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## Inclusive and exclusive masculinities in physical education

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**Inclusive and Exclusive Masculinities in Physical Education: a Scottish case study**

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## **Abstract**

This research examines how adolescent males (ages 16-17 years) construct and experience their masculine identities within the context of physical education (PE). A class of 23 boys and 3 girls from a state secondary school in Scotland were observed over a period of 3 months. During the third month, five of the observed pupils volunteered to take part in a conversation with the lead researcher which was guided by their participation in a repertory grid task. The same five participants also took part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The analysis of the evidence revealed that the adolescent pupils internalised and performed an orthodox form of masculinity that centred on strength, pain tolerance and the policing of others. More inclusive masculinities appeared to be emerging, however, the hypermasculine and public nature of the PE environment made it very difficult for the pupils to freely adopt or perform these alternative, more inclusive forms of masculinity. Additionally, pupils who did perform traits associated with inclusive masculinity often exhibited a high degree of social and physical capital. In order to facilitate a culture where all individuals feel free to express their gendered identities, teachers are encouraged to recognise, promote and celebrate multiple masculinities. This could create a safer learning environment for pupils and help prevent identities from being 'destroyed' in PE.

## **Keywords**

Hegemonic masculinity, orthodox masculinity, inclusive masculinity, physical education, identity, social capital.

## **Background**

The role of PE in the construction of masculinity is being increasingly scrutinised, as evidenced in research carried out by Silva, Botelho-Gomes, and Goelner (2012) and Atkinson and Kehler (2012). Also see The Guardian's Teacher Network (Jenkin, 2015) for a special feature. Here, it has been highlighted that homophobia and the use of derogatory language in PE, espoused mainly by boys, are key contributing factors to the large numbers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex pupils who say that they do not like PE. Specifically, there are concerns over the ways in which identities are 'destroyed on a regular basis' in PE (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012, p. 171). This destruction of alternative gendered identities has also been attributed to the hypermasculine culture of the subject (Hickey, 2008). In hypermasculine cultures, violent, aggressive, brave, competitive, misogynistic and homophobic behaviours are celebrated (Kirk, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1987) suggests that these behaviours are culturally valued and normalised, leading to the dominant position of men in society whilst marginalising women and other gender identities. Masculinity is stratified according to the hegemonic mode of dominance (Connell, 1987), creating and legitimising a masculine hierarchy. According to this theory, young, white, middle-class, able-bodied and heterosexual men adopt a privileged position in society by embodying a culturally idealised form of masculinity. They exalt strong, aggressive and non-feminine behaviours and their dominance is accepted by those who occupy positions further down the hierarchy.

By contrast, a more recent body of literature suggests that multiple masculinities are able to co-exist in a horizontal (not stratified) alignment (Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2012; McCormack, 2014). Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinity theory accounts for these findings by suggesting that as cultural homophobia diminishes in the Western world, a wider range of identities are legitimised. Whilst Anderson (2012) explored this cultural shift among sixth form PE pupils in their 'social' spaces, little is known about the extent to which these more inclusive masculinities exist within the context and culture of PE and Scottish PE in particular. There remains a dearth of recent evidence that has explored the scale of this cultural shift in pupils' wider PE experiences. Consequently, it is both educationally significant and timely to explore

the ways in which young males understand what it means to be masculine and how this understanding impacts on their lived experiences in PE – in this case within a Scottish state secondary school. This is particularly relevant in contexts where PE is viewed as a logical site for nurturing pupils' wellbeing. In Scotland, PE is located within the curricular domain of health and wellbeing, and accordingly, PE teachers are tasked with the responsibility of developing mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2009). However, currently little is known about the ways in which PE teachers in Scotland create environments for learning that facilitate the attainment of these aims (Gray, MacIsaac & Jess, 2015). Understanding how young males construct and perform their masculinities in the school and PE may offer some insight into the effectiveness of their learning contexts in promoting pupil wellbeing, or indeed if their identity construction continues to be 'destroyed on a regular basis' (Atkinson & Kehler 2012, p. 171).

### **Inclusive Masculinity Theory**

In presenting both a critique and an extension of Connell's (1987) work, Anderson (2009) asserts that a more expansive model is necessary to explain the ways that masculinity is understood and enacted, and so has developed the theory of inclusive masculinity. Anderson (2009) suggests that attitudes in Western societies towards different ways of 'being' have increasingly become more open. In this more liberal society, there is greater acceptance of different genders and sexualities. Resultantly, the boundaries for permissible behaviours have widened and multiple forms of masculinities are able to co-exist.

