place on how their peers perceive their 'I'-identity and peer group status (Nielsen and Thing, 2019a), concerns which out way a young person's sense of moral obligation to protect their peers by reporting bullying. Collectively, these findings demonstrate how pupils must navigate identity and emotion-laden tension balances when observing or being a victim of bullying, with many opting for self-preservation over perceived previously cited moral obligations. The importance of power relations within the culture of silence should also be considered given that stigmatisation is an inherently social process. What emerges here is that bullies may use stigmatisation processes, such as labelling someone a snitch, as a controlling and oppressive power resource. By labelling a peer a snitch, bullies may use stigmatisation process to ensure teachers are not made aware of their behaviours, providing them further opportunities to maintain their social dominance.

When asked about how reporting may lead to peer stigmatisation, Jessica (Year 10) stated, 'sometimes a pupil might go to a teacher, but the teacher does more than the pupil wants them to do. That makes the pupil never want to speak up about it again'. Acting in response to a vague report from a pupil or after observing a potentially harmful interaction may be fraught with tensions for a PE teacher. Mr Walker mentioned the 'severity' of an act as a key consideration for how he may respond, however, as evidenced earlier in this chapter, it is often difficult to understand the extent to which emotional harm is caused. Therefore, PE teachers must make a subjective judgement on an incident that they may or may not have witnessed, judgements which are likely to be inconsistent. In addition, several of the older pupils also stressed the significance of perceived teacher-pupil relations when faced with tensions of whether to report bullying. Recalling Chapter Five, some pupils problematised perceived PE teacher favouritism towards more sporty pupils, those that are most competent at sport, study GCSE PE, and/or represent the school in extracurricular sports fixtures. When debating why less-sporty pupils may not raise their concerns when being mocked, defamed, and marginalised during PE, Elliot and Freddie (Year 11) suggested:

> Elliot: I can't see them trusting a PE teacher.
> Freddie: Because a lot of PE teachers are quite friendly with the students. I think there is
> a lot of PE teachers who put it [bullying] to the side, especially with the more popular

> kids, especially if it is one of their favourites. Like there is a PE teacher who has particular favourites and it's like they could do anything and get away with it.

Perceived favouritism amongst male PE teachers is not uncommon (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Hay and Macdonald, 2010; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011), neither is the perception that teachers may be complicit to bullying in boys PE (Jachyra, 2016; O'Connor and Graber, 2014; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). Here, the boys suggest that their PE teachers may be complicit in competence-based bullying, with performance-based peer commentary, especially banter, largely normalised and legitimised. In a figuration in which sporting competence and the embodiment of a competitive ethos is highly valued, both structurally and experientially, being 'sporty' is part of an established 'we-group' norm (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Moreover, participation in extracurricular school sport enables more informalised teacher-pupil relations to develop, enabling closer degrees of mutual identification between pupils and teachers, and fostering increased degrees of social closeness. Whilst the *Sport and Activity Plan* (GOV.UK, 2023a) reports that participation in extracurricular activities may have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour during compulsory lessons, the evidence presented here indicates that the strengthening of 'we-group' alliances fostered during extracurricular activities may have unintended social consequences. Specifically, closer social cohesion between sporty pupils, established group members, and their PE teachers may constrain some less-sporty pupils, those who are most likely to be bullied in PE, from reporting such harm evoking behaviours to their PE teachers., which may lead to the normalisation of abusive behaviours (DfE, 2023).

Further evidence of the perception that some PE teachers may be complicit in competence-related bullying during core PE lessons was provided by Fran (Year 10), who stated, 'PE teachers don't recognise it [bullying] because people who aren't good at sport are given fake sympathy, like pretending to help them when they are getting judged'. The reported lack of empathy may be further illustrative of an established 'we-group' mentality that struggles to appreciate an outsider group members' feelings of inferiority and emotional harm, further constraining less-sporty pupils from speaking-out against manifested power imbalances during PE lessons (Elias and Scotson, 1994). These findings are significant when considering the roles and responsibilities of the teacher documented within the LTS behavioural policy. This policy states that teachers must be alert to social dynamics in their class, however such evidence suggests that PE teachers may be unaware of how overt peer commentary, gossip, and marginalisation evoke feelings of affective harm for some young people. These findings demonstrate not only the significance of peer group relations and pupils' implicit fears of social repercussions, but also the importance of consistent teacher responses to bullying, whether perceived or actual.

In addition to the psychological, emotional, and social tensions that pupils must navigate when experiencing and/or observing bullying in PE, the culture of silence was also rationalised by many older pupils. When discussing why bystanders may not challenge or report bullying, Abbie (Year 10) stated, 'sometimes it is not

your business anyway, so you're not going to get involved', similarly, Mickey (Year 10) explained, 'I wouldn't really blame the bystander because that is most people here and it is not really your fault that it is happening'. These findings suggest that pupil's distance themselves from bullying scenarios by rationalising that they are not responsible for the behaviour, therefore placing emphasis on the victim to report or for a teacher to intervene. Mierzwinski and Velija (2020a) described how boys in KS3 granted themselves feelings of diminished responsibility when upholding a culture of silence, however the authors depicted a lose-lose scenario whereby silence may elicit feelings of shame and guilt for bystanders. At LTS, pupils afforded themselves similar feelings of diminished responsibility, yet no feelings of guilt or shame were evidenced when pupils discussed failures to 'stand up' or 'speak out'.

Further probing into how pupils rationalised the culture of silence in PE revealed a shared discernment that it is often hard to decipher whether peer commentary is bullying or banter. Indeed, the blurred lines between bullying and banter were significant in pupils' navigations of bullying in PE (Abell *et al.,* 2023; Booth, Cope and Rhind 2023; Buglass *et al.,* 2020; Newman, Warburton and Russell, 2022), as Thomas (Year 10) stated:

> Sometimes you can't tell if they are just having banter because it could just be banter. But say just one person is receiving it a bit more than the other person and you don't know if they are friends or not. So, you don't really want to get involved.

Reiterating this narrative, Neve (Year 10) noted how, 'people might take it [banter] the wrong way and they might think it is bullying when it is not'. As banter was understood as a form of communication which only takes place between friends and that can only be understood between friends, it is not surprising that bystanding pupils were uncertain of whether peer commentary was hurtful or humorous for the auditor. Moreover, the subjective, situational, and socially constructed nature of pupils' assessments of banter help explain why pupils rarely reported and/or intervened in interactions which may or may not have breached the line of acceptability. Aware that they may not share the same sense of humour and emotions as those directly involved, pupils often opted to ignore verbal exchanges between peers, further placing the onus on the auditor to report or challenge hurtful peer commentary.

The discussions presented in this section have revealed how, irrespective of age or gender, pupils consistently opted against intervening (as bystanders) and reporting (as victims or bystanders) when navigating negative peer commentary, gossip, and marginalisation in PE. In doing so, pupils often bypassed government, school, and best practice guidance (Evans, 2021; GOV.UK, 2024; Horton, 2011). This approach was primarily driven by fear of being targeted, stigmatised and/or socially excluded (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; O'Connor and Graber, 2014). Such fears demonstrate the importance pupils placed on not jeopardising their 'I'-identity and their 'I-we' peer relations, ensuring that they were not ostracised within a 'they' group (Elias, 2001; Nielsen and Thing, 2019a). Pupils' decisions not to report bullying were further informed by their fears of

both teachers' immediate responses, highlighting their reporting role, and concerns of being dismissed by teachers, given the normalising of targeted peer commentary within the PE figuration. In some cases, perceived teacher favouritism towards more established group members who embodied the dominant 'we-group' identity and had stronger 'we-group' alliances within peers and teachers constrained some less-sporty pupils, those likely to be bullied, from reporting. Collectively, these findings evidence the importance that young people place on their 'I'- and 'I-we' identities (Elias, 2001; Nielsen and Thing, 2019a), as well as the power of peer commentary and gossip within pupils' gendered peer group dynamics. It is these social, identity-based, emotion-laden, and tension balances that pupils must consider when navigating bullying.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how secondary school pupils socially constructed and navigated bullying within the PE figuration, providing ethnographic insights into the prevalence, manifestation, and responses to bullying. Through examining boys and girls PE as figuration, key findings have demonstrated the significance of the gendered structure of PE, the subject-specific behavioural norms, and single-sex peer group dynamics. In boys PE, sporting competence was highly valued, with bullying likely to be manifested through defaming peer commentary, blaming, and marginalisation. In girls PE, sporting competence was coupled with performative aesthetics, with bullying manifested more covert forms of peer commentary and gossip. Consistent across all ages and genders, pupils reported an unwillingness to intervene in and/or report bullying in PE, citing fears of social repercussions, and opting for stoicism. Moreover, findings suggest that being labelled as a 'snitch' or a 'grasser', denoting someone who discloses information to someone in a position of authority (i.e., a teacher), may be more damaging for a young person than being labelled a bullying, a somewhat paradoxical finding when compared against policy documentation. These findings demonstrate the social, psychological, and emotional-laden tension balances that young people must navigate when experiencing, observing, or deciding to report bullying to a teacher, with many young people opting for self-preservation.

Applying Elias and Scotson's (1994) model of established-outsider relations provided a theoretical framework to demonstrate how established group members used peer commentary as an effective power resource to build, maintain, and strengthen social cohesion amongst sporty peers and PE teachers, distinguishing themselves from the group disgrace attributed to less-competent peers, who formed an outsider group. Given the valuing of sporting/athletic competence, the normalising and legitimising of peer commentary, and methods of grouping pupils, less-competent pupils were unable to overcome their group disgrace, alter their social status, or disrupt uneven power relations. As such, within the PE figuration, established-outsider relations were relatively static and flat, in the sense that there were few conflicts, with clear and distinguishing hierarchies even within pupils' peer group dynamics. Collectively, the empirical and

theoretical informed findings provide a nuanced perspective on how bullying may be manifested and navigated within PE. The following chapter, the final results and discussion chapter in this thesis, will explore the everyday realities of school changing room procedures and practices, and pupils' behavioural norms, peer relations, and identity self-protection methods.

Chapter Eight - 'It's definitely a social occasion': Changing room processes, semi-naked bodies and gendered peer group dynamics

Described as critical access points (Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Fusco, 2006) and 'institutional transition zones' (Kehler and Atkinson, 2015, p.267), school changing rooms are spaces where pupils change into and out of PE kit, often in the presence of up to 60 peers. Alongside this function, changing rooms provide a sociologically interesting space given findings that they are hotspots for boys banter (Chapter Six) and can include girls and boys bullying (Chapter Seven). School changing rooms have also been identified as spaces whereby feelings of pleasure, shame and embarrassment are fostered (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010; Fisette, 2011; Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Gerdin, 2017a; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020b). Despite increasing international academic interest in this space (Kehler and Atkinson, 2015; Forsberg, Horton and Thornberg, 2024; Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Gerdin, 2017a), to date, there is little empirical evidence of the everyday realities within secondary school PE processes and practices, nor pupils' behavioural norms and peer relations. This gap in knowledge is primarily due to changing rooms been 'off limits' heavily protected school spaces (Kehler and Atkinson, 2015; Gerdin, 2017b; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). Having been granted access to this space (boys changing room), the aim of this chapter is to fill this empirical gap and provide theoretically-informed analysis of young people's perceptions of and gender etiquettes within these unique school spaces. As referred to in Chapter Four, observational data was only gathered within the boys changing room due to LTS's changing room policy and national guidance regarding same-sex changing room supervision (DfE, 2014b, 2018; NSPCC, 2022).

Discussion begins by exploring the spatial arrangements of the LTS PE changing rooms and the age-based and gendered nuances within key practices. Such practices are analysed through the lens of key policies to demonstrate the everyday realities of policy in practice. Then, attention shifts to pupil's etiquettes within the changing rooms, exploring the age-based and gendered nuances of changing room practices and pupils' behavioural norms and peer group dynamics. Finally, the social, psychological, and emotional impacts of young people revealing their (semi)naked bodies in front of their peers and PE teachers are explored. Throughout this chapter, figurational concepts of civilising processes (Elias, 2000), gendered civilised bodies (Dunning, 1999; Shilling, 2012; Thing, 2001), and 'I-we-they'-identities and habitus (Elias, 1978, 2001) are used as analytical tools from which to provide a more adequate understanding of the everyday realities of school changing room processes, pupils' gendered behavioural norms and peer group dynamics.

8.1 Changing room policies and gendered practices at LTS

In England it is government mandate that all pupils aged 11 years or over at the beginning of the academic year (Year 7) must be provided with suitable changing accommodation and shower facilities (DfE, 2018).

Guided by the *School Premises Regulations,* the DfE (2014b) stipulate that in mixed-sexed secondary schools, such as LTS, girls and boys should have equal access to separate (sex-segregated) changing facilities. Amid growing concerns around the equitable provision of school toilets and changing rooms for transgender and non-gender conforming pupils, the UK Government recommend:

> If a child does not want to use the toilet, changing room or showers designated for their biological sex, schools and colleges may wish to consider alternative toilet, changing room or shower facilities for the child, however schools and colleges cannot allow a child to use a space solely designed for use by the opposite sex (GOV.UK, 2023b, np).

As a result of such guidance, schools are encouraged to provide alternative changing facilities to sex-segregated changing rooms, however this recommended is not completely constraining as it is not mandatory.

At LTS, the changing rooms accommodated up to 60 pupils at any given time. Almost identical, the girls and boys changing rooms encompassed a large open-plan floor space that was approximately 20 metres in length, seven meters in width, and two meters in height which served as a communal changing space. Also located within the changing rooms was an open-plan shower block containing eight shower heads, a small office, and a washroom containing two private cubicles in the girls changing room and one cubicle and a urinal in the boys changing room. The changing area contained wooden benches and fitted clothing racks which lined the interior walls and branched off dividing the floor space into four identifiable sections, labelled 'bays'. The changing areas was minimalistic in design, consisting of hardwearing non-slip flooring, cream-coloured walls, no windows, and two noticeboards displaying the core PE and extracurricular sport timetables. This architectural design appears relatively standardised given the similarities with those described in the United States (Fusco, 2006), New Zealand (Gerdin, 2017a, 2017b), and Sweden (Forsberg, Horton and Thornberg, 2024). At LTS, the boys and girls changing rooms were adjacent, both having an entrance that led directly into the gymnasium and another onto a corridor which connected the field, swimming pool, sports hall, and the dining hall.

As denoted above, while changing rooms are often depicted as one all-encompassing space, the changing rooms consisted of several spaces which severed multiple purposes. Despite its name, the shower block was seldom used for washing purposes. The lack of showering could be partly explained by the short duration and back-to-back timetabling of lessons and practicalities of 60 pupils using eight showers, although pupils also never showered after extracurricular sport when less constrained by time and when fewer pupils participated. This finding appears indicative of broader cultural shifts whereby young people dislike and actively avoid showering after PE (Forsberg, Horton and Thornberg, 2024; Frydendal and Thing, 2020; Sandercock, Ogunleye and Voss, 2016). Therefore, rather than functioning as a washing area, the shower block served as a space in which some pupils changed attire. Observations made within the boys changing room revealed a general trend that up to four pupils would use the shower block to when changing. One reason for this was in

larger classes space was at a premium, whilst another reason is that the shower block contained a wall which provided a more private changing space for pupils who wished to escape peer gaze, a finding discussed later in this chapter. The changing rooms also housed a small office, with a locked door, used by PE teachers to store equipment and PE kit, a space off-bounds to pupils. The toilets located within the changing rooms were observed and reported to serve dual purposes (Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018), one for urination and defecation, and another as an additional, more private, space for pupils to change attire. As such, some areas of the changing rooms were open, in a sense that pupils were in view of each other, whilst others were more private (Kjaran, 2019). Why some pupils opted to change in more private areas of the changing rooms will be provided shortly after discussing everyday changing room procedures.

Everyday changing room procedures

Before entering the changing rooms, KS3 pupils were required to congregate in a courtyard located close to the changing rooms. Indicative of the formalising practices, which younger pupils were required to line-up in a single file line, alphabetically informed by surname. Male PE teachers invited boys into the changing rooms once silent. This obedience centred practice exampled the strict behavioural constraints imposed on younger boys, further evidencing the more formalised nature of teacher-pupil relations within the KS3 PE figuration. Interestingly, girls of the same age were not required to stand in silence nor alphabetical order whilst lining up, although their entry was still dependent on a teacher's invitation. Whilst not qualified by teachers, observations of this social process revealed that most younger boys tended to be highly energetic and excitable before PE, whereas most younger girls tended to be more reserved and engaged in group-based conversations. Discussing such procedures, Mr Walker explained:

> So, the changing room policy changed massively during Covid because we had to keep a metre away from everybody. We also had it where we [teachers] would line everyone up outside prior to a less and then we would walk them in as a class, that made a massive difference. We used to have it where they would come in when the bell went and they would all come in in their own time, through the door to get changed. So, since Covid we kept the idea that students line-up outside, we think that it worked well, really well. It calmed the lesson down before it started, a lot more organised.

The UK Government imposed Covid-19 restrictions (see GOV.UK, 2020) constrained certain PE procedures, but in doing so enabled teachers to implement and maintain more structured constraints on younger pupils, but not older cohorts. Instead, pupils in Years 10 and 11 entered the changing room on their own accord, often entering in small groups. This contrast further evidenced the more informalised and less constraining practices and teacher-pupil relations observed during Year 10 and 11 PE lessons. Occasionally, teachers felt compelled to adopt more formalised approaches as corrective measures, as described in the following fieldnote:

Fieldnote 3rd February 2022 – Year 10 Boys Football

> As pupils entered the changing room, five of the boys, all members of the school football team, were discussing a football match at lunch. Four of these boys were directing performance-related chants towards the other boy, implying he was rubbish at football. As the chants became louder, with other boys joining in, Mr Harris shouted 'be quiet and get changed'. In the far corner of the changing room, out of view of Mr Harris and I (both standing in the office entrance) a football hit one of the protective light covers on the ceiling, making a loud shuddering noise. Mr Harris immediately blew his whistle and demanded all the boys left the changing room and lined up in the courtyard. Many of the boys were half changed at this point, exiting in their school shirts and PE shorts or vice versa. Once outside, Mr Harris waited for silence, which took approximately three minutes as several boys were ribbing each other about their attire. Whilst waiting, several Year 10 girls walked past to enter the changing rooms, pointing and laughing at some of the boys when doing so. When Mr Harris addressed the group of approximately 50 boys, he remonstrated that their behaviours were 'childish', 'dangerous', and 'completely unacceptable'.

By implementing a whole-class disciplinary approach and labelling unacceptable behaviours as infantile, male PE teachers used shaming as a mechanism of realigning boys with civilised and more formalised behavioural expectations (Elias, 2000; Velija and Hughes, 2019). Elias (2000) conceptualises shame as serving both positive and negative functions, with positive shaming being used to encourage people to behaviour in more civilised manners (Atkinson, 2012; Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm, 2014; Velija and Hughes, 2019). In this case, PE teacher's use of shaming served positive functions of reiterating the importance of behavioural self-restraints during the changing process. However, making boys line-up half changed to be laughed at by female peers may have evoked negative shame, particularly for those boys who had conformed to behavioural expectations. These findings demonstrate teachers power advantage and how despite offering older cohorts more informalising opportunities, should these not be adhered to in an acceptable manner, teachers could use their authority to implement what they perceived as effective corrective measures. There was no evidence to suggest that female PE teachers utilised similar shaming tactics, but opted for more individually negotiated forms of behavioural management, for example individual conversations. Collectively these findings evidence both age-based and gendered nuances in procedures before pupils entered changing rooms, nuances which illustrated formalised and informalised trends and the use of shaming as an effective corrective behavioural measure.

Upon entering the changing rooms, all pupils were expected to adhere to a seating plan, with each pupil having a bench space and clothes peg. Consistent across all year groups, at the beginning of the academic year, pupils were allocated their own space. However, there were gendered differences in how seating plans were formulated, with Mr Walker explaining, 'all of the boys follow a seating plan in the changing rooms, it is in alphabetical order split between group one and group two'. Registered informed, mirroring the lining-up procedure, male PE teachers seating plan was partly designed to enable teachers to easily identify which

pupils were present/absent, but also intentionally served to socially constrain where boys sat whilst changing attire. Further discussing the rationale behind the seating plan, Mr Wilkinson explained:

> It is not like on a bus where you have the back seats, the kids who take up the back seats. We [male PE teachers] position them [boys] in alphabetical order. If there is a group of boys who are in the higher echelons, if you like, we will often split them up otherwise they are quite a dominant force in that environment [changing room].

Seemingly aware of boys' peer group dynamics, positioning boys in alphabetical order provided an equitable method for teachers to better maintain social order, whilst subtly exerting their power advantage. Whilst teacher implemented seating plans are commonplace in classroom-based subjects (Victory, Cohen and Flemming, 2014), such practices are seldom discussed in PE-based literature. At LTS, this formalising and socially constraining procedure was uncritically accepted by many boys, with Freddie (Year 11) denoting, 'I think everyone just gets on with it and I don't think anyone has a great dislike of it'. This procedure was accepted partly due to the spatial arrangements of the changing rooms which enabled socialising opportunities, as explained by Nick (Year 11), 'so, it is in alphabetical order but luckily the bays are quite close to each other so if you speak up you can still talk to each other'. Furthermore, observations revealed that if pupils remained in their designated space, PE teachers often allowed boys to chat across bays. Before discussing such etiquette, the procedures utilised in the girls changing room are outlined.

Contrastingly, female PE teachers implemented fewer constraining procedures, as evidenced by Mrs Hanson:

> We [female PE teachers] let them [girls] pick their seats because... [short pause] I know the boys have done it in alphabetical order and things, but it is a different kettle of fish. Girls need to be sitting with their friends to get changed, really. They don't have the same sort of issues as they would have in the boys [changing rooms].

Reiterating the importance of enabling girls to select their own space within the changing room, Miss Turner stated:

> We don't put them in alphabetical order because they are, girls are more likely to, you know, be happier if they are getting changed around their mates and people who they are comfortable with. So, there is no particular structure around that.

During focus groups, girls commented on this approach, for example, Fran (Year 10) noted:

> At the beginning of the year the pegs have numbers on and you pick your number and then you go where you want. So, in our changing room you have the middle two bays where me and our friendship group is and then you have the chavs on that side [points right]. So, everyone gets like tiny sections for each friendship group.

Comparatively, female PE teachers appeared less concerned with maintaining control over girls within the changing room, seldom suggesting they need to exert their power advantages to maintain civilised behaviours.

Instead, procedures were designed to encourage girls to feel confident and comfortable when changing attire, a finding not shared by male PE teachers. Further conversations with female PE teachers revealed that their changing room practices were partly driven by their desire to reduce barriers participation in PE for girls, with similar considerations underpinning female PE teachers' pedagogical approaches discovered elsewhere (Fisette, 2011; Slater and Tiggemann, 2011). Whilst positively intended and received, this enabling procedure could arguably serve the unintended social consequence of perpetuating divisions between girls' friendship groups, enabling gossip-type behaviours to manifest, effecting peer group dynamics within this space and possibly during the ensuing lesson, as presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

Through a figurational lens, these insights reveal how, as pupils progress through secondary PE teachers may implement less formalised precures and less-strict behavioural constraints, evidencing how older pupils were expected to demonstrate higher levels of behavioural self-restraint, indicative of individual civilising processes and civilised bodies (Atkinson, 2012; Elias, 2000). As explained by Shilling (2012), a marker of a civilised body is the ability to exert high degrees of emotional control and internalised demarcated expectations regarding appropriate behaviour. Within the changing rooms, teachers expected older pupils to have developed and be able to embody self-restraints, subsequently implementing more informalised procedures, reintroducing more formalised procedures when pupils, specifically boys, breached behavioural expectations. Findings have also demonstrated that teacher implemented procedures were gendered with male PE teachers utilising a more formalised lining-up practice and seating plan than their female colleagues, which were intended to help maintain their increased power status and control over up to 60 boys. In contrast, fluctuating power balances caused less tension for female PE teachers, whose practices were designed to appease girls' friendship group preferences in order to create a social climate in which pupils felt confident and comfortable to change attire for PE and subsequently engage in PE. Interesting, the rationales and concerns behind such gendered procedures were not shared by male and female PE teachers, further demonstrating the need to examine girls PE and boys PE as distinct, yet interconnected, figurations.

Changing room supervision and gendered civilised bodies

The seating plans and subsequent peer group dynamics were also influenced by the extent teachers were present whilst pupils got changed. How teachers positioned themselves in the changing rooms revealed further gendered nuances. For greater context, it is worth noting that at a national level, the DfE draw upon recommendations provided by NSPCC (2022), who stipulate that adults should never stand in the changing rooms watching children and young people and that adults should not continuously enter without good reason. Instead, the NSPCC (2022) recommend that teachers should position themselves in earshot of the changing rooms, only entering in case of a disturbance, citing bullying as an example. Aware of such policy recommendations, as well as previous empirical findings (Gerdin, 2017a, 2017b; Kehler and Atkinson, 2015;

Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a), surprisingly male PE teachers directly supervised boys whilst they changed, a practice which enabled me to make observations whilst accompanying them. Male PE teachers welcomed the extra pair of adult eyes and ears in identifying any harmful behaviours (i.e., bullying). Male PE teachers preferred observing boys in pars whereby they could converse amongst themselves or often with members of school sport teams (sporty pupils). Explaining this practice, Mr Harris stressed, 'you wouldn't leave anybody in a maths classroom or a science laboratory on their own. I think whatever lesson you are teaching it is only sensible to be there 100 percent of the time'. Supporting and qualifying this perception, Mr Shaw stated:

> 100 percent a teacher should be there [boys changing room], anything could happen in a changing room if a student, if a teacher is not there to make sure that anything doesn't happen. Injuries could occur or there could be bullying that is taking place, if a teacher isn't there then that is going to be more prevalent. There are showers, there are toilets, if a teacher isn't there then, you know, it is definitely a health risk, definitely.

Male PE teachers shared the perception that boys were more likely to experience various forms of physical, psychological, social, and/or affective harm should they be left unsupervised in the changing rooms. Findings presented in Chapter Seven justify these suspicions, recalling how pupils suggested that PE-based bullying is most prevalent when a teacher is not present, a previously well document finding (see Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Wei and Graber, 2023), demonstrated in Chapter Two. At LTS, male PE teachers were aware of how their presence severed as a deterrence to boys who may wish to bully, fostering more formalised and restrained behaviours and more inclusive peer relations to manifest. Whilst policy reports that teacher supervision should not be necessary to maintain good behaviour (NSPCC, 2022), male PE teachers' experiential knowledge of boys' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms suggested that supervision is required. Moreover, at a practical level, it would be extremely challenging for a PE teacher to identify specific verbal interactions, that may or may not constitute bullying, when positioned in earshot of the changing room given that up to 60 pupils could be talking whilst changing clothes.

Such was the importance male PE teachers placed on having two staff members present in the boys changing room, this provision could often impinge on what otherwise would have been a free period for a colleague. Stressing the need for such practices, Mr Wharfedale stated:

> Generally speaking, there is always someone in there [boys changing room] with you because you can't leave the boys in there. I know my timetable inside out and I know certain lessons that I am in the changing rooms by myself because they are the lesson that you dread. You know you have to be a little bit more on it because they are big classes, and they are hard to manage and maintain. Sometimes you have got 55 15- to 16-year-old lads in the changing rooms, who forget kit all the time, who can be a little bit rowdy and a little bit daft. If you are in there by yourself it is not an easy thing to do. So, I definitely think it is important you are in there and you have two of you [teachers].

The importance of having two teacher present was driven by a sense of duty to ensure safe standards of behaviour. At a practical level, observations revealed that having two staff members present enabled one teacher to deal with any kit issues, injury complaints, and other administrative duties (i.e., registration, departmental notices, extracurricular announcements), leaving the other teacher to monitor and police behaviour. These findings underline the practicalities of managing large classes in a confined space and the arguably unrealistic policy expectations concerning eaves dropping to ensure pupil safety (NSPCC, 2022).

Many boys supported male PE teacher's decisions to supervise the changing process, Owen (Year 7) suggested, 'it is pretty important with us like getting changed, some people could be inappropriate and weird sometimes. So, it makes sure everybody is being good and isn't being weird'. Several older boys shared this perception, with Brogan and Shay (Year 11) stating:

> Brogan: If there is a teacher there then people won't, there is like, it's like a deterrence really which stops people from doing stuff that they shouldn't do. They know if they bully in front of people who have authority over them then they could be punished.
> Shay: It's just people doing things that are more physical when teachers are not around, especially in the changing rooms. It's good that there is normally always teachers around.

Boys' unanimity of this practice vindicated teachers' stance, demonstrating a shared awareness of how a teacher's increased power status, specifically the threat of reprimand, serves as a deterrence for bullying and other harm evoking behaviours. These findings evidence how, despite best intentions, the NSPCC (2022) guidelines, endorsed by the DfE, may be at odds with pupil preference. In this case, it would seem that such policy recommendations are derived from adult fears concerning other adults gaze over pre/pubescent bodies, accusations feared by some PE teachers (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Gerdin, 2017b; Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a). However, whilst aimed at safeguarding children from predatory behaviours from adults, this policy guidance serves an unintended social consequence of prohibiting teachers' duty and ability to safeguard children from harmful (physical, social and emotional) peer-on-peer behaviours, which appears at odds with responsibilities detailed in *Keeping Children Safe in Education* report (DfE, 2023). Such safeguarding concerns are not unforeseen by policy writers, as the NSPCC (2022) propose that teachers may enter changing rooms in response to disturbances or bullying. Therefore, the policy stance illustrates the outcome of two competing interests, and which one is deemed to be more severe, one which boys, teachers, and possibility parents would not choose.

Contrastingly, female PE teachers and girls were more divided in their perceptions of changing room supervision, with Miss Jones deliberating:

> Yes and no. Obviously for safeguarding reasons, yes. But then again for safeguarding reasons, no. Because there are some students who will say without even thinking, "what are you looking at?" "Why are you here when I am getting changed?" So, I think you

> sometimes feel that you have to stay in the office and only go out as and when you are needed. And because the students are really good at coming to the door [of the office] and saying, "Miss, I need this and so and so needs that". But there is always a slim thought in your mind that if I go out and stand in the changing room somebody, a student is not going to be comfortable with that and you have got to think about their perception of what you are doing. Even though it might be the wrong perception of why you are there.

Confronted with a tension balance regarding safeguarding pupils and safeguarding themselves from pupil accusations, female PE teachers opted to follow national policy guidelines by remaining in earshot of the girls (NSPCC, 2022). Female teachers rationalised their decision by remaining in the office, a space where they could hear, but not see, pupils, also encouraging girls to knock should they require teacher attention. Qualifying these findings, Miss Turner noted:

> I never really go in there [main changing area] to be honest. We [teachers] have like our enclosed area [office] where the girls come if they were to have notes or needed kit. They would come to us, we would never go to them.