Anderson suggests that hegemonic masculinity as a masculine archetype is often confused with hegemonic masculinity theory as a social process (Adams, Anderson, & McCormack, 2010). Consequently, the term 'orthodox' masculinity is adopted to describe archetypes that demonstrate behaviours associated with homophobia, sexism, emotional stoicism and heterosexuality (Anderson, 2009). To describe the archetypes that reject these notions of masculinity, Anderson refers to inclusive masculinities. Men adopting inclusive masculinities have more open, positive and progressive attitudes towards masculinity and sexuality and are able to display a wider range of previously feminised behaviours without fear of being stigmatised or pejoratively labelled as gay.

To further explain this theoretical development, Anderson describes the phenomenon of homophobia. Homophobia is defined as the cultural fear of being homosexualised (McCormack, 2011) and is moderated by two key factors: the level of cultural homophobia and the fear that anyone can be gay. Where levels of homophobia are low, men have a broader range of behaviours available to them. For example, previous research has focused on the masculine identities constructed by white middle-class university students (Adams, 2011). In this context, the heterosexual men were comfortable being with gay students, were physically tactile with other men and talked about more feminised topics without fear of being labelled as gay or effeminate. By contrast, Froyum (2007) investigated the ways in which black youth from low-income families in the US constructed and embodied their gender and sexual identities. She found that the teenagers primarily constructed their identities through their bodies. They rejected homosexuality whilst concurrently affirming their own heterosexual superiority through displays of heterosexual prowess, threats and violence. These examples reinforce the importance of connecting the lived environment to the lived experiences, to consider the specific social and cultural contexts impacting upon gendered expressions and values.

### **Masculinities in Secondary schools**

Traditionally, secondary schools have been sites where sexual identities have been oppressed, where heterosexuality has been privileged and where boys have had a limited range of behaviours available to them (Wellard, 2006). Connell (1989) describes how the informal culture of the school reproduces a dominant form of masculinity, one that privileges strong, aggressive and non-feminine behaviours, by creating and legitimising a hierarchy that privileges boys over girls. Holligan and Deuchar's (2014) work, on Scottish male teenagers showed that in Scotland (with its higher levels of violent crime than England or Wales), boys constructed their masculinity around violence within the school environment, conceiving of the school as a place of conflict and threat. Similarly, Morojele (2011) uncovered a stratification of different masculinities in schools, where boys who displayed strength and toughness achieved a privileged hierarchical position over other boys. In schools, the body is a powerful means of gaining masculine capital and avoiding marginalisation (Wellard, 2006). It is a place where bodily practices are coded as masculine and

feminine and, as a result, the range of acceptable behaviours available to students is limited (Wellard, 2009).

The use of homophobic discourse is also a powerful means of restricting behaviours in secondary schools. McCormack (2011) defines homophobic discourse as anti-gay discourse that has the primary intention of hurting someone and, in schools, it impacts negatively on both the learning environment and the social freedom of sexual minorities (McCormack, 2011). McCormack and Anderson (2010) suggest that homophobic discourse has two purposes: to distance oneself from being gay and to police the behaviours of others – all of which serves to reinforce the heterosexual status of the perpetrator. Those who challenge this discourse are ostracised for doing so, putting their social status amongst their peers at risk.

Given the high cultural value that orthodox masculinity affords, perhaps even more so in some Scottish state secondary school settings, it can be difficult for boys to resist creating a masculine identity for themselves which aligns with dominant norms and values (Connell, 1995). Consequently, the dysconscious reproduction of such norms is established because the behaviours associated with them are framed as socially desirable. Boys who perform and value these masculinities display higher status by virtue of such self-affirming displays; but crucially, they reproduce such norms by desiring such behaviours even if they do not possess the associated physical attributes that constitute orthodox masculinity. Evidence of such behaviour occurred in Wight's (1994) study of Scottish schoolboys, highlighting "a growing discrepancy" between how boys presented their emotions and sexual experience to male peers and their actual emotions and sexual experiences, with some boys exaggerating their sexual conquests, downplaying their emotional connection to girls in front of other boys, but privately expressing them to the interviewer.

More recently, a number of studies have demonstrated that not all boys aspire to attain orthodox masculinity (McCormack, 2014; McCormack & Anderson, 2010) and instead pursue more 'personalised' (Swain, 2006) or 'inclusive' (Anderson, 2009) masculinities, adopting an identity that neither supports nor challenges orthodox masculinity. In a culture of decreasing homophobia, they are able to partake in school life without policing their own or others' identities and multiple masculinities are equally esteemed in a horizontal alignment (Anderson 2014; White & Hobson,

2015). However, this does not mean that there is a gender 'utopia' where homophobia does not exist (White & Hobson, 2015). Rather, society is more accepting of, and values multiple forms of masculine performance. This shift towards more progressive attitudes in society and more specifically in the school context was evidenced in McCormack and Anderson's (2010) study where boys internalised inclusive masculinities and created wider masculine boundaries, enabling them to feel both physically and emotionally closer to one another. McCormack and Anderson (2010) and McCormack (2011) also found very little evidence in schools of homophobic discourse among the sixth form boys in their respective studies. Indeed, homophobic discourse was stigmatised and deemed to be unacceptable by pupils.

### **Masculinities in PE**

Whilst a number of studies have documented inclusive masculinities in schools, few have focused on how pupils construct inclusive forms of masculinity in the PE context. Recently, White and Hobson (2015) explored the construction of masculinities with male PE teachers and identified teacher narratives around 'peer acceptance, complete inclusion and normality' (p. 12). In a study that examined the construction of masculine identities of sixth form PE pupils, Anderson (2012) found compelling evidence to suggest a decrease in homophobia and a climate of openness, softness and kindness. However, whilst Anderson himself suggests that some forms of orthodox masculinity could have been performed on the playing field, he did not explore this in his investigation. Research in the PE context, examining the ways in which pupils understand what it means to be masculine *and* how this understanding is shaped by their experiences in PE, is still required. This is a pertinent issue because PE is associated with the reproduction of hegemonic norms (Parker, 1996; Pringle, 2008). Studies have concluded that the subject of PE teaches boys to 'be a man' (Silva et al., 2012, p. 269) and that alleged feminine traits like physical incompetence, weakness and vulnerability are to be avoided (Hickey, 2008). In contrast, aggression, bravery and strength are considered masculine and boys who embody these traits are often more successful in PE (Wellard, 2009) and more able to progress up the social hierarchy (Atencio & Koca, 2011).



PE has traditionally been a 'vortex' for the production and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Mooney and Hickey, 2012), through the organisation of single-sex or 'streamed' ability lessons (Evans, 2004) and omnipresence of competitive team sports - as is the case in the Scottish PE context (Gray, Sproule & Wang, 2008). Team sports such as rugby and soccer in the PE curriculum are powerful tools for the construction of masculine identities, with their focus on power, strength, physical aggression and domination. Participation in such games also leads to suffering, sacrifice and the tolerance of pain (Light and Kirk, 2000), all characteristics of orthodox masculinity. This then legitimates and reproduces a hierarchy of masculinity where smaller or weaker boys and girls are subordinated and unequal gender relations are reproduced.

Violence is perhaps also more prevalent in the PE context because of the abundance of unsupervised spaces that pupils can access; for example, large playing fields or changing rooms (Parker, 1996). Not only can boys 'hide' from their teachers in these spaces, but they are also places where their bodies are on public display and where they can therefore be subject to bullying if they do not meet the hypermasculine standards of the dominant group (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012; Kirk, 2010). White and Hobson (2015) noted that some of the PE teachers in their study were concerned that the changing rooms could be an unsafe place for gay pupils and one teacher recalled a historical account of anti-gay harassment.

More research in this area is necessary to fully understand the complexity of gender construction in the PE context, especially given the evidence to suggest that cultural, social, economic and intellectual status has some influence over identity construction. For example, Light and Kirk (2000) reported that private school rugby players found it difficult to play the same aggressive style as their 'working class' opponents as they considered themselves to be socially and morally 'above' this. Furthermore, Atencio and Koca (2011) examined the social practices in PE in a Turkish secondary school situated in a socially deprived area. They found that the boys who were able footballers and who embodied the 'expected' behaviours associated with football (Wellard, 2009) constructed an orthodox form of heterosexual masculinity and marginalised both less able boys and girls in PE.

Adolescent masculinity in PE remains a contested area, partly because of the internal conflict male pupils experience in a context where they have to engage in 'aggressive'

activities that may be at odds with their own personal, more inclusive masculine identity. Consequently, the primary aim of the present study is to contribute to the research in this area by examining the ways in which adolescent male pupils in a Scottish secondary school understand what it means to be masculine, and how this understanding influences them and their social experiences in PE. Furthermore, it positions the performance of masculinities in the contextually specific environments in which they exist to understand further the relationship between masculinities, social status and group values.