During focus groups, girls confirmed that female PE teachers stay in the office and provided insights into why their teachers may follow such protocols, with Alice (Year 10) noting, 'it would be really weird', whilst Neve (Year 10) stressed, 'obviously they [teachers] are not going to be watching us [girls] get changed'. In contrast to their male peers, girls unanimously agreed that their same-sex teachers should not directly observe them getting changed suggesting such practice would be unnatural or unexpected, perhaps more conscious of an adult gazing at their semi-naked bodies and more trusting that girls should be able to self-regulate their behaviours to breach peer-on-peer safeguarding issues. These gendered findings appear indicative of long-term gendered perceptions regarding male and female civilised bodies (Elias and Dunning, 1996), which appear to continue to enable and constrain PE teacher's pedagogical practices and pupil's behaviours within changing rooms.

Through a figurational lens, Elias (2001) understood the body and human emotions as dependent on time and culture, in other words, dependent upon the prevailing figurational dynamics. The gendered nuances in changing room procedures at LTS and pupils' and teachers' perceptions of gendered practices imply that it is more socially acceptable for an adult male to gaze over the semi-naked body of an adolescent boy, than it is for an adult female to gaze at the body of an adolescent girl. These findings demonstrate that civilised bodies are managed in gendered ways in PE secondary PE (Shilling, 2012) and reminds us that civilising processes are always relational (Elias, 2000). More specifically, these findings reveal how female bodies are perceived to require more protection in changing room spaces, perhaps due to the sexualisation of the female body (Renold and Ringrose, 2013), and therefore changing room processes become more privatised in girls PE. In comparison, male bodies were judged to require less protection from predatory and/or sexual gaze, and more protection from dangerous and harmful behaviours (i.e., bullying), arguably indicative of long-term views of male bodies as aggressive and strong (Dunning, 1999). At an ideological level, female PE teachers believed

that girls need more social and emotional protection when tasked with changing attire for PE, concerns not shared by male teachers and boys. These gendered findings support Dunning's (1999) and Thing's (2001) expressions that female civilised bodies are view as weak, passive, and having soft emotions. Therefore, insights support arguments that civilising processes are always gendered and that gendered emotions are expressed differently (Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018; Thing, 2001). These relational and emotion-laden considerations will not be drawn upon to examine pupils' gendered changing room etiquettes.

8.2 Changing room etiquettes and gendered peer group dynamics

Further explaining why PE teachers implemented differing procedures within the boys and girls changing rooms, this section examines pupils' behavioural norms and peer group dynamics within these relatively unique school spaces. To contextualise the ensuing discussion, it is important to recall that pupils, of all ages and genders, generally spent the first 10 minutes and final five minutes of each PE lesson in the changing rooms, equating to approximately a quarter of each lesson. Noting a socially enabling, yet unwritten, changing room policy, Mr Walker stated, 'we have a policy that they [pupils] can talk amongst themselves whilst they change'. This policy contrasted to broader school practices, whereby pupils were expected to spend the first five minutes in other curricular subjects reading in silence, a school-wide initiative aimed at improving pupil literacy. Comparatively, therefore, changing room procedures provided pupils with more enabling, de-routinising and informalised socialising opportunities, a finding which perhaps explains why some older pupils perceived PE as being cathartic and serving as a form of academic escapism. Whilst socially enabling, and therefore partly legitimising verbal interactions, PE teachers detailed several unintended behavioural, social and emotional consequences of this unwritten policy.

Beginning with discussions of boys' changing room etiquettes, Mr Walker stated, 'they can be a bit boisterous and it can be hard to get them to be quiet. There is a lot of laughing and joking'. Further demonstrating the need for dual supervision, Mr Walker's reflection detailed one undesirable consequence of socially enabling changing room policies, specifically that boys may deviate from more formalised behavioural expectations. Interesting, the term 'boisterous' was cited by all male PE teachers, with Mr Shaw describing the social process:

> With male classes they are very, very chatty. Very boisterous. Students sometimes get too overexcited, maybe because they are excited to take part in PE, because for me, people who enjoy PE are excited to get out there. So, it does take quite a bit to get them to calm down and remind them that they are still in a lesson, and they are not just socialising with their friends.

The presented findings demonstrate how pupils are provided with greater degrees of autonomy, responsibility, and opportunities to be social in comparison to other curricular subjects when changing, as well as during

different periods of PE lessons (i.e., during drills). These increased opportunities for sociality before physical activity commences may enable boys to strengthen their friendship bonds, whilst also have negative consequences for those pupils who experience bullying within changing rooms (Mierzwinski and Velija, 2020a; Peterson, Puhl and Luedicke, 2013; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011; Wei and Graber, 2023). At a visceral level, this social process tests boys' emotional self-restraint and desire to conform to behavioural standards, which are loosened somewhat whilst in this space. In this sense, boys engage in the formality-informality span (Wouters, 2007), which can include more informalised verbal interactions (i.e., banter) being more legitimised, whilst simultaneously being expected to conform to more formalised obedience centred behavioural constraints (i.e., talking quietly, remaining in their changing bay).

Further detailing how some boys may exploit such enabling opportunities for sociality when changing attire, Mr Wilkinson stated:

> We have some boys who unlike in a normal lesson have free rein and are free to roam. So, the first three or four minutes, if you are not on top of them, they are spent wandering around the changing rooms, chatting to their mates that they may or may not have seen throughout the day.

Although expected to change attire in a designated space, observations supported Mr Wilkinson's reflection a many of the sporty boys were frequently observed wandering around the changing rooms, chatting to their friends and PE teachers, whilst some older boys regularly flexed and compared their muscles in front of an audience. Indeed, observational insights revealed that the 15 minutes spent in the changing rooms provided boys with unique homosocial bonding opportunities, whereby banter was highly prevalent and where some boys who embodied hegemonic masculine ideals of muscularity and athleticism (Connell, 2005) gained kudos from their peers and male PE teachers, as evidenced in the following fieldnote:

Fieldnote 28th April 2022 – Year 11 Boys Danish Longball

> Whilst the class changed attire, five boys – all members of the school football team – approached Mr Wharfedale and I and began discussing the interschool football game which had taken place the previous day. Mr Wharfedale and the boys were exchanging banterous comments, specifically about Nick, a self-proclaimed 'bagsman', had slipped when taking a penalty. While the group were talking to Mr Wharfedale, Ethan showed the group a video of him deadlifting at a local gym, with the five boys and Mr Wharfedale giving Ethan credit for the impressive lift. After Ethan spent approximately a minute flexing to the group and his peers at the front of the changing room, Mr Wharfedale said, 'look Ethan, as impressive as it is, put your top back on and finish getting changed'. Ethan laughed, replying 'ah sir, you're just jealous that I'm ripped', before proceeding to get changed. When changed and waiting for Mr Wilkinson to call the register, the majority of boys had moved around the changing room to speak to their friends in other bays, however six of the less-sporty boys remained seated in their designated space, sat quietly and not interacting with anyone around them.

Whilst some sporty boys (established group) exploited these socially enabling and seemingly normalised opportunities, other boys, particularly outsider-group members who were chastised and marginalised during active participation, opted for more reserved and modest behaviours within the changing room. Furthermore, the banter frequently exchanged between sporty boys and PE teachers emphasised a degree of sociality which less-sporty boys, those understood to form an outsider group within the boys PE figuration, were seldom observed engaging, revealing how differing degrees of social cohesion between sporty boys, less-sporty boys, and PE teachers were part manifested within changing rooms. Aware of and seeking male gaze, some older boys who were not particularly sporty but enjoyed fitness-related activities (i.e., weightlifting, high-intensity running) were regularly observed posing, flexing and boasting their toned muscular bodies, seemingly in search of approval, admiration, and respect from their peers and PE teachers. Whilst some sporty boys were happy to display their semi-naked bodies, many outsider group members, those who lacked sporting competence, opted for modesty and often changed attire quickly and quietly, arguably attempting to avoid chastising peer commentary which could involve body shaming. Therefore, beyond sporting competence specifically, such behaviours illustrate how the changing process centralises and visualises boys semi-naked bodies, serving as a site where masculine validation is enacted (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010; Gerdin, 2017a; Tischler and McCaughtry, 2011). In this case, such validating processes enabled peripheral members of the established group to momentarily enhance their masculine 'I'-identity and their positioning within the dominant gendered 'we-group' (Elias and Scotson, 1994).

Although most boys changed attire in the main changing area, some younger boys regularly utilised the more private areas of the changing rooms. Observations revealed that in any given Year 7 lesson four or five boys would change clothing in either the shower block or the toilet cubicle, thus removing themselves from the gaze of their peers and PE teachers. Such findings were not captured when observing older boys (Years 10 and 11), whereby all boys changed in the communal changing area. For some younger boys, changing in more private areas of the changing rooms attracted unwanted peer attention and peer commentary, as evidenced in the following fieldnote:

<div align="center">Fieldnote 3rd February 2022 – Year 7 Boys Gymnastics</div>

Upon entering the changing rooms many of the boys proceeded to their pegs and immediately began changing attire, with the vast majority conversing with peers within their changing bay. Three of the boys – all slightly larger than their peers – headed towards the toilet with their PE bags. Whilst these boys were walking across the front of the communal changing area, Max (a particularly loud and popular pupil) shouted, 'off to get changed in the toilets are we?' followed by a burst of laugher and sniggers from several over boys. Upon hearing Max's jibe, two of the boys returned to their clothes peg in the changing area and began changing, cautious to not reveal their torsos when doing so. The other pupil (Sam) rushed towards the toilet, only leaving when Mr Harris began calling the register. As Sam returned to his peg space, Max and two other boys pointed and laughed at Sam.

Such incidents indicated that most boys would rather change attire in the communal area, even if this process evoked feelings of embarrassment or emotional distress, as being seen to change in alternative areas of the changing room led to peer ridicule which may manifest momentary feelings of embarrassment and internalised feelings of shame (Elias, 2000). These negative emotions experienced by some boys within the changing room may be one unintended consequence of male PE teachers attempting to regulate, standardise, and, thus, normalise the changing process, by often encouraging younger boys to change attire in the main changing area. As evidenced above, deviation form 'normal' changing room processes appeared to be an 'occasion of shame', a social situation in which one reflects upon with regard to their actions (Goudsblom, 2016). In this case, as in any other situation, feelings of shame are evoked through social interaction, manifested as shame is exclusively a social emotion, feelings aroused by other people (Goudsblom, 2016). Younger boys appeared to have similar levels of heightened self-consciousness to their older peers, but navigated such feelings in differing ways, for example using the more private areas of the changing room. Through the years, however, boys increasingly displayed stoic changing room habits, seldom using the toilets and/or showers, arguably aware of the shame attached to the use of such spaces. Supporting these findings, several older boys discussed how their masculine identity may be questioned should they opt to use the toilets or shower block when changing attire. Explaining why with age boys become less likely to use more private areas of the changing rooms, Elliot (Year 11) stated, 'it's like masculinity. No one wants to feel or look embarrassed in front of other men'. Consequently, some boys, those who are perhaps self-conscious of their physical appearance, are confront with a tension balance of experiencing feelings of embarrassment by having their peers gaze at their semi-naked bodies or experiencing feelings of shame when deviating from normalised practices when changing in the toilets. Seeking to avoid socially and emotionally damaging peer ridicule, older boys opted for stoic responses when changing attire, seldom using the more private areas of the changing room.

From a figurational perspective, embarrassment is 'displeasure or anxiety which arises when another person threatens to breach, or breaches, society's prohibitions represented by ones' super-ego' (Elias, 2000, p.296). In this regard, the process of revealing their semi-naked bodies in front of their peers may evoke feelings of embarrassment for some young males, as their peers may comment or make a joke about their physical appearance. In contrast, shame is understood as 'a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual on certain occasions by force of habit' (Elias, 2000, p.292). Moreover, shame is a fear of social degradation inwardly triggered by feelings of inferiority (Elias, 2000; Mennell, 1992). Within the changing rooms, some boys may experience shameful feelings when transgressing the figurational norm of changing in the private spaces of the changing room, whilst also experiencing shameful feelings towards their gendered body. Navigating this emotional-laden tension balance, as boys progressed through secondary school many opted for stoicism, changing attire in the main changing area, rather than the toilets or shower block.

Girls' changing room etiquettes

To overcome the lack of observational insights, female PE teachers were asked to describe girls everyday changing room behaviours. Their responses revealed that girls were highly sociable when changing attire for PE, as reported by Mrs Hanson:

> Year 7s will giggle and gossip away, well I think all [year] groups will actually. It is definitely a social occasion. If we get them changed in silence, the worst thing we could do is get them changed in silence. It is for a chat really, that is what it is.

Whilst socially enabled by the same changing room policy and similar procedures, pupils' changing room etiquettes were gendered. In contrast to boys' boisterousness, girls engaged in more subtle and reserved forms of communication (i.e., gossiping) within the changing rooms. Moreover, female PE teachers explained that enabling girls to chat with their friends while changing attire may reduce and help alleviate anxieties linked to the changing process or forthcoming PE lesson, as evidenced by Miss Turner:

> So, the changing room is quite a relaxed environment because like I said, we want to break down as may barriers for the girls, so it is not silent. The girls are chatting away and what not. From what I hear, it is more like catching up on their days off or TV shows and stuff like that. They are not in a social arena, but it is somewhere for them to interact.

Whilst girls were less constrained than their male peers, recalling gendered nuances of changing room seating plans and teacher supervision, they displayed more formalised behaviours within this unique school space. Intended to reduce girls' anxieties, enabling girls to change next to their friends whilst not directly supervised may have fostered in-group gossip, which was found to be the most pervasive form of bullying across the girls PE figuration at LTS, as well as in previous literature (Hills, 2007; Fisette, 2011; Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud, 2017). Undoubtedly, girls liked this socially enabling policy, but it also served to heighten tension balances between friendship groups, which could manifest into actual or perceived lesson-based gossip and peer commentary.

During focus groups, most girls discussed how they and their peers prefer to change attire in the more private areas of the changing room. Consistent across all year groups, girls attempted to avoid peer gaze when changing clothes for PE, first evidenced by Jade and Olive (Year 7):

> Jade: You will want to be at the back because it is a bit awkward when you are getting changed and it is a bit easier to be at the back,
> Olive: I think that obviously it is to do with your friendship groups, but i think that people don't want to be near the front and people go to the back because they don't want to get dressed in front of people.

In accord, many Year 7 girls reported that it is 'easier' to change attire outside of peer gaze, suggesting it is less emotionally, rather than physically, demanding. Probing revealed that many younger girls reported that

the process of momentarily revealing their semi-naked bodies evoked feelings of discomfort, displeasure, and, for some, embarrassment. This sentiment emerged regardless of girls' body types or stage of physical maturation, with findings mapping in KS4. However, most older girls placed increased emphasis on changing in the more private areas of the changing room, spaces where they could fully escape peer gaze, as detailed by Molly, Fran, and Alice (Year 10):

> Molly: Lots of people get changed in the toilets.
> Fran: There are like two toilets in our thing [changing room]. There is always a queue for who is going to get changed in there and if you actually need the toilet then you have to wait.
> Alice: I know a lot of people who aren't really that body confident and feel really awkward changing in front of a big group of people. Because everyone has a different form because we are all growing and I know a lot of people are, they feel really judged and they feel like they have got to get changed behind walls.

These findings reveal that many girls may be conscious of their bodies, which is problematic given the centrality of the body in PE. The Year 10 girls' discussion also demonstrates that many older girls' preferences to change in the toilets are shaped by a combination of sociogenetic and psychogenetic factors. In this regard, some girls may have body insecurities which operate internally, with such emotions arguably acerbated by peer judgement, real or perceived, and the increasingly in-group based and cynical nature of girls' peer group dynamics. These findings help explain many girls' implicit fears of having their semi-naked body judged by peers in other friendship groups may inform their decisions to change in the toilets. During a stage of rapid physical and psychological maturation (puberty), Alice's account demonstrates how 14- to 16-year-old girls may experience emotional discomforts and/or fears when revealing their semi-naked bodies in a communal changing space. The impact of puberty on girls' participation is highlighted by Sport England (2022, p.2) who stress, 'all girls, even the most sporty, need more support to manage the physical and emotional impact of puberty on physical activity'. Moreover, literature suggests that with age children (girls) become increasingly self-conscious of their bodies when tasked with changing clothes for PE and school sport (Elliot and Hoyle, 2014; Harris *et al.,* 2018; Walseth, Aartun and Englesrud, 2017). In contrast to boys PE, there was no evidence to suggest that girls utilised the changing process as an opportunity to display and parade their gendered bodies, however observational data and further interview data is needed to test this finding.

Female PE teachers' interview responses corroborated the finding that with age girls increasingly utilise the more private areas of the changing rooms to change attire for PE, sharing similar perceptions of why such behavioural shifts occur, Miss Jones stating 'as the children go up in years you will find a lot more wanting to get changed in the toilets. So, you will have a bigger queue. Not a lot of girls like changing in front of everybody'. All three female PE teachers were acutely aware of how the changing process evokes feelings of discomfort, anxiety and/or embarrassment for many of the older girls. Attempting to mitigate these negative emotions, female PE teachers explained how they enable girls to change in the more private areas of the

changing rooms (toilets, shower block, or the disabled toilet). Whilst male PE teachers sought to normalise the changing process, female PE teachers were more empathetic towards girls concerns of revealing their semi-naked bodies. This appreciation evidences the mutual understanding between girls and female PE teachers and is a further example of how female PE teachers' approaches were designed to reduce barriers and obtain buy in to PE, as detailed in Chapter Five. Female PE teachers also discussed how changing room procedures are modified to accommodate all pupils, as explained by Miss Jones, 'obviously the non-binary or transgender children they can, they should get, and we do say they can use the toilets to get changed' and 'those who can't get changed [in the communal changing area] due to religious reasons, they get changed in the toilets'. Indicative of broader heteronormative assumptions and practices (Herrick and Duncan, 2020; Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018), the LTS changing rooms were sex-segregated spaces with pupils grouped in accordance with their birth-assigned biological sex, assuming all pupils are cisgender. Informed by national policy guidelines (DfE, 2014b; NSPCC, 2022), the positioning of pupils into sex-segregated changing rooms is a historically embedded practice. At a national level, the NSPCC (2022) recommend that transgender and non-binary pupils should not change in the main changing area, whilst the DfE (2023) suggests that schools should make decisions on a case-by-case basis. At LTS, PE teachers navigated pupils' preferences by allowing pupils whose gender identity differed to their biological assigned sex to use the disabled toilet located in the swimming pool, with pupils then expected to join their peers in the main changing rooms for registration.

Collectively, the data presented here demonstrates that girls often utilised the more private areas of the changing room to navigate these negative emotions evoked through the changing process. In contrast to their male peers, the use of toilets to change attire in girls PE was not described as a shameful practice, instead viewed as a normalised and socially expected procedure, evidencing how civilising lessons of privacy and shame are often gendered (Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018). Seeking to avoid feelings of embarrassment and shame manifested by peer commentary and peer judgement, real or perceived, with age girls increasingly utilised the more private areas of the changing room, avoid social degradation when doing so (Elias, 2000). Interestingly, there was no evidence of peer judgement been manifested in the girls changing rooms, however perceptions of other friendship groups conversations and fears of body-image based gossip being manifested increasingly led to more girls using the more private areas of the changing rooms seeking identity self-protection.

In sum, the findings presented in this section further illuminate the gendered differences in young people's communication styles, behavioural norms, and identity management strategies within the PE figuration, further illustrating how such gendered peer group dynamics fluctuate and become increasingly differentiated across five years of secondary education. The findings presented here imply that by observing their own and their peers' behaviours within the changing room, as well as by internalising their PE teachers' attitudes towards the changing process, through the five years of secondary school girls and boys developing differing

changing room habituses. Whilst I do not wish to imply that a gendered habitus is fixed, static, or goes unchallenged, the gendered nuances discovered in pupils' perceptions of the changing process and their behavioural norms within the school changing room demonstrate how many young people came to embody a collective gendered habitus (Elias, 2001). Evidence of how young people's perceptions of and etiquettes when changing into swimming attire is now presented to demonstrate how changes in figurational structures (i.e., PE kit requirements) may alter pupils' peer relations, behavioural norms, and identity management strategies within the changing rooms.

8.3 Changing attire for swimming: fluctuating etiquettes and heightened emotional sensitivity

Whilst pupils changing room etiquettes were generally consistent, the requirement to change attire for swimming had notable impacts upon pupils' behaviours, peer relations, and emotions. All KS3 pupils were timetabled for a minimum of 10 swimming lessons per year, episodes involving temporarily removing and swapping underwear for swim attire, which proved to be an emotionally challenging process for many pupils. Generally, pupils used the main changing rooms to change attire for swimming, however the Year 9 girls changed in the swimming pool changing rooms (a space reserved for external hires), a detailed discussed shortly. The main changing rooms often contained two classes, meaning that up to 30 pupils would change into swimwear, alongside up to 30 pupils who would change into regular PE kit. The process of temporarily revealing their naked bodies in front of peers, revealing their semi-naked bodies whilst waiting to commence active participation and during the transition to and from the swimming pool were all noted to heighten some pupil's feelings of emotional discomfort, specifically feelings of embarrassment and shame. Examination of shifts in pupils' behavioural norms, peer relations, and emotions when changing for swimming is important as observations revealed that pupils' participation levels in core PE reduced significantly, approximately 10 percent boys and 30 percent girls, when swimming was delivered.

In contrast to the gendered changing room procedures and practices, ethnographic insights revealed that boys' and girls' etiquettes and emotional sensitivities towards changing clothes for swimming were more closely aligned. In practice, swimming lessons required pupils to change into swimwear (shorts for the boys and a one-piece swimsuit for the girls), removing underwear in doing so, before sitting semi-naked (no tee-shirt, socks, or shoes) in the changing room awaiting registration and instruction. Once briefed, pupils were required to walk to the swimming pool, a transition which was approximately 25 metres. Observations captured within the boys changing room revealed that boys were generally more reserved in their interactions and more cautious of hiding their bodies when tasked with changing into and out of swimwear, with the majority using their towels to cover their bodies when changing. During this process, boys were rarely observed bantering, rarely observed traversing the main changing area, with some boys utilising the more private areas of the changing room (shower block and toilets) as changing spaces. Moreover, once changed

boys were more reserved in their interactions, often remaining seated with towels draped over their shoulders, demonstrating greater degrees of social and behavioural self-restraint than when changing into 'normal' PE kit.

During focus groups many pupils shared their dislike of the swimming changing process, with Fran, Ellie and Alice (Year 10) denoting such discerning perceptions:

> Fran: I hate swimming because you literally have to get fully changed.
> Ellie: Because that is when getting change is literally the worst.
> Alice: You can come to school in your swimming costume [under your uniform] but obviously you can't wear it after. Like some people just don't get fully changed and they like wear their wet swimsuit. Getting changed for swimming is really bad.

Sharing the girls' perceptions, regardless of age or gender, pupils unanimously reported their dislike of having to remove their underwear, in the same space as their peers. Such were the levels of discomfort, many pupils described avoidance tactics, for example wearing swimming kit under school uniform and changing in the toilets. Teachers were also aware of such tactics, as Miss Jones reported:

> The Year 7s a lot of them already have their swimsuits on. You get a lot of them with their friends holding towels around each other to cover them up. But then you have got some who have got no issues, you know, just go for it. We have a lot of them asking to get changed separately. So, we have the toilets, and we have the disabled toilet in the swimming pool.

Mirroring their female peers' tactics, observations revealed that many boys wore their swim shorts under their school trousers when timetabled for swimming, a tactic not observed for non-swimming lessons. This finding indicates that pupils can experience embarrassment when temporarily revealing their naked bodies in a public sphere. Miss Jones's account also reveals the collective effort to mitigate such awkwardness through peer support. For girls, this form of allyship was partly enabled by the pupil selected seating plan whereby many girls opted to change next to their close friends. The same level of accommodation and mitigating strategy was not observed in the boys changing room, whereby boys either took great care in wrapping their towel around their waist before removing their underwear or changed in the toilet cubicle. Further boys more individualistic means of maintaining privacy may also be linked to previously cited peer group dynamics and identity protection mechanisms. More specifically, girls' close friendship bonds and collective fears of peer judgement may partly explain why ally support was more forthcoming within the girls PE figuration. In contrast, expectations of male stoicism and emotional resilience may help explain why boys opted for more individualised changing practices.

Despite the gendered nuances in changing room practices, boys and girls shared the perception that changing attire for swimming heightens feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and embarrassment. Discussing this process, Owen (Year 7) stated:

> I get changed in, I do use them [toilets] in the swimming pool because I get really uncomfortable around people, especially when, you know, getting changed into swimming trunks and all that. I kind of get it. I don't like getting all of my clothes off and that is why I have quite a lot of trouble in PE. I guess that's just how it is.

By noting 'that's just how it is', Owen's account demonstrates how pupils internalised that the changing process should be viewed as normal, a perspective encouraged by all the male PE teachers at LTS. However, the requirement to temporarily reveal the naked body in a public space is not a normalised practice for a young person, or adult, in British society. For a young person, PE lessons may the only time that they reveal their (semi)naked bodies in front of non-family members, as dressing has become a private affair, a practice learnt as part of an individualised civilising process (Elias, 2000). Given that dressing is a practice often limited to the home, a private space away from peers' gaze, it is unsurprising that young people are reluctant and feel emotionally uncomfortable when asked with changing attire in front of up to 60 peers. Evidence suggests that these heightened emotional sensitivities fostered by changing for PE are not only experienced by children in the UK, but across many Western societies (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010; Gerdin, 2017a; Johansen *et al.,* 2024; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008; Frydendal and Thing, 2020).

PE teachers were aware of how the swimming changing process fostered negative emotions for many pupils, discussing pupils' changing room etiquettes, Mr Walker suggested:

> Some [pupils] become more sensitive or body conscious when changing for swimming and one or two more will go in the showers or the toilets, whereas you might not see any in a lesson that isn't swimming. So, there is an element that some pupils become a lot more self-conscious.

Changes in pupils' etiquettes when changing into swimwear compared with regular PE kit were not limited to their use of space but were also evidenced in teachers' reflections of pupils' peer group dynamics. Comparing boys' behaviours when changing, Mr Wilkinson stated:

> There is definitely a difference. When it is swimming, they keep themselves to themselves a bit more. They are hunched over protecting themselves. It is crazy really because in a normal lesson they are stripping off to their boxer shorts and putting their tee-shirt on. But in a swimming lesson they can be just as covered up with a towel. But it does calm them down a little bit I think because they are so intent on one seeing them naked that they don't talk to anyone. [short pause] Swimming does cause an issue or it does have an impact.

Supporting my observations that boys become less social and less boisterous when changing into swimming attire, Mr Wilkinson's reflection implies that boys' social and behavioural shifts may be driven by fears of peers viewing their genitalia. This finding mapped across the LTS PE figuration, describing how girls' behaviours and peer relations become more individualised when changing for swimming, Mrs Hanson noted:

> There are a lot of queues [for the toilets] when it comes to swimming, so they do try and hide away, a lot of them. They just try and shy away from each other. The amount of kids that I have had in Year 7 come and ask where the cubicles are for swimming [laughs, ironically] "we haven't got any. Just get changed ". It is probably a bit quieter as everyone is trying to do the sneaky trick of getting your swimming costume on without taking your underwear, it is probably a lot quieter actually.

These findings reveal how many pupils enter the PE figuration expecting and preferring to use individual cubicles when changing into swimming attire. Such expectations and preferences are perhaps informed by young people's experiences of swimming clubs and leisure centres, locations whereby pupils have been taught water safety as part of their compulsory primary schooling (DfE, 2013). Subsequently, through this form of socialisation, children learn that naked bodies are to be kept private (Elias, 2000; Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018). This socialisation is challenged and adapted as pupils enter and progress through secondary school, as Mr Wilkinson explained:

> This year the Year 7s I have found that more and more have come to the office and say, "I don't want to get hanged in front of all the other people, can't I get changed somewhere else?" Our answer is always, yes. But we would always say that you have a towel, so wrap it around your waist. I don't know if a lot of them know you can get changed with a towel wrapped around your waist. It is a whole-body thing, for some of them it might be. There is still a number of kids who aren't bothered about it. But I would say at the moment we have 15 to 20 kids who don't feel comfortable.

Providing an approximation, Mr Wilkinson suggested that up to two thirds of pupils in each Year PE class may experience emotional discomforts when required to change attire for swimming. Corroborated by female PE teachers' interview responses, in practice this meant that many pupils sought to use more private areas of the changing rooms, causing queues for the toilets, which limited the duration in which pupils were physical active. On average, observations revealed that pupils would spend 10 minutes in the changing rooms before swimming and 10 to 12 minutes after swimming, as teachers provided pupils with extra time post participation to get dried and prepared for their next lesson. Whilst arguably necessary given pupils' preferences and perceived needs, one outcome of such accommodation was that during these lessons pupils spent less time actively participating in swimming, which is significant amid growing concerns about the reduced time pupils spend being physically active during PE lessons (Hingley *et al.,* 2023).

Transitioning to and from the swimming pool

Emotion-laden issues related to swimming were not isolated to the changing rooms, as pupils also expressed how their emotional sensitivities towards revealing their semi-naked bodies are heightened when transitioning to and from the swimming pool. Once changed, pupils were required to walk approximately 25 metres from the changing rooms to the entrance of the swimming pool building. The changing rooms and swimming pool were connected by a corridor which also led to the sports hall, school field, and the canteen.

As girls and boys changing rooms were adjacent, when transitioning between buildings, girls and boys occasionally met in the corridor. Irrespective of age or gender, most pupils were observed running between the changing rooms and swimming pool. This urgency to enter the pool (pre-lesson) or the changing room (post-lesson) was partly motivated by half-naked pupils' desires to keep warm, given that the corridor was often cold. However, focus group responses revealed that avoiding a heteronormative gaze was a more pressing concern for many pupils. Problematising the transition to and from the swimming pool, Fran (Year 10) stated, 'even though the pool is right next to the changing room, when you are having to walk there it is really bad because the boys come through'. Emphasising the emotional sensitivities fostered by boys gazing at a girl's semi-naked body, Annie (Year 10) added, 'I think I would just die'. Capturing how some boys navigated this embarrassing process, Freddie (Year 11) stated:

> When we go swimming and the girls come out, we [boys] run across to get to the pool and that's like quite embarrassing in a way. Because the amount of lads that I have seen go into the swimming pool and go like this [demonstrates a deep inhalation of breath, pushing his chest out and pulling his shoulders back] because they have tensed up as there are girls there. I have seen that tons.