## **Methodology**

Examining adolescent male pupils' understandings of masculinity within their school and PE context is particularly salient given that masculinity is a socially constructed phenomenon that is largely impacted upon by the environment (Connell, 1995). Consequently, some key principles of ethnographic research were drawn upon throughout the research process. In particular, attempts were made by the lead researcher to build relationships with participants and to become as immersed as possible within the research setting within the time limits of this study. The lead researcher was embedded within the school for three months as a student teacher of PE. This allowed him to make multiple observations of the participants in question, talk informally with participants on an ongoing basis and adopt a more holistic perspective when gathering and analysing the evidence.

## **Participants**

All of the participants in the study came from one state secondary school in a working class area of central Scotland. At the time the research was carried out, the school was attended by around 1000 pupils. The PE department was made up of four teachers, two male and two female, and all had a background of playing or coaching team sports. Over the past two years, all of the core PE classes were organised according to gender; the girls engaging in an 'aesthetic' curriculum consisting of activities such as trampolining and gymnastics, and the boys a curriculum made up primarily of team sports such as football and rugby. Prior to this, all core lessons were co-educational and the curriculum included a variety of activities, although the majority of these were team games. The certificated PE classes in the school were all co-educational;

however, the majority of pupils electing this option were male. In Scotland, from the age of 15, all pupils have to elect between three and six certificated subjects (English, maths and a foreign language are compulsory). Pupils elect to study specific subjects for a number of reasons, often because they enjoy the subject, although previous research set in the Scottish PE context suggests that this is not always the case (see MacPhail, 2002).

For the present study, a secondary 5 certificated PE class (ages between 16 and 17 years) comprising of 23 boys and 3 girls was observed over a three-month period. During the final month, all pupils in the class were informed about the general nature of the study and were invited to be participants in the next phase. Subsequently, five male participants volunteered to participate in two one-to-one interviews. It is acknowledged that volunteer sampling can result in a degree of self-selection bias and therefore the participants may not be representative of the group as a whole. However, given the personal nature of the study, where the participants were encouraged to talk about themselves and their bodies, voluntary sampling was viewed as a suitable means of participant recruitment (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, the small sample size was deemed appropriate to allow for a deeper insight into pupils' lives and experiences. Ethical approval was granted for the study and informed consent was obtained from all participants. All five participants were from white working class backgrounds, with the exception of one pupil who was of Asian descent. Researcher observations over the three month period indicated that all five participants occupied comfortable positions within school social hierarchies and one boy in particular seemed to be socially dominant within the school. They appeared to embody a competitive and sporty identity, in line with what Anderson (2009) describes as orthodox masculinity.

## **Evidence Collection**

### Participant observations

For the three-month duration of the project, the lead researcher both worked as a student teacher of PE and engaged in participant observations as a researcher. These observations took place over four separate days per week – three in a practical setting and one in a classroom. The observations were focused on physical and social

interactions between pupils during and outwith lessons. Similar to Anderson (2012), relevant observations were recorded from memory in a private space as soon as possible after the event. The notes that were taken during the observation served to increase the researcher's understanding of the class culture, become familiar with individual class members and their social networks, and identify any critical incidents relating to their masculine identities and behaviours in PE. These notes were subsequently used to inform interviews and analysis and helped to create a rich description of the context in which the participants' masculine identities were performed and interpreted.

### **Reflections from the Lead Researcher**

A crucial aim of this study was to build relationships with participants in attempting to become an 'insider' within their social situations. Therefore, inter-subjective reflection was especially important when collecting and interpreting data. Such reflection involves analysing the researcher's own self-presentation, considering how the participants and researcher relate to one another and examining the relations of power at play between researcher and participants (Robson, 2011). Within this study, the lead researcher attempted to get 'closer' to the participants by distancing himself from the role of 'teacher'. For example, a class was chosen for the study that the lead researcher did not himself teach. The lead researcher was fairly close in age to pupils, only being a few years older than them, and spent lots of time informally getting to know participants. This was done by talking about common interests such as football, music, television shows and video games and taking an interest in other things important to the pupils. However, whilst doing this, he took care not to associate himself with a hypermasculine image or to socialise with only certain pupils in the class. The lead researcher was sensitive to appropriately negotiating the constant tension between getting 'in' with certain social groups and marginalising others. Following previous studies within this area (Adams, 2011; Adams et al., 2010; McCormack, 2011; McCormack & Anderson, 2010), the lead researcher frequently reflected upon his own masculine identity and that of his participants. This was done through keeping a personal reflective diary throughout the research process.