Here, Freddie suggests when seeking to avoid feelings of embarrassment and shame evoked by a female peer gazing at their semi-naked bodies, boys may attempt to present gendered bodies that align with perceived hegemonic ideals of athleticism, muscularity, and strength (Bramham, 2003; Connell, 2008; Stride *et al.,* 2020). Such forms of body sculpting can be seen as another self-protection mechanism utilised by the boys within the PE figuration, seeking to manage their 'I' identity through a stoic act. It is important to note that this short transition may be the only situation in school when pupils semi-naked bodies are seen by peers of the opposite sex given the sex-segregated structures of PE. These findings build upon existing arguments that when pupils are sex-segregated in schools (in toilets and changing rooms) young people begin to normalise that when unclothed male and female bodies are to be kept separate (Fusco, 2006; Paechter, 2006; Slater, Jones and Procter, 2018), indicative of long-term civilising processes and expectations of civilised bodies (Elias, 2000; Shilling, 2012). Moreover, building upon Frydendal and Thing's (2020) research, these findings demonstrate how young people view the semi-naked body as something connected to gendered feelings of shame and embarrassment, with such feelings fostered by perceptions of opposite sex attractiveness and heteronormative gaze.

Discussions with PE staffs at LTS revealed that many of the teachers were aware of that this brief transition to and from the swimming pool fostered feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, and shame for some pupils. Subsequently, some cohorts, specifically older girls, were allowed to change in the swimming pool toilets, a procedural shift qualified by Miss Jones, 'obviously, we have to do the little walk. We let the Year 9s get changed in the swimming pool, so they don't have to walk back to the changing rooms. Generally, the Year 7s are way better than the Year 9s, again it is body issues. Intended to minimise girls' emotional sensitivities

which were heightened during transition. This shift in practice from Year 7 to Year 9 appeared to be informed by a reduction in girls' participation in not only swimming, but also in core PE more broadly. Differences in participation between swimming and non-swimming lessons were most evident in girls core PE, with observations of swimming lessons consistently revealing that up to a third of the girls were spectating, rather than participating. Informal conversations with female PE teachers revealed that participation in swimming was a major issue for the PE department, with many girls consistently providing parental notes which excused them from active participation, often citing menstrual cycle. Observations of KS3 boys core PE lessons revealed that participation rates in swimming were lower than during other core PE activities, such as athletics, football, and rugby. It was often noted how up to six boys would not be taking active participation in swimming lessons, whilst observations of other activities revealed that generally only one or two pupils would be excused via a parental note. Further evidence of this issue was provided during interviews, Mr Wharfedale noted, 'I have done swimming lessons in the past where I have had more pupils on the side [not participating] than those in the actual pool'. Providing his thoughts on how to increase participation levels, Mr Wharfedale stated:

> We have changing rooms in the swimming pool that we do use occasionally. To be honest, I think we should use them a bit more often as there is more space in there and in terms of breaking down barriers it is a little bit less, like a bit less exposed in a way. Because if you go into the main changing rooms you have 30 [pupils] who are getting changed for swimming and 30 getting changed for normal. So straight away there is half of the people who aren't getting changed into their swimming kit, who aren't looking but obviously you are aware that people are getting changed for swimming. And then there is the walk to the pool as well.

Here, Mr Wharfedale demonstrates his awareness of how this social process may cultivate feelings of shame and embarrassment. His proposed practical shift may minimise peer gaze of pupils' (semi)naked bodies, reduce opportunities for heteronormative based feelings of shame and embarrassment, and, perhaps, increase pupils' participation in swimming. However, this change would require an additional teacher to be present to oversee the changing process given swimming pool specific safeguarding policies.

In sum, the findings presented in this section have revealed fluctuations in pupils' changing room etiquettes, peer relations, and emotions when required to temporarily reveal their naked bodies. When required to fully change attire, including the removal of underwear, pupils' etiquettes become more privatised and individualised. To this end, when changing into swimming attire for many pupils' peer group sociality became increasingly less important and identity self-protection from peer judgement, real or perceived, became increasingly prioritised with the more private areas of the changing rooms (i.e., toilets) more frequently used by boys and girls. When analysed through a figurational lens, ethnographic insights revealed that when changing attire for swimming pupil's 'I'-identity took a stronger emotive charge than their 'we'-identity which, particularly for boys, was prioritised when changing in normal PE kit. Situating these findings in

contemporary civilities towards the body, it is important to note that children and young people are repeatedly educated on their genitalia being kept private and away from the gaze of others, lessons taught as part of an individual civilising process which is indicative of long-term shifts towards bodily exposure (Elias, 2000). Such discourses, informed by safeguarding and legislative measures, may further serve to young people's sensitives around bodily exposure, contributing to internalised behavioural constraints and emotion-laden attitudes around public nudity. Pupil's heightened sensitivities towards changing for swimming are also influenced by PE teachers gendered approaches, with female PE teachers more willing to accommodate girls' preferences anxieties than their male colleagues who often encouraged boys to be emotionally stoic and change attire in the communal area. Collectively, these findings reveal several gendered nuances in the ways in which young people navigate the changing process and sensitivities towards young people's gendered civilised bodies within the PE figuration.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided in-depth empirical insights into the everyday realities of secondary school PE changing room processes to demonstrate how young people perceive, experience, and navigate the process of changing attire. Whilst everyday changing room policies and procedures enabled high degrees of sociality, examination of pupils' changing room etiquettes revealed gendered nuances in pupils' peer relations, behavioural norms, and emotional management when engage in this unique social process. Most boys utilised the enabling opportunities for sociality to chat and banter with their peers or to enact boisterous behaviours, often strengthening their social bonds when doing so. Some older boys, particularly those who embodied a muscular, athletic, and hegemonically masculine body (Connell, 2005), utilised the changing process to show off their semi-naked bodies, gaining kudos from their peers and PE teachers, subsequently benefiting their 'I' and 'I-we'-identities (Elias, 2001). In contrast, most girls were more reserved within the changing room space, only interacting within their established friendship groups, social processes enabled by a self-selected seating plan. Reporting concerns of peer judgement, younger girls sought ally support when changing attire, whilst many older girls utilised the more private areas of the changing room, limiting their sociality. Girls seemingly placed increased importance on protecting their 'I'-identity when changing attire for PE than their male peers, who often sought to develop 'we-group' bonds through high degrees of sociality. Regardless of age or gender, when required to fully change attire, including the removal of underwear, pupils' etiquettes became more privatised and individualised, with many pupils seeking 'I'-identity self-protection.

In the context of this ethnography, a figurational analysis of everyday changing room procedures and practices offers three main insights. Firstly, gendered nuances in changing room procedures and processes have developed from and have been reproduced within the broader figurations of practice at LTS, whereby female PE teachers adopted less strict and obedience centred constraints than their male colleagues. Arguably, the

gendered differences in PE teachers changing room practices (i.e., seating plans, pupil supervision, and permittance of space usage) could be informed by their own gendered habitus, developed through their own experiences of PE, their occupational socialisation, and bespoke knowledge of pupils gendered behavioural norms (i.e., boisterous boys and restrained girls) and emotional management strategies (i.e., stoicism and emotional expression). Secondly, building upon Frydendal and Thing's (2020) conclusions that changing room situations are vulnerable situations, the findings presented in this chapter revealed age-based and gendered nuances in young people's navigations of the changing process, specifically how feelings of anxiety, embarrassment and shame are induced through peer interactions and perceptions of how peers judge their semi-naked bodies and/or use of certain changing room spaces. Finally, pupils' negative perceptions of and emotions evoked by revealing their naked bodies in front of same-sex peers and semi-naked bodies within the gaze of the opposite sex remind us that 'the civilising process always leaves scars' (Elias, 2000, p.377). In this regard, the general trends of pupils' reduced engagement in PE when swimming was timetabled is indicative of societal norms and values connected to feelings of shame and embarrassment evoked by revealing the naked body. The aim of the following chapter, the final in this thesis, is to provide some concluding remarks pertaining to young people's gendered peer group dynamics, behavioural norms and identity management strategies in secondary PE.

Chapter Nine - Conclusion

This chapter provides concluding remarks into the complexities of young people's peer group dynamics in secondary PE, illuminating the age-based, gendered, and situational nuances of boys' and girls' navigations of banter, bullying, and changing room processes. In doing so, a brief overview of the thesis is provided to revisit the study's aim, scope and context in terms of existing academic knowledge and the thesis's contemporary relevance. Then, the thesis's four specific research questions are answered through detailing the key empirical findings. The theoretical significance of these findings is then presented and positioned within the key contributions to knowledge that this thesis provides. From here, such knowledge is applied to demonstrate the policy-based, practical, and theoretical implications this thesis generates, which informs recommendations for future research.

9.1 Thesis overview

Chapter One detailed legislative policy and non-statutory governmental guidance concerning the provision of PE in state-funded secondary schools in England, before overviewing key empirical and theoretically-grounded insights into young people's gender embodiment and peer group dynamics in PE. As the only curricular subject delivered under the National Curriculum in which young people are often sex-segregated, PE provides pupils with distinctive opportunities for sociality and homosocial relationship development within compulsory lessons. Such policies and subject-specific structures made secondary PE a fertile ground from which to examine girls' and boys' peer group dynamics. Reviewing literature concerning young people's gendered peer group dynamics in secondary PE, Chapter Two demonstrated how much research on pupils' gender embodiment has focused on single year groups, single-sex samples, and core PE lessons. Therefore, such snapshots fail to demonstrate how young people's gendered relationships and behavioural norms develop, change and contrast across five years of secondary school PE and across multiple forms of PE provision (i.e., compulsory PE, assessment PE, and extracurricular sport). Whilst humour and 'banter' has emerged as a central feature of young people's (and some adults') peer group dynamics, there was previously a lack of knowledge relating to secondary school pupils' perceptions, experiences, and navigations of banter in secondary PE. This scarcity is significant amid growing academic and political concerns regarding the inappropriateness of banter in sporting environments and increasing associations between banter and verbal bullying in educational environments. One key space where bullying manifests in secondary PE is changing rooms, but most data concerning this issue is self-report and subsequent analysis fails to examine the role changing room of procedures and processes in such manifestations. Furthermore, focusing on bullying incidents fails to document on how pupils navigate such spaces in terms of avoidance, self-preservation strategies and emotional management. Therefore, gaining observational data alongside asking pupils and

teachers process-orientated questions gains greater insights into intended and unintended social, psychological and emotion-laden consequences of everyday realities within secondary PE.

Whilst most previous studies in this field had applied a gender-specific theory (i.e., hegemonic/inclusive masculinity) or concepts from the work of Bourdieu and Foucault, the rationale for selecting figurational sociology was provided in Chapter Three. Several concepts were introduced - figuration, interdependence and power relations, established-outsider relations, habitus and identity, and gendered civilised bodies and emotions – before demonstrating how each concept had been previously applied and developed. Each concept was then outlined in terms of its relevance to aiding the examination of boys' and girls' gendered peer group dynamics, behavioural norms, and identity (re)productions within and across the PE figuration. This theoretical framework also influenced the research approach underpinning this thesis. Therefore, Chapter Four detailed how appropriate blends of involvement and detachment were considered in terms of methodological fit and practical applications when undertaking this ethnography. The school where this ethnography took place was outlined, alongside the various research processes undertaken, rendering visible the practical, ethical, and emotion-laden tensions encountered during seven months of fieldwork. Data collected through 120 PE lesson and 35 extracurricular sport observations, 14 focus groups, and nine teacher interviews, was empirically thematically analysed before applying various figurational concepts as sensitising tools. Researcher reflexivity was offered to demonstrate the everyday realities and sometimes messiness of conducting school-based ethnography closely following a Covid-19 lockdown period, an offering which provides practical examples of how researchers may overcome procedural and ethical challenges.

Chapters Five to Eight presented the main empirical findings and theoretically-grounded discussions of young people's gendered peer group dynamics, experiences of banter and bulling, and navigations of changing room processes at LTS. Chapter Five detailed the structure and delivery of PE and extracurricular sport at LTS, providing critical comments on how PE provision is partly enabled and constrained by governmental policy, whilst also partly enabled and constrained by PE teacher's occupational socialisation and shared sporting and gendered habituses, pupils' peer group dynamics and preferences for team-based games, and teacher-pupil relations. Such enabling and constraining social processes often revealed and/or were underpinned by age-based, gendered, and situational nuances across different complex and fluctuating aspects of PE. Such nuances were apparent in pupils' conceptualisations of banter, in how prevalent and in how banter manifested, as outlined in Chapter Six. Further examination included how pupils and PE teachers socially constructed and navigated (in)appropriate banter within often competitive, highly social, and dynamic PE lessons. Aware of banter's often blurred line with bullying, Chapter Seven identified disparate power relations underpinning manifested bullying in boys and girls PE. How such power differentiators were underpinned by or managed through identity-based and emotion-laden tensions young people faced when experiencing and/or observing bullying in PE were portrayed. Cognisant that such social processes, power relations, and identity

management strategies often take place and/or become heightened in changing rooms, Chapter Eight explored age-based and gendered nuances in key procedures and processes used in this space at LTS. Part of this analysis demonstrates how nuanced procedures and processes part enabled several (un)intended relational, behavioural, and emotion-laden consequences. Collectively, these results and discussions chapters provide key empirical findings from which to answer this thesis's four research questions.

9.2 Key findings

The themes identified above partly demonstrate how undertaking this thesis supports existing arguments that PE is a relatively unique curricular subject delivered under the National Curriculum. Results and discussion chapters were replete with examples of how PE's subject-specific structures (i.e., sex-segregation), procedures (i.e., changing attire) and practices (i.e., delivery methods) enabled greater opportunities for sociality, social bonding/conflict, and behavioural experimentation than available in other classroom-based subjects. Within these subject-specificity domains, numerous age-based, gendered, and situational nuances have been detailed. Such nuances are now framed when directly answering this thesis's four research questions, starting with how girls and boys understand their peer and teacher-pupil relations in secondary PE.

Younger pupils (Year 7) were often socially constrained by strict obedience centred pedagogical approaches, which included PE teachers emphasising pupils learning and embodying formalised school etiquettes and civilised behaviours with the aim of developing younger pupil's self-restraints in line with their behavioural expectations in PE. Such emphasis was aided by teachers' skill-based learning approach, which limited opportunities for sociality and behavioural experimentation, offering teachers significant control and power advantages over pupils. As pupils progressed through the years, however, PE teachers increasingly imposed less strict social constraints on pupils and implemented a team-based games model. This attitudinal and pedagogic shift enabled older pupils (Year 10 and Year 11) higher degrees of agency (i.e., self-selected teams, activity selection) and more enabling opportunities for sociality and behavioural experimentation (i.e., more time observing and comparing peers). However, this shift led to changes in teacher-pupil relations with some pupils, specifically less-sporty pupils, perceiving that their PE teachers favoured their more competent peers, who participated in multiple forms of PE and shared a sporting habitus with PE teachers. This perception was part-informed by teachers' adoption of more informalised, less constraining, and, therefore, more socially enabling pedagogic approached during extracurricular sport activities. During such activities, structural (i.e., opt-in nature) and procedural (i.e., teachers' approaches) shifts enabled teachers and sporty pupils to engage in more frequent informalised conversations, fostering of more interdependent and mutually-oriented social bonds.

Pupils' understandings of their peer group relations in secondary PE at LTS revealed both age-based and gendered nuances. Peer relations became more fractious and tension-bound with age, with in-group friendships becoming increasingly more important to girls' peer group dynamics, and differences in sporting competence becoming increasingly more important to boys' peer group dynamics. Whilst most younger pupils peer relations were found to be generally inclusive and supportive, older pupils peer relations became more divided with tensions between different social groups influencing everyday social processes, pupils' engagement in lessons and teachers' pedagogical approaches across multiple PE spaces. Participation in extracurricular sport enabled closer social bonds and mutual identification between sporty pupils, which were often used to differentiate sporty and less-sporty pupils within core PE. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the relational nuances within pupils' peer group dynamics, be that age, gender or impact of extracurricular activities on PE relations across different platforms of PE. Aware of such nuances as well as the centrality of banter within teacher-pupil and pupil peer relations across the differential provisions of PE, the second research question sought to examine how age and gender impacts pupils' experiences and navigations of banter in secondary PE.

At a conceptual level, most younger pupils were unaware of the term 'banter' and were unable provide a definition, whilst most older pupils associated banter with reciprocated forms of jovial humour exchanged between friends. However, girls and boys understood the humorous aspects of banter to be manifested differently, with boys citing elements of mockery and ridicule, whilst girls cited inoffensive joking. Therefore, by the age of 16 years, young people had developed gendered humour styles and tolerances towards offence. These styles and tolerances were evident daily within PE at LTS, with banter becoming increasingly normalised and a somewhat socially expected form of communication amongst older pupils and PE teachers, particularly amongst older boys and male PE teachers. Such type of communication was part enabled by the aforementioned shifts in PE teachers' pedagogical approaches towards older pupils, including them bantering and sledging, which legitimised performance-related banter during core PE and embraced its usage during extracurricular sport. The high prevalence of banter and its age-based, gendered and multiple-platform variance rarely manifested in other subjects, further illustrating the role of enabling and constraining social processes within its manifestation.

In boys PE, humorous forms of mockery, ridicule, and sledging were often quick-witted, performance-related, and confidently voiced in a pantomimic manner, reciprocated in verbal (i.e., returned comment) or non-verbal (i.e., gesture or facial expression) ways. Such forms of peer commentary were understood to provide prosocial and cathartic functions, generally aiding pupils' and PE teachers' enjoyment in PE and served as a form of academic escapism. However, male PE teachers often used performance-related sledging as a tactic to motivate and challenge the most competent sports performers, seemingly aware that sporty boys enjoyed being challenged physically and verbally, an awareness part developed through the aforementioned tighter

social bonds developed through extracurricular activities. Contrastingly, in girls PE, banter was often only exchanged within friendship groups, rendering it rarely audible to other peers or PE teachers. Whilst female PE teachers understood banter to be a fruitful tactic to reengage girls in PE, they opted for performance-related comments delivered at an individual, as opposed to whole-class, level, seemingly aware to how such comments may be (mis)construed and/or be received as embarrassing. In this sense, PE teachers perceived girls as more emotionally sensitive and expressive, whilst boys were considered more emotionally resilient and stoic.

How banter was received and navigated often determined the extent in which it was perceived as being (in)appropriate within PE at LTS. Indeed, whilst banter was a normalised, legitimised, and somewhat expected form of communication, findings revealed how the (in)appropriateness of banter was socially constructed between the individuals directly involved (i.e., the orator and the independent recipient). Pupils and PE teachers agreed that banter's 'line of acceptability' is relationally and situationally constructed, therefore able to fluctuate depending on the strength of relationship between those involved and the social situation in which a comment is voiced. This social construction, appraisal and judgement criteria means that appraising the (in)appropriateness is highly subjective and likely to be inconsistent. For instance, pupils and PE teachers often assessed banter's (in)appropriateness through non-verbal cues (i.e., facial expressions), rather than verbal responses, which is problematic given how many young people, particularly older boys, were emotionally stoic and self-restrained when receiving peer commentary which may have caused offence. The difficulties in objectively and accurately assessing banter serve to highlight the high levels of social, psychological, and emotional intelligence required to appraise and engage in it in a socially acceptable and non-offensive manner. In this sense, it is unsurprising that many pupils struggled to identify when banter may breach the socially constructed line of acceptability. The complexity, nuance and tensions involved in bantering provides much needed context to how some types of banter or banter-based interactions were or could be construed as verbal bullying. How age and gender impacts upon young people's experiences and navigations of bullying is the third research question within this thesis.

Answering the third research question, key findings demonstrated the significance of the gendered structure of PE, the subject-specific behavioural norms, and single-sex peer group dynamics. In boys PE, sporting competence was highly valued and socially rewarded by boys and male PE teachers, with the least-sporty boys most likely to be bullied by more sporty pupils. Competence-based bullying was manifested through defaming peer commentary, blaming, and marginalisation, behaviours partly enabled by the dominance of a team-based games pedagogical model and the normalisation of performance-related peer commentary. As elected captains, sporty boys were able to exercise their power advantages over less sporty boys by demanding they adopt undesirable positions (i.e., goalkeepers), positions in which less-sporty boys could be easily blamed following a team's defeat. Constrained by the mixed-ability class structures and normalised

practices, less-sporty boys had little opportunity to avoid chastising and hurtful peer commentary. In girls PE, sporting competence was coupled with performative aesthetics as the most common risk factor to bullying, which manifested through more covert forms of peer commentary and gossip.

Consistent across all ages and genders, pupils reported an unwillingness to intervene in and/or report bullying in PE, citing fears of social repercussions, and opting for stoicism. Specifically, being labelled a 'snitch' or a 'grasser' may be more damaging for a young person than being bullied or being labelled a bully, a somewhat paradoxical finding when compared against broader societal attitudes towards bullying and policy documentation which states, 'all pupils should 'stand up' and 'speak out' against bullying and any forms of discrimination'. Whilst actively seeking to involve themselves in instances of bullying, many young people rationalised their decisions not to intervene and/or report by citing a lack of awareness of other peer group dynamics, often suggesting that outwardly derogatory peer commentary could be 'banter'. Furthermore, some older pupils bemoaned perceived teacher towards sporty pupils, those who were most likely to bully, sharing concerns of teacher negligence as a constraining consideration when experiencing and/or observing bullying. Teachers' reflections demonstrate that should a pupil opt to report a harm-inducing behaviour, they are unlikely to use the word 'bullying', therefore subjective judgements regarding appropriate reprimand are likely to be inconsistent. These key findings demonstrate the heightened social, psychological, and emotion-laden tension balances that young people must navigate when experiencing, observing, or deciding whether to report bullying to a teacher, with many young people opting for self-preservation. Indeed, the fourth and final research question within this thesis referred to how changing room processes and practices impacts upon young people's identities and emotional expressions in secondary PE.

Whilst policy-informed and teacher-implemented changing room procedures enabled high degrees of sociality, examining etiquettes within this space revealed age-based and gendered nuances in pupils' peer relations and their emotional management strategies when changing attire. Before pupils entered the changing rooms, male PE teachers imposed strict social constraints on younger boys, specifically demanding silence and an alphabetically informed queue, such constraining practices were not implemented for older cohorts or by female PE teachers. Upon entry, boys, irrespective of age, were socially constrained by teacher-implemented and alphabetically informed seating plan, which served as a key power resource which enabled PE teachers to maintain social control over up to 60 boys. In contrast, female PE teachers allowed girls to self-select their changing room space, seldom citing power or control-based tension, but instead reducing girls' anxieties evoked by the attire changing process. In terms of supervising this space, male PE teachers placed importance on directly observing boys due to their safeguarding concerns (i.e., bullying). Contrastingly, female PE teachers opted not to observe girls change, due safeguarding concerns (i.e. adult gaze) and less fears concerning bullying. Collectively, these findings demonstrated that whilst male and female PE teachers were enabled and constrained by the same changing room policies, their everyday

practices were gendered, with female PE teachers opting for more informalised and socially enabled procedures than their male colleagues.

Irrespective of age, most boys utilised socially enabling opportunities to chat and banter with their peers, or be boisterous, with both behaviours strengthening peer group dynamics. Contrastingly, most girls were more reserved, only interacting their established friendship groups. Concerned of peer judgement, girls sought ally support when changing attire, with many changing in more private areas of the changing rooms, a practice that became increasingly less prevalent with age in boys PE. Pupils use of multiple changing room spaces revealed gendered feelings of shame and embarrassment. In boys PE, there was an expectation, fostered by male PE teachers attempts to normalise the changing process, that pupils should change in the communal changing area, with the practice of changing in more private area (i.e., toilets) becoming an increasingly shame evoking act. In contrast, through the years of secondary school girls increasingly utilised the more private areas of the changing room, a process which was found to avoid, rather than evoke, feelings of shame and embarrassment. Irrespective of age or gender, pupils' sensitivities towards peer judgement and verbal bullying became particularly heightened when they had to remove underwear and change into swimwear and make their way to the pool, provoking various avoidance strategies (i.e., provision of parental notes to excuse participation.

9.3 Contributions to knowledge

The aim of this thesis's focus on young people's gendered peer group dynamics and behavioural norms in secondary PE, specifically focusing on banter, bullying, and changing room processes, was to provide key contributions to knowledge. Empirically, this has been achieved by examining all aspects of PE provision across multiple year groups, demonstrating how pupils' peer relations, behavioural norms, emotional management strategies, and teacher-pupil relations shift and fluctuate throughout their secondary PE experience. Through being the first ethnography of its kind to access and compare peer relations in core PE, GCSE PE, and extracurricular sport, as well as observing male changing rooms, original findings have been presented. Further differentiating this thesis from other ethnographies in the field was the use of figurational sociology to theoretically-examine key empirical findings. This framework ensured that: (a) previously undocumented or undervalued enabling and constraining social processes were highlighted, (b) key social processes and attitudes that enable and constrain disparate pupil-peer and pupil-teacher power relations were presented, and (c) the fluidity of pupils' reproductions of gender identities and civilised bodies in the secondary PE figuration were mapped. Further illustrations of such key contributions to knowledge via figurational concepts are provided below.

By examining the enabling and constraining processes of policy enactment at LTS, this thesis provided novel insights into tension balances that PE teachers face when implementing national policy (i.e., NCPE). Focusing on both processes is necessary given that similar studies tend to focus on the constraining aspects of policy enactment (Haycock and Smith, 2010; Scanlon, MacPhail and Calderón, 2023). Through detailing teachers' pedagogical approaches and age-based and gendered preferences, this thesis portrays how those who 'do' policy are enabled to influence how PE is structured, delivered and practiced. However, embroiled in such policy constraints and autonomous-led enabling are teachers' relations with pupils for whom they were interdependent as part of the PE figuration at LTS. Conceptualising girls and boys PE as two distinct, yet interconnected, figurations enabled both specific and comparative findings to be presented, as evidenced above. Furthermore, by examining extracurricular school sport as a further but interrelated figuration enabled the demonstration of how pupil-peer and teacher-pupil relations were part-developed, different and impacted on power relations within core PE lessons. This relational awareness also helped demonstrate how feelings of interconnectedness and mutual orientation are not static or natural, but instead are constantly created, negotiated, and managed within and across different platforms of PE. It is from within these figurational dynamics in which young people must learn to shape and navigate their peer group status, behaviours, and emotional expressions in order with the dominant 'we-I'-identity within the figuration they find themselves situated.

One-way pupils create, negotiate and manage their 'we-I'-identity was through engaging in banter. This thesis's presentation of age-based and gendered differences in how girls and boys conceptualised, manifested, and navigated banter offers original findings and analysis. The fact both boys, male PE teachers, girls and female PE teachers engaged in banter, albeit in gender nuanced ways as evidenced above, illustrates how this form of communication is not inherently or exclusively masculine, as it is often portrayed and analysed. Through collating multiple ethnographic methods, this thesis illustrates what structural, social processes and prevailing attitudes enable banter to be normalised and legitimised across the PE figuration. Through the lens of peer group dynamics and power relations, it was possible to illustrate several prosocial functions as well as more conflict-based functions of banter in PE, both of which are evidenced above. Detailing all functions of banter is necessary to avoid previous tendencies to publish overly value-laden perspectives, instead ensuring more value-neutral and detached portrayals are offered. It is through this more neutral lens that the multi-faceted, relationally and situationally constructed metaphorical lines of acceptability when judging banter's (in)appropriateness can be appreciated and used to better understand the increased blurring of lines between banter and verbal bullying. The line and its blurring were often based on subjective appraisals of not only what is said, but who it is said by and who it is intended for, illustrating the socially constructed and informed lines from which pupils and teachers must navigate regularly. The broader significance of such

knowledge is its evidencing of gendered differences in 21st century civilities towards humour, causing offence and social relations.

By examining boys PE and girls PE as figurations this thesis has provided new insights into how gendered structures, pedagogical practices, teacher-pupil relations, and pupil peer group dynamics collectively contribute to the manifestation of bullying in secondary PE. This understanding offers a more socially informed as opposed to common psychological explanations of how bullying manifests. Whilst sporting competence is a well-cited risk factor to PE-based bullying, this thesis has identified age-based and gendered differences in the way competence-based bullying is manifested and highlighted the unintended social consequences of teachers' pedagogical approaches (i.e., team selection methods and team-based games model) and pupils' participation in multiple forms of PE. As bullying was, and is often, aimed at certain groups, applying the concept of established-outsider relations usefully demonstrated how established group members (sporty pupils) used peer commentary as an affective power resource to build, maintain, and strengthen social bonds with other sporty peers and PE teachers, distinguishing themselves from outsider group members (less-sporty pupils). Given the valuing of sporting competence and embodied sporting identities within PE figurations, as well as the normalisation of peer commentary, less-sporty pupils were unable to overcome their group disgrace, alter their social status, whilst also being reluctant to call upon teachers to challenge ridiculing, marginalisation, and ostracising behaviours.

Building upon Mierzwinski and Velija's (2020a) discussions of a culture of silence in male PE, applying Elias's (2001) personal pronoun model enabled new insights into the role of identity management and emotional self-restraints in girls' and boys' navigations of bullying in PE. Irrespective of age or gender, pupils opted for self-protection and self-preservation when being and/or observing bullying, seldom reporting bullying to PE teachers due to fears of reputational damage to their 'I'- and 'we'-identities, specifically fears of being bullied or being ostracised from their peer group. Furthermore, the stigma and shame attached to being a 'snitch' was found to be more damaging to a young person's 'I-we'-identity than being branded a bully or being someone who did not report bullying, a somewhat paradoxical finding given anti-bullying initiatives. One unintended outcome of such stoic responses was that established-outsider relations between sporty and less-sporty pupils were maintained, preserving social cohesiveness amongst established group members and minimising outsider group members opportunities to challenge damaging peer behaviours. Collectively, these findings provide a different perspective from dyad (bully-victim) informed analyses of bullying and demonstrate the need to focus on subject-specific social processes, teacher-pupil relations and peer group dynamics.

Examining changing room processes and pupils' changing room etiquettes at LTS provided several key contributions to knowledge. As the first ethnography to provide observational insights and gendered

comparisons, this thesis has enhanced understandings of school changing room structures (i.e., formed of multiple spaces), changing room procedures (i.e., positioning of pupils and teachers), pupil etiquette (i.e., peer interactions and use of differing spaces), and pupils' emotions during the attire changing process (i.e., shame and embarrassment), whilst also demonstrating age-based and gendered differences within and across these elements. These original findings serve to critically question the adequacy of existing governmental policies and endorsed recommendations (NSPCC, 2022), as pupils (mainly boys) believed that teachers should be present to supervise the changing process to reduce instances of bullying and peer abuse, behaviours widely associated with school changing rooms and which may lead to emotion-based subject avoidance. This thesis has also provided new insights into the emotional-laden consequences of transitioning between spaces during PE lessons, particularly when swimming is taught. For some pupils at LTS, the swimming changing process and transition between the changing rooms and pool was a significant barrier to participation in PE, findings which reveal how often-hidden procedures and practices negatively impact upon pupils' perceptions of and engagement within PE.