## **Interviews**

All five interviewees took part in two separate one-to-one interviews with the lead researcher. Similar to the techniques used by Johnson, Gray and Horrell (2013), photographic elicitation was used as a catalyst for the initial discussions. Participants were asked to arrange six pictures of various sportsmen in order of 'manliness'. Using the pictures, the participants then carried out a rating of each sportsman using a repertory grid technique. Based on Kelly's (1970) personal construct theory, the repertory grid aims to reveal how individuals understand their world by rating elements against sets of bipolar constructs. For example, a rugby player could be rated on a scale of strong to weak. In the present study, participants created bipolar constructs for each image by identifying a key characteristic of each sportsman along with a contrasting construct that described the opposite of each characteristic (Yorke, 1978). A scale was then formed that allowed them to rate each picture, offering an insight into how the participants understood the key characteristics of each sport. The participants also rated themselves against each construct to demonstrate the extent to which they believed they embodied the identified characteristics. The repertory grid technique was not applied to gather generalisable truths about what it means to be 'manly', rather, they were used as conversational prompts to precipitate the elucidation of sensitising categories around which participants could discuss and explain their ratings and gendered perceptions.

At the end of the three month period of observation, and almost two weeks after the repertory grid 'conversations', participants attended a second, 'follow-up' interview. This interview aimed to encourage participants to reflect more personally on issues of masculinity. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were chosen rather than group interviews because the voices of individuals with alternative perspectives on masculinity can be silenced by the discourse of dominant others (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002). The questions were developed by the lead and second researchers, and were informed by key themes from previous literature in the field. Importantly, the questions were also shaped by the analyses of the observation data. This resulted in the development of meaningful and contextually bound questions around key themes such as masculine traits, feminine traits, peer group culture and popularity. All interviews, including the repertory grid interviews, lasted between 30 and 40 minutes

and took place in a room free from distraction. They were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

### **Analysis of Evidence**

Having a small sample who felt comfortable in talking openly with the lead researcher over two interviews led to a large amount of rich, in-depth data being generated for subsequent analysis. This added to a vast quantity of field notes which had been constructed continually over the three month period. Initially, field notes and transcripts from both the repertory grid conversations and the semi-structured interviews were read multiple times to get a 'feel' for the data. A preliminary process of open coding took place in order to identify emerging categories. This entailed considering the 'text' and developing phrases that explained and summarised key issues. The codes that were developed were then analysed using a constant comparative method (Glaser 1964). This involved the identification of similar codes which were then grouped together to form categories. On-going reference to the observation data further supported the initial analytical process. This process was repeated until no new categories emerged. Finally, axial coding was carried out to identify relationships between different categories and generate overarching themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Discussion of Results**

#### *Strength*

In order to facilitate a conversation around key issues, participants were firstly asked to arrange a series of pictures in order of 'manliness'. This provided participants with an opportunity to reflect upon and then articulate their understandings of what it meant to be masculine or be a man. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all participants ordered the pictures in the same way, placing dance and gymnastics at the 'least manly' end of the scale, with soccer and rugby at the 'most manly' end of the scale. However, to justify this order, participants primarily referred to the physical strength needed to participate in more masculine sports. Specifically, to qualify as masculine, they focused on the extent to which strength was used against other people.

Sam            '[In rugby] they're fighting all the time and running into people. Gymnastics is just trying to hold your own weight, like personal strength, whereas rugby is like strength to out power someone else.'

Similar thoughts were echoed by David as he justified why he placed dance as the least masculine sport:

David            'Dance does have a lot of physical demands to it, but I just think because there's no contact and it's not as intense I would put it there [as 'least manly']'

Such views are representative of an orthodox masculinity (Atencio & Koca 2011; Hickey, 2008; Pringle, 2008), where being strong is a key aspect of 'being a man' (Silva et al., 2012, p. 272) and importantly, also a key aspect of being successful in the context of PE (Wellard, 2006). The PE context is typically viewed as a hypermasculine space where physicality and strength are highly valued (Atencio & Koca, 2011; Kirk, 2010; Parker, 1996). Certainly this was the case in the present study, where displays of strength were regularly observed, not only during lessons where strength over an opponent was essential, but also before and after lessons where the adolescent male pupils often engaged in physical encounters such as play fighting, rough play and arm wrestling. This was evidenced in the following field note:

*After class is finished, the pupils begin to leave the gym hall. Whilst doing so, Craig play fights with Scott and puts him in a headlock. The pupils struggle with each other, but Craig maintains his grip until the teacher tells them to stop.*

Participation in this type of combative behaviour appeared to be a way for pupils to measure and compare their strength against each other, creating a hierarchy of power where stronger pupils can enact dominance over weaker pupils (Connell, 1995; Froyum, 2007). Consequently, observations revealed that, even once the PE lesson had finished, the PE context remained a location for the production and maintenance of orthodox masculinity, where pupils had numerous opportunities to display their strength over others. Interestingly, despite observing numerous public displays of hypermasculine behaviours and despite recognising the importance of strength in

constructing their views on masculinity, the participants that were interviewed were modest about the extent to which they embodied this characteristic. Only Neil rated himself as strong, and yet he was quick to downplay his strength:

Neil            ‘I’m not, like, a fitness freak, you know? I’m not at the gym every day pumping iron’

It was very interesting to note that, although strength was considered a desirable trait, participants distanced themselves from looking extremely strong or appearing narcissistic and obsessive about their bodies. Furthermore, when asked if they would change aspects of themselves, participants were still reluctant to overly increase their strength or be seen to embody the physique most closely associated with strength:

Sam            ‘I wouldn't want to be absolutely massive or huge’

In the context of the current study, these participants appeared happy to occupy a ‘not strong but not weak’ position, signalling the embodiment of an acceptable form of masculinity. Neil’s use of the word ‘*freak*’, for example, demonstrates how being overly strong was considered both abnormal and undesirable. This sentiment was echoed by all of the participants. This is because the embodiment of traits that are deemed to be abnormal would likely lead to a stigmatised, and ultimately marginalised, identity (Connell, 1989). Consequently, the adolescent male pupils in this study appeared to negotiate an identity that was neither excessively strong nor too weak, eschewing extremes of both main groups.

### *Pain tolerance*

One consequence of the pupils’ battles of strength is the inevitable experience of pain. Indeed, participants in this study showed awareness that, to be considered masculine within society, boys should display a tolerance towards pain:

Sam            ‘When someone says ‘be a man’ it’s just like don’t cry if someone snaps [fouls] you or whatever. Just get up and take it, take it like a man’

Being able to withstand pain was viewed as an acceptable way of ‘doing boy’ (Swain, 2006, p. 333) and being overly affected by pain was viewed as a feminine trait. Sam appeared to subscribe to this discourse, as in the one-to-one interview he expressed



his belief that making a 'big deal' out of getting hurt was 'girly'. Scott also expressed a similar belief, as exemplified when he was asked to describe the traits of a boy who was labelled as 'girly':

Scott            'More gentle, more delicate, if you know what I mean? You react to pain more dramatically'

These views reflect an understanding of masculinity that suggests males should be stoic in their reaction to pain, and those who 'overly-dramatize' their reactions to pain are deemed to be more feminine (given that females have more freedom to express their vulnerable and sensitive emotions). This also represents the internalisation of gender binaries (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012; Connell, 1995) where in order to be masculine and not feminine, pain is tolerated (and in some cases embraced) and emotion is suppressed (Wight, 1994), as demonstrated by Scott, for example, who described how he could be '*oblivious to danger and pain*' whilst playing rugby. Interestingly, Scott also admitted that this was not always the case and that sometimes his reaction to pain could be '*overly dramatic*'. This is very typical of most males, as few are able to fully embody orthodox masculinity (Atencio & Koca, 2011; Swain, 2006). However, the physical, competitive and combative nature of many activities in PE can put male pupils under pressure to attain orthodox ideas as many of them necessitate and even encourage the tolerance of pain (Hickey, 2008; Pringle, 2008). The pupils in the present study described this pressure to cope with pain in PE, as demonstrated by David when he explained how 'masculine' pupils reacted when experiencing pain:

David            'I'd say there's a few that try their best to stay up even if they do get kicked, without going down and crying about it'

David's explanation reinforces the idea that, while repressing pain is idealised as a masculine trait, only 'a few' boys are able to successfully achieve this. Nonetheless, in PE it appears that tolerating pain is a key means by which male pupils' masculine identity is constructed, performed and judged. More specifically, the central role of competitive sports in PE fosters an ethos where repressing pain is celebrated and privileged (Silva et al., 2012), and pupils who show pain are marginalised and pejoratively branded feminine (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012; Parker, 1996; Tischler & McCaughy, 2011). Consequently, pupils display their masculine identity and

distance themselves from femininity by repressing pain, often policed by others into performing this behaviour, and ensuring that, on the playing field at least, a more orthodox form of masculinity is maintained (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012; Parker, 1996).