Whilst applying figurational sociology in several ways, this thesis aimed to demonstrate the adequacy of figurational concepts to explain the age-based and gendered nuances of young people's peer group dynamics. The notion of civilised bodies was applied to examine the extent that it is gendered and features within secondary school pupils' behavioural norms and identity management strategies. There was consensus amongst policy statements and empirical data that lessons of civilisation are gendered. At a policy level, the DfE's (2018, 2023) reference to gendered differences in girls' and boys' physical capabilities in reference to pupil safety and fairness insinuates the need to protect girls' bodies from more competitive male bodies, an ideology central to the reason that PE is the only curricular subject that can be taught to single-sex classes in English state-funded secondary schools. The structural separation partly informed differences in how girls and boys behaved and communicated within their respective PE figurations. Most boys were often highly social, competitive and energetic, often using their sporting bodies to gain kudos and promote their gender identity, whilst most girls were often more reserved in their interactions and behaviours, sharing concerns of performative aesthetics when participating in PE. These findings demonstrate how during five years of secondary school PE the values attached to young people's bodies become increasingly gendered, with boys' and girls' etiquettes, particularly when bantering or changing attire, becoming increasingly differentiated.

Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge how boys and girls entered the PE figuration and engaged in other non-PE figurations with a forming gender habitus, the fact that PE is unique in centralising, segregating, judging, enabling and constraining the gendered body in multiple ways is significant. It is from within these pupils' gendered habitus, from which PE plays a part in forming and moulding, that this thesis tests Thing's (2001) acknowledgment of females having (or being perceived to have) 'soft' emotions and Mierzwinski and Velija's (2020b) reference to boys' stoicism when part of a PE figuration. Whilst girls and boys shared similar

emotional experiences during PE, the gendered ways girls and boys navigated emotions of fear, embarrassment and shame when receiving banter, experiencing or witnessing bullying, or changing attire became increasingly gendered through the years and increasing became influenced by their peers' and PE teachers' responses to emotional expressions. These findings serve to demonstrate how emotions and emotional expressions should be understood by considered sociogenetic (i.e., peer- and teacher-relations) and psychogenetic (i.e., internalised ideologies and habitus) dimensions.

Finally, this thesis provides new and unique insights into a hidden curriculum in secondary PE. While discussions often centre upon activity provision and teachers' ideologies, amid calls for gender equality in PE and in broader society, this thesis demonstrated how everyday procedures and practices, teacher-pupil relations, and teachers' expectations of boys' and girls' behavioural and emotional self-restraints remain heavily gendered in secondary PE. As well as focusing on pupils' peer relations, behavioural norms, and identity management strategies within secondary PE, this thesis also provides new and valuable insights into how PE teachers' pedagogical practices and adult-child relations partly contribute to disparate power relations and problematic behaviours within PE and youth sport settings. Ethnographic insights revealed several age-based and gendered nuances in how PE teachers delivered core PE lessons and situational nuances in how they interacted with pupils, all which had unintended consequences for pupils' peer group dynamics. Female PE teachers implemented fewer obedience centred social constraints in girls PE than their male colleagues implemented in boys PE. More specifically, through the years, girls were increasingly enabled to self-select their performative groups, self-select their space within the changing rooms, and were often allowed to wear alterative and/or additional forms of PE kit than prescribed within the school policy, findings which did not map to boys PE, whereby stricter and more authoritarian pedagogical were utilised. Driven by identity and emotional-based concerns, female PE teachers more democratic approaches arguably heightened social divisions between friendship groups and enabled peer-judgement to be manifested via tight-knit and friendship-based gossip networks. Taken collectively, this thesis's key findings have demonstrated gendered and age-based nuances in young people's peer group dynamics, behavioural norms and identity management strategies within the PE figuration. It is argued that during a particularly impressionable phase of their social and psychological development, secondary school pupils must constantly navigate tension-bound peer relations, behavioural expectations, and emotional expressions. These social, psychological and emotion-laden processes involve complex and sophisticated appreciates of how young people are bonded together. It is through understanding and appreciating these complexities that more reality-congruent and effective policies, teaching practices and behavioural expectations can be made.

9.4 Implications, limitations and future research recommendations

The key findings and contributions generated through this ethnography enable several implications for practice to be proposed. This thesis raises several questions of the adequacy of school-wide, rather than subject-specific, behavioural policies recommended for and implemented in secondary school PE. Throughout, this thesis has demonstrated how PE is a unique curricular subject delivered under the National Curriculum, with differing class formation strategies, methods of delivery, expected behavioural norms, and opportunities for sociality in comparison to most, if not all, other compulsory curricular subjects. Subsequently, it is argued that some policies, particularly anti-bullying policies, may need to be adapted for PE to more adequately enable PE teachers to identify and challenge harmful behaviours, a responsibility bestowed upon all teachers in English schools. A subject-specific policy document or teacher training course would arguably enable PE teachers to more objectively and consistently, therefore more adequately, assess repetition, intent, and goal-orientation when appraising pupil behaviour, judgements that are currently found to be highly subjective and inconsistent in PE. Furthermore, as banter is increasingly becoming normalised and legitimised within English educational and sporting cultures, it is argued that the DfE, and national governing bodies, should provide teachers, coaches, and young people with specific guidance on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate 'banter', guidance which would further enable teachers to identify and challenge harm-inducing behaviours. Increasing pupils' and teachers' awareness of how differing forms of communication and humour styles (i.e., ridicule, mockery, sledging, sarcasm, and self-deprecation) may be understood by some as funny and harmful by others may reduce the prevalence of verbal bullying and other forms of discrimination (i.e., homophobia, racism, and sexism) in educational and broader sporting environments. Arguably, such subject-specific policies may better equip teachers in 'challenging inappropriate behaviours between children that are abusive in nature' (*Keeping Children Safe in Education* report, cited in Department for Education, 2023, p.12).

This thesis's findings also raise questions of current school changing room guidance, specifically the NSPCC's (2022) *safeguarding considerations for getting changed at school* briefing. Arguably intended to protect and safeguard children and young people from predatory adult behaviours, recommendations that teachers should not enter and/or observe pupils as they change attire for PE is problematic, as the lack of adult presence within changing rooms is found to be a main reason why bullying occurs within these spaces, a finding which extends beyond UK schools. At LTS, up to 60 pupils used the changing room at any given time, a number which may be higher in other schools, meaning that it is an unrealistic expectation for teachers to be able to overhear isolated or repeated forms of child-on-child abuse, one suggested reason for adult entry into changing rooms (NSPCC, 2022). Following the approach adopted at LTS, therefore, it is recommended that two or more teachers or school staff members (i.e., teaching assistants or PE technicians) should directly supervise the changing process, an approach which would arguably reduce instances of bullying and

discrimination within school changing rooms and perhaps increase the time which pupils spend actively participating in PE, both of which are concerns recognised by the UK Government (DfE, 2023; GOV.UK, 2023). Subsequently, a more prescriptive and nationalised changing room policy which contains specific guidance on how teachers should position themselves and how to address any pupil concerns regarding supervision may prove useful, whilst changing room supervision could also be included in initial teacher education as up to a quarter of PE lessons may be spent within these spaces.

Despite this thesis making several contributions to knowledge, there are a couple of limitations that should be acknowledged. At a methodological level, it would have been desirable to probe more deeply into young people's perceptions and experiences of GCSE PE and extracurricular sport during focus group discussions, which may have provided richer empirical insights into each aspect of PE provision at LTS. However, this was not possible due to focus group time constraints imposed by the project gatekeeper, namely the 20-minute slots allocated for each discussion to take place. Highlighting one of the practical challenges in conducting social research in a UK secondary school, such scheduling limited the scope of questioning and ability to probe, therefore most questions asked were focused on core PE, which is compulsory for all pupils in English secondary schools. A second limitation is the lack of observational insights into girls changing room etiquettes, limiting the extent to which gendered comparisons could be drawn in Chapter Eight. As a male researcher, school and national policy restrictions prevented access to the girls changing room and, therefore, discussions of girls changing room etiquettes were limited to interview data, which may, or may not, have captured the intricate nuances of girls' peer group dynamics and behavioural norms within this unique school space. Whilst the lack of observations is undoubtedly a limitation, the fact that observations were captured within the boys changing rooms provides a more adequate understanding of boys changing room etiquettes and navigations of the changing process than those presented in previous ethnographic explorations.

To conclude, despite this thesis enhancing understandings of young people's gendered peer group dynamics, navigations of banter, bullying, and changing room processes in secondary PE, naturally this ethnography has generated several questions that could be considered for further exploration. This ethnography is the first to explore banter in a single-sex female sporting environment. Having discovered how banter manifested, future research may wish to explore girls' and women's perceptions, experiences, and navigations of banter in other single-sex sporting environments, which may shed further light on the gendered nuances of communication styles, civilities to offence, and emotional self-restraints in contemporary society. Future research could also engage teachers and pupils in collaborative dialogues through a participatory action research approach. As pupils and PE teachers often had nuances perceptions, appraisals, and experiences of banter and verbal bullying, as well as changing room procedures and processes, a co-construction approach may help develop subject-specific codes of conduct serving to establish greater clarify regarding the challenges pupils face in PE and develop more suitable methods of challenging and reducing harm-inducing

experiences in PE. Such research may also consider exploring neurodiverse pupils' perceptions and experiences of banter, as there is currently a lack of knowledge regarding how PE teachers and pupils adapt their communicative styles when interacting with neurodiverse young people in often competitive PE lessons. Finally, further ethnographic research examining extracurricular school sport is needed to more adequately understand pupils' peer group dynamics and teacher-pupil relations within this often academically neglected form of PE provision. Such research may shed light on why many younger pupils tend to participate in extracurricular activities, yet participation rates decline as pupils progress through secondary school. Such ethnographic research could conclude with a co-constructed approach, centring pupil voice with regards to activity choice, creation of an inclusive social climate, and how best to ensure prolonged participation.

From a theoretical perspective, future studies may wish to apply the Elias and Scotson's (1994) model of established-outsider relations to make sense of young people's peer group dynamics, particularly experiences of bullying, within co-educational, ability-setted, and/or less sport oriented (i.e., health and physical education) PE provisions, as well as including more diverse pupil and teacher demographics within research samples. At LTS, the figurational dynamics were relatively flat and static, with sporting competence (boys) and in-group friendship (girls) serving as key and distinguishing power resources within the PE figuration. These gendered findings may, or may not, be transferable to other PE departments who adopt less standardised delivery methods. Furthermore, cognisant of Bloyce and Murphy's (2007) concerns regarding the robustness of the concept, a longitudinal study over at least three years would explore the rigidity of such established-outsider relations, whilst exploring the extent to which pupils may accept, change or reject dominant 'I'-'we'-'they'-identities and group images (minority of the best and minority of the worst). Such explorations may also examine the extent to which involvement in additional forms of PE (i.e., GCSE PE or extracurricular sport) influence established-group relations, examining the extent to which divisions can emerge within established groups of sporty pupils and to examine the extent to which these power relations may be gendered within co-educational classes. Undertaking such research would explore the flexibility of the concept within PE environments where peer-group dynamics are less structurally informed, where sporting competence is less visible or more equal, and where performance-based peer commentary (i.e., gossip) is less frequent. As stated from the outset of this thesis, it essential that all teachers understand the importance of challenging behaviours that are abusive in nature, it is hoped this thesis better equips PE teachers to identify inappropriate behaviours that are abusive in nature.

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Date & Time	Lesson	Activity	Location
Year Group	Teacher	No. Pupils & Sex of pupils	Weather conditions

Full notes

Theoretical considerations	Reflexive stance

Appendix B – Parental Consent Form

Matthew Green
York St. John University
School of Science, Technology and Health
Lord Mayor's Walk
York
YO317EX
Matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am completing a research project examining young people's social interactions in Physical Education and school sport. I request your permission for your child to be part of this study that is being completed within the PE department.

What does the involve?

The study will involve asking children to volunteer to take part in a 30-minute focus group discussion. Each focus group will involve 4-6 children from the same PE class and will be single-sex. During the focus group, children will take part in a few quick and easy concept mapping activities based on the terms 'bullying' and 'banter' which will be used in a group discussion on how the two concepts are similar and different. Focus groups will take place during school time and be located in a classroom near the PE department or in a safe space provided by the Head of PE.

What happens with the study findings?

The focus group data will form part of a larger PhD research project exploring young people's social interactions in PE and school sport. Only myself, Dr Mark Mierzwinski and Dr Charlotte Haines-Lyon will have access to information from this investigation. All information will be stored in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Pseudonyms (false names) will also be used to protect the anonymity of all children who take part in the focus groups, with pseudonyms also used to hide the names of any other people or organisations mentioned. The study should not encourage conversations of a personal nature and your child's answers will only be disclosed to the Gatekeeper (Head of PE) if they refer to potential breaches in children protection or safeguarding issues.

What are the risks/benefits to participants?

The study should not encourage conversations of a personal nature and participants' answers will only be disclosed to the Gatekeeper if they refer to any potential breaches in child protection or safeguarding issues. Therefore, this research poses minimal risk and does not induce harm on the participants. This study aims to provide young people with a voice to discuss these topics, which are often neglected or overlooked within existing research.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

My details are at the top of the page. Alternatively, you can contact Dr Mark Mierzwinski via m.mierzwinski@yorksj.ac.uk.

If you have any further concerns, queries or complaints regarding the research project please contact Dr Sophie Carter (Chair of the Ethics Committee for Science, Technology and Health at York St John University) via s.carter@yorksj.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns, questions or complaints regarding GDPR during this project please contact Dr Amanda Wilcox (University Secretary) via us@yorksj.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Green,

York St John University.

Please sign below **if you do not wish your child to participate** in the research described above.

In not returning the form within one week I give **consent** for my child to take part in this research project.

Print Name: ……………………………………………..   Date……………………………

Signature: …………………………………………………….

Appendix C – Pupil Participant Information Sheet and Assent Form

Title of study: A duty of care for young people: Differentiating bullying from banter in Physical Education and school sport.

Name of School: Science, Technology and Health

Name of Researcher: Matthew Green

Project Supervisors: Dr Mark Mierzwinski and Dr Charlotte Haines Lyon

Introduction

You have been invited to take part in a research project examining young people's social interactions in Physical Education and school sport. Before deciding whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with your parents and the Head of PE.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The aim of this study is to investigate young people's social interactions in PE and school sport and how they might affect identity construction. I am interested in exploring how peer-relations and group dynamics change across different age groups, sexes and activities. I am also interested in verbal communications among young people and PE teachers and how young people understand concepts such as bullying and banter. As such, I would like to conduct a focus group interview with your peers to discuss your thoughts and attitudes of bullying and banter in PE and sport.

What will you do in this project?

You will be joined by some of your classmates and I will ask you to complete some quick and easy activities to help us discuss your thoughts of bullying and banter, and what you believe the differences to be. The discussion will last no more than 30 minutes and will take place in a classroom near the PE department at your school.

Do you have to take part?

No. This is a voluntary-based study. Your Head of Physical Education has said it was ok, but It is up to you whether or not you would like to take part, but your contribution would be greatly appreciated. If you do

decide to take part, you may withdraw from the study without a given reason. It is important to know that this is not a test, you will not be marked on your contribution. If you do wish to take part, there will be no pressure on you to contribute during the focus group, but anything you do wish to contribute would be greatly appreciated.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this project because you are a secondary school pupil involved in compulsory PE, which is the sample I am looking to observe. You have experience of PE throughout your time in education and now aged between 11-16 years of age you have formed your own views and opinions on your experiences in PE and school sport.

What are the potential risks to you taking part?