### *Identity policing*

Hypermasculine norms, such as the expectation for boys to repress pain, can limit the range of behaviours available to pupils. By stigmatising certain behaviours, individuals are constrained into enacting a very narrow form of masculinity (Connell, 1989; Morojele, 2011). For example, Mark explained that he would not even consider joining a dance club, primarily because of the reaction that he thought that he would receive from his friends:

Mark            ‘Oh no, it wouldn't be [positive]. They'd probably use things like ‘oh you need to man up’, they'd probably use phrases like that if I told them I wanted to dance’

If boys choose to participate in activities viewed as feminine, such as dance, then they are often labelled as deviant and this can lead to individuals being ostracised as the ‘negative other’ (Hickey, 2008, p. 156). This also reinforces the idea that, for male adolescents, being masculine means not being feminine and some boys therefore feel they must monitor their behaviour to ensure they are not acting in effeminate ways (Connell, 1995; Wellard, 2006). Male pupils who behave in ways that are deemed feminine face having their identity questioned, stigmatised and destroyed (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). This was highlighted by Neil in relation to how his peers would react if he decided to start dance classes:

Neil            ‘I might be perceived as gay or something!’

As previously mentioned, the PE environment is one that offers an abundance of open space, where pupil discourse and behaviour are on public display (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012; Parker, 1996). It is in these spaces that behaviours can be observed, questioned and policed by others. Here, individual pupils question the (hetero) sexuality of others by making derogatory comments towards them (Froyum, 2007). For example, during a soccer lesson Sean, a very competitive pupil, became very frustrated with his teammate's behaviours, as noted in the following incident:

*Whilst playing football, Callum complains about not receiving a foul. Sean responds by saying 'stop greetin' [crying], faggot.*

Whilst it is possible that Sean's reaction was an example of homophobic discourse used to assert his orthodox masculinity, in a culture of diminished homophobia, McCormack (2011) suggests that young people more often use what he describes as 'gay discourse'. Importantly, this form of discourse still has socio-negative intentions, although it is possibly less harmful than homophobic abuse. Additionally, research suggests that this type of policing can still be used to affirm the individual's heterosexual status and elevate the pupils' social standing within the PE context (Atencio & Koca, 2011; Connell, 1989; Hickey, 2008; Parker, 1996).

### *Popularity*

Traditionally, research has indicated that the embodiment of orthodox masculinity leads to high social status and popularity (Atencio & Koca, 2011; Hickey, 2008). However, the participants in this study referred to a different set of characteristics to define the notion of popularity. Reflecting the findings of McCormack and Anderson (2010), the most valued traits in their social groups were not centred on orthodox ideals of masculinity, rather they celebrated traits like friendliness and generosity. For these adolescent boys, being 'nice', 'kind' and 'friendly' enabled them to build social capital and elevate their position within their peer group (McCormack, 2011; Swain, 2006). This climate is more in line with inclusive masculinity theory, where the boundaries for 'being' masculine are much wider and individuals feel free to behave in ways that have previously been stigmatised (Anderson, 2009).

When multiple masculinities are valued, adolescent boys are free to embody and perform a wider range of behaviours (Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2011). This was exemplified by Neil as he demonstrated an indifference towards being feminised:

Neil                    'Sometimes I may have acted out a little feminine, but I'm not really bothered about it because everything I do I always think 'is it the right option' - is it the right way I should be doing this certain thing? So if I'm going to be perceived as feminine then I'm not bothered about it'

The views held by Neil reflect Anderson's (2009) suggestion that homophobia is decreasing in modern culture, and adolescent boys are able to perform a wider range of behaviours without worrying about being labelled as feminine or homosexual (Anderson, 2012; McCormack, 2014). Interestingly, Neil also expressed views that were more in line with an orthodox form of masculinity, for example when he described weakness as a feminine trait, thus demonstrating the fluid nature of gender identity (Connell, 1995; Swain, 2006). Frosh et al. (2002) suggest that an individual's identity is actively created and reconstructed and, depending on the context, individuals may be able to draw on different forms of masculinity to present a desirable face (Goffman, 1973; Paechter, 2003). Therefore, adolescent male pupils are able to actively construct an identity that embodies traits characteristic of both inclusive masculinity and orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2009). Ultimately, the identity pupils decide to project will depend on what will gain more capital in a specific situation (Goffman, 1973).