This study presents minimal risks and should not have any psychological impact. You can withdraw from the project by informing me (the researcher) via email or by contacting the gatekeeper (Head of Physical Education). From that point, any information you have provided throughout the observations will be destroyed and there will be no further observations of PE lessons or school sport activities that you undertake.

What happens to the information in the project?

All of your answers will be stored safely and securely, with only myself and my university research supervisor having access to them. The focus group will be recorded using an audio device, however only I will have access to the recording and it will be safely stored on a password protect account. I will only report answers to the Head of PE if I feel the information could pose a risk to you or your classmates. Your identity will remain anonymous throughout the research process and all your identifiable information (e.g. name and school) will be removed from the final report. These focus groups will form part of a larger research project that I am undertaking.

What happens next?

If you are happy to take part in this project, you will be asked to read and sign the assent for below and return it to me or the Head of Physical Education at your school. After that, you will not have to anything other than participate in your PE lessons and any extra-curricular school sport activities as you normally would. Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written in this form.

Contact information

My name is Matthew Green and I am a student at York St John University.

Email: matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk

Research Supervisors

Dr Mark Mierzwinski – Email: m.mierzwinski@yorksj.ac.uk

Dr Charlotte Haines Lyon – Email – c.haineslyon@yorksj.ac.uk

If you agree to be in the project, please tick the following boxes:

☐	I have either read or had this assent form read to me.
☐	I understand that I have been asked to be in a project about my experiences in PE.
☐	I have been asked if I have any questions about the project and these questions have been answered.
☐	I understand that the focus group session will be recorded using a device.
☐	I agree to be a part of this project.

Participant name (please print):

Researcher signature:

Appendix D – Focus Group Interview Guide

Banter in Physical Education and School Sport:

1. Please can you each describe what the term 'banter' means?
2. To what extent, if any, does take place in school?
a) In Physical Education; b) in extracurricular sport; c) in classroom-based lessons
3. Does banter take place in Physical Education? If so, where and how often?
4. Can you please explain who is likely to be involved in banter during PE lessons and school sport activities?
5. What sort of topics do people banter about during PE?
6. What locations does banter take place most and least often during PE? And can you please explain why?
7. How often does banter take place during PE?
8. How do pupils respond to banter in PE and school sport?
9. How do teachers respond to banter in PE and school sport?
10. How would you define banter to someone who has never heard the word before?

Bullying in Physical Education and School Sport:

1. Please can you each describe what the term 'bullying' means?
2. Does bullying happen in PE and school sport? If so, how? Where? And how often?
3. Can you please explain who is likely to be involved in bullying behaviours during PE?
4. What location does bullying take place most in PE? And why do you think that is the case?
5. How to pupils respond to (a) being bullied in PE and (b) observing bullying in PE?
6. How do teachers respond to bullying in PE?

Peer group dynamics in PE:

1. Please can you tell me about any social interactions in PE and school sport? Who is involved? Are there any groups?

2. Can you please explain to me how groups/teams are decided in PE? What are your thoughts on such processes?

3. Please can you tell me about social interactions that take place in the changing room?

4. Please can you explain to me about participation levels in PE and extracurricular sport?

Differentiating banter and bullying:

1. Please can you compare bullying and banter?

a) Conceptual/definition; b) performances; c) responses.

2. How do pupils differentiate banter and bullying in PE and school sport?

3. Do you think pupils understand the difference between banter and bullying in PE?

4. Does your school have a banter or a bullying policy?

Appendix E – Teacher Information Sheet and Consent Form

Matthew Green

York St. John University

School of Science, Technology and Health

Lord Mayor's Walk

York

YO317EX

Matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk

Introduction

You have been invited to take part in a research project examining young people's social interactions in Physical Education and school sport. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take the time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is unclear or you would like further information, please contact me (student researcher) or my research supervisor Dr Mark Mierzwinski using the contact details on the following page.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The aim of this study is to investigate young people's social interactions in Physical Education and school sport. More specifically, the study seeks to explore how young people differentiate banter from bullying and, in doing so, discover if there are differences in pupils interactions depending on their any age, gender and social settings. I am also particularly interested in verbal communication amongst Physical Education pupils and how this links to identity construction. The aspect that I would like your views on and experiences of is the often unseen areas of Physical Education such as the changing room environment, teacher-pupil interactions and the notion of banter.

What will you do in this project?

As this project involves gathering your views and experiences, you will be asked to take part in one interview which will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview can take place at a time that is convenient to you, preferably within the school setting. The interview will ask questions about Physical Education, extra-curricular school sport and pupils social interactions.

Do you have to take part?

No, this is a voluntary-based study. It is up to you whether or not you would like to take part, however your contribution would be greatly appreciated. If you decide to take part, you may later withdraw from the study without giving a reason and without penalty.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this project due to your experiences of teaching Physical Education and school sport. Although I have conducted observations within the Physical Education department, your expertise will provide important contextual and background information on young people's social interactions.

What are the potential risks to you taking part?

This study poses minimal risk and should not induce harm. You can withdraw from the study at any point by informing me (the researcher) via email and if you choose to do so any information you have provided will be removed from the study and destroyed. You may request that the information that you have provided is removed from the study at any point within 28 days after you took part in the interview.

What happens to the information in this project?

All interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes, but all answers provided will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for you and any people or places mentioned in the interview in order to maintain anonymity for you and the school. All data collected throughout this investigation will be stored securely on a password protected York St John University OneDrive account, which is used for the storage of research data at York St John University in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Only myself and my research supervisors will have access to these documents.

What happens next?

If you are happy to take part in this project, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Should you wish, a member-check will be put in place to ensure that the data collected is correct and interpreted correctly. In this instance, an email will sent to your account to check that the interview transcript is correct. It is possible that the results of this project will be published, however your confidentiality will be ensured at all times. If you do not wish to be part of this project, I would like to thank you for taking the time reading this investigation.

Researchers contact details:

Matthew Green   Dr Mark Mierzwinski

Matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk   m.mierzwinski@yorksj.ac.uk

If you have any further concerns, quires or complaints regarding the research project please contact Dr Sophie Carter (Chair of the Ethics Committee for Science, Technology and Health at York St John University) via s.carter@yorksj.ac.uk

If you have any concerns, questions or complaints regarding GDPR during this project please contact Dr Amanda Wilcox (University Secretary) via us@yorksj.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Green

York St John University

Matthew Green

York St. John University

School of Science, Technology and Health

Lord Mayor's Walk

York

YO317EX

Matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk

Dear

I am completing a research project examining young people's social interactions in Physical Education and school sport. I would like to invite you to take part in an interview to gain your experiences, perceptions and observations of pupils social interactions in lessons and activities that you have delivered.

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study please circle the appropriate responses, before signing and dating the declaration at the bottom of this form. if there is anything that you do not understand and would like more information on, please ask.

I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form.	YES	/	NO

| I understand that the research will involve me completing an interview exploring my experiences, perceptions and observations of young people's social interactions in PE and school sport. | YES | / | NO |

I understand the interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be recorded using an audio recording device.　　YES　　/　　NO

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time and without having to provide a reason. I understand that I should contact you via email should I wish to withdraw from the study and that I can request withdrawal up to 28 days after the interview.　　YES　　/　　NO

I understand that all information that I provide for this study will be treated in strict confidence and that my identity will remain anonymous in any written work arising from this study.　　YES　　/　　NO

I understand that any audio recorded material will be solely used for research purposes and destroyed on completion of the research project.　　YES　　/　　NO

I consent to participate in this project.　　YES　　/　　NO

Print Name:　　　　　　　　　　　　Date:

Signature of Participant:

Appendix F – Teacher Interview Guide

Section One – Background information of the teacher

1. Can you please explain to me your role in the school and the PE department?
2. Can you please outline your involvement in PE lessons and extra-curricular activities? (e.g. focus on male/female PE, which sports you deliver).
3. Can you outline any other teaching you do outside of the PE environment? (e.g. form tutoring, GCSE PE, other subjects)

Section Two – Gender differences in pupil social interactions in PE and school sport

4. From your experiences please could you describe to me how boys interact in Physical Education lessons?
5. From your experiences please could you describe to me how girls interact in Physical Education lessons?
6. Can you please explain any similarities and differences between male and female interactions and PE?
7. Can you please explain to me how boys interact with you when delivering PE lessons?
8. Can you please explain to me how girls interact with you when you're delivering PE lessons?
9. Can you explain to me how pupils socially interact in mixed-sex PE and school sport environments?

Section Three– Year group differences in pupils' social interactions

10. In your experience, how do year 7 pupils interact in Physical Education lessons?
11. In your experience, how Key Stage 4 pupils (years 10 & 11) interact with each other in Physical Education lessons?
12. Could you please explain any similarities and differences between year 7 pupils interactions to those in Key Stage 4 when in a Physical Education environment?
13. Are there any differences in extra-curricular school sport attendance numbers from year 7 to Key Stage 4? If so, please could you explain why you think these differences occur?
14. Can you please explain any similarities and differences between the ways in which year 7 pupils interact with you in comparison to Key Stage 4 pupils?

Section Four- Social context and environment

15. In your experience, do pupils interact differently in extra-curricular sport in comparison to PE lessons? If so, how?

16. Can you explain to me the process by which female pupils get changed before and after PE lessons? (e.g. changing room set-up, time scales, private cubicles)

17. Can you please explain to me how pupils interact in the changing room environment?

18. Can you please explain to me how pupils position themselves in the changing room environment? (e.g. any cliques, which pupils facilitate interaction)

19. Are there any similarities and differences to how year 7 pupils interact in the changing room to how Key Stage 4 pupils interact in the changing room? If so, please could you explain.

20. Do you feel it is important for a teacher to be present in the changing room environment? Please could you explain your thoughts on this?

21. In your experiences, are there any similarities and differences in pupils social interactions when changing for swimming compared to another PE activity? If so, please could you elaborate on these.

Section Five– Observations on pupil relations – bullying and banter

22. Do you ever come across any behaviour issues in the PE environment? If so, which context do issues arise? (e.g. playing field, fitness suite, changing room)

23. Do you ever come across any incidents or reports of bullying in the PE environment? If so, which contexts do they arise and who is involved?

24. In your experience, do pupils use banter as a form of social interaction in PE? If so, who engages in this form of interaction and in which social context?

25. Do you think pupils struggle to differentiate bullying from banter? If so, why?

26. Do pupils initiate banterous interactions with you? If so, which pupils are most likely to engage in this form of interaction?

That brings to a close the questions I have. Is there any other information that you feel would be interesting regarding pupils social interactions in Physical Education and school sport? Thank you so much for your responses, if you have any questions about the research process moving forward please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks once again.

Appendix G – Observations Ethical Approval Letter

School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Dear Matthew,

Title of study:	A duty of care for young people: Differentiating bullying and banter in Physical Education and school sport. Stage 3
Ethics reference:	STHEC0057
Date of submission:	23/02/2022

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval form and attached appendices (Appendix A-C)	03/04/2022

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study. You are now free to begin data recruitment and collection for the above approved study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sophie Carter
Chair of the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Appendix H – Focus Groups Ethical Approval Letter

Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

York St John University,
Lord Mayors Walk,
York,
YO31 7EX

10/02/2022

School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Dear Matthew,

Title of study: A duty of care for young people: Differentiating bullying and banter in Physical Education and school sport. Stage 2

Ethics reference: STHEC0052

Date of submission: 12/01/2022

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval form and attached appendices (Appendix A-E)	09/02/2022

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study. You are now free to begin data recruitment and collection for the above approved study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sophie Carter
Chair of the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Appendix I – Teacher Interview Ethical Approval Letter

School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Dear Matthew,

Title of study: A duty of care for young people: Differentiating bullying and banter in Physical Education and school sport.
Ethics reference: STHEC0047
Date of submission: 07/06/2021

I am pleased to inform you that the above application for ethical review has been reviewed by the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion on the basis of the information provided in the following documents:

Document	Date
Application for ethical approval form and attached appendices (Appendix A-C)	29/10/2021

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval, including changes to recruitment methodology or accompanying documentation. All changes must receive ethical approval prior to commencing your study. You are now free to begin data recruitment and collection for the above approved study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sophie Carter
Chair of the School of Science, Technology, and Health Research Ethics Committee

Appendix J – Gatekeeper Information Sheet and Consent Form

Matthew Green
York St. John University
School of Science, Technology and Health
Lord Mayor's Walk
York
YO317EX
Matthew.green2@yorksj.ac.uk

Dear Head of Physical Education,

I am completing a research project on examining children's social interactions in Physical Education (PE) and extra-curricular school sport. I request permission to use your department to complete my research.

What does the study involve?

The study will involve observing PE lessons and extra-curricular school sport activities for three months. Within this period, I would be observing lessons and sport activities across three days a week. It is desirable that I observe lessons across Key Stages 3 & 4, including both male and female PE lessons. During the lessons I would be located on the periphery of activities taking field-notes on an iPad around group interactions. Lessons would be observed during times most convenient to you and staff within your department. I will also be happy to offer voluntary assistance in setting up activities and tidying away equipment at the end of lessons.

What happens with the study findings?

Only the research supervisors, Dr Mark Mierzwinski and Dr Charlotte Haines Lyon, and I will have access to the information gathered from this investigation. All information will be stored in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Although no individuals will be the focus of observations, any identifiable information of individuals, the school or other organisations will be removed from the study to ensure anonymity. The study should not encourage conversations of a personal nature and only conversations initiated by the pupils' will be recorded in the observational field-notes. Any information or observations mate that my potential breach child protection or safeguarding issues will be disclosed to you as the Gatekeeper.

What are the risks/benefits to participation?

The study should not encourage conversations of a personal nature and only conversations initiated by the pupils' will be recorded in the observational field-notes. Any information or observations mate that my potential breach child protection or safeguarding issues will be disclosed to you as the Gatekeeper. Therefore, there is minimal risk and does not induce harm on the participants. This study aims to capture an in-depth understanding of young people's social interactions in PE and school sport which are often neglected or overlooked within existing literature. In return for granting access to your department, I would like to offer my services as a volunteer teaching assistant to help within the PE department in any way you deem appropriate.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

My details are at the top of the page. Alternatively, you can contact Mark Mierzwinski or Charlotte Haines Lyon via m.mierzwsinski@yorksj.ac.uk or c.haineslyon@yorksj.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns, queries or complaints regarding the research project please contact Dr Daniel Madigan (Chair of the Ethics Committee for Science, Technology and Health at York St John University) via d.madigan@yorksj.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Best wishes,

Matthew Green,

York St John University.

Please sign below if you are happy for me to complete my research in your department.

I have read and understood the information above and **<u>do give my consent</u>** to this study taking place.

Print Name: ……………………………………………. Date: ………………………………

Signature: …………………………………………………

Appendix K - Pupil Debrief Form

Thank you for taking part in this research project. I appreciate the fact that you have taken the time and effort to help with this study.

As explained in the Participant Information Sheet that was provided before you decided whether to take part in this project, there were potentially some minimal risks of becoming involved. If you would like any further information about your participation in this project, please do not hesitate to contact me or the Head of Physical Education. My details can be found on the Participant Information Sheet or the Information sheet sent to your parent/guardian.

If you have been affected in any way as a result of your involvement in this project, please be aware that impartial support, advice, help or guidance may be available from the following groups or organisations:

Name of Organisation	Telephone number	Website/Email
Mind	020 8519 2122 (General)	www.mind.org/uk
	01904 643364 (York)	
The NSPCC	0800 1111	https://www.nspcc.org.uk
Anti-Bullying Alliance		https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Thank you again for your time.

Best wishes,

Matthew Green

Appendix L - NVivo-12 Screenshots