There is some research evidence to suggest the accepted presence of inclusive masculinity in the PE context (Anderson, 2012), where boys openly perform feminised behaviours. This was, at times, observed in the present study, as demonstrated by the following field note:

*When Lewis is placed in Adam's team, Adam celebrates and they embrace each other with a hug.*

And, from the same class:

*Pupils are sitting down whilst the teacher organises teams. Ryan walks up behind George and runs his fingers through George's hair repeatedly. George does not visibly react.*

Ironically, on many of the occasions where more inclusive masculine behaviours were observed, the pupils involved were those who also possessed orthodox traits such as physical strength, sporting competence and who reported sexual conquests with females. This is similar to previous research that has uncovered inclusive masculinities in elite sports performers (Adams, 2011; Anderson & McGuire, 2010). The 'heteromascline capital' associated with these traits may have enabled them to transgress orthodox norms and perform more 'inclusive' behaviours (Anderson, 2014). In other words, they embodied orthodox masculinity to such an extent that they

did not have to fear being perceived as feminine or homosexual (Anderson & McGuire, 2010). In this way, the behaviours of the boys in this Scottish PE context may not have been evidence of more inclusive masculinities, rather they may signal the existence of another 'exclusive' masculinity (Wellard, 2006, p. 110) where only boys with a privileged amount of capital can enact this form of fluid masculinity. Indeed, this was evident in Wight's (1994) study, where the boys from the most popular group in the school (partly because of their hypermasculinity) could transgress the boundaries of orthodox masculinity more easily and publicly without losing status.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This research aimed to provide an insight into the phenomenon of adolescent masculinity in a Scottish PE context. The discussion demonstrates how the participants internalised an orthodox masculinity and, similar to a number of other studies, the pupils believed that being masculine required the embodiment of traits like strength and pain tolerance (Hickey, 2008; Morojele, 2011). Participants recognised their own limited embodiment of these traits, supporting previous research that suggests that few men are able to fully enact orthodox masculinity (Atencio & Koca, 2011; Swain, 2006). Instead, participants negotiated a 'normal' identity that was to a large extent congruent with hypermasculine expectations. Adherence to this identity was policed through various forms of discourse and aggression within the PE context, especially but not exclusively on the field of play. The physical battles, competition and public displays of strength that are often necessary in PE, allowed 'tough' pupils to legitimate their form of masculinity (Atencio & Koca, 2011). Therefore pupils who embodied orthodox masculinity during PE, gained a privileged position in the PE hierarchy (Connell, 1995) and were able to police the identity of other male pupils making it difficult for other male pupils to exhibit behaviours associated with inclusive masculinity. However, more congruent with inclusive masculinity, participants suggested that niceness, friendliness and kindness also, in some situations, led to high social status in their school. This suggests an acceptance of inclusive masculinity, and could explain the physical tactility observed between boys during some PE lessons (Anderson, 2009, 2012; McCormack & Anderson,

2010). This reflects previous research with elite-level soccer players where orthodox on-pitch norms and behaviours were resisted and challenged by athletes off the field of play (Adams et al., 2010), thus suggesting that orthodox behaviours may be required to play the game, but are not necessarily intrinsically valued by those who play the game or widely practised after the game is finished. However, although the pupils in this study appeared to value aspects of inclusive masculinity, as evidenced by the ease with which they were able to articulate their inclusive masculinity during the interviews, this was not so easy for them to play-out in the ‘real-life’ PE context. The results of this study clearly highlight the complex and fluid nature of masculine identity construction in PE, and the possible existence of another ‘exclusive’ masculinity in this Scottish context. Consequently, more research in this area is necessary so that the influence of diminishing homophobia in Western societies can be better understood from different cultural and social perspectives.

This study may be important for teachers of PE in many ways. By improving their awareness of various forms of masculinity, teachers are better placed to challenge the dominant, orthodox norms in PE (Pringle, 2008). This allows them to be proactive in confronting gendered identity policing and preventing identities from being destroyed in PE (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). In this way, teachers are better equipped to create learning environments where inclusive masculinities can thrive and pupils’ social, emotional and mental wellbeing can be supported (Anderson, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2010).

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