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4 **A Position Statement on Social Justice, Physical Education and Bullying:**

5 **A Figurational Sociological Perspective**

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26 Bullying is increasingly considered to be an important moral, political and social issue
27 within modern society. Academic research on this issue has mostly been examined through a
28 psychological lens, often using questionnaire data to examine and explain the prevalence of
29 different types of bullying. In this position statement, we apply a figurational sociological
30 perspective to examine issues of school-based bullying in physical education. We critically
31 reflect on attempts to position bullying amongst young people as a ‘social justice’ issue and
32 argue that core figurational principles might potentially help researchers strive towards a
33 more reality-congruent means of conceptualizing the power-relationships that are inherent
34 within bullying. We further maintain that the development of a more detached understanding
35 of issues relating to bullying might provide a more adequate basis to contribute to future
36 ongoing policy development.

37 **Key Words** Bullying, physical education, social justice, figurational sociology

38 **Introduction**

39 Data from recent large-scale surveys suggests that between 45-51% of young people
40 experience bullying during their time in UK schools (DitchTheLabel, 2018; Stonewall, 2017).
41 Recent reports also highlight the impact that bullying in schools can have on the mental and
42 physical health of young people and emphasize its lasting effects into adulthood (Brauser,
43 2014; Smith, 2014). Following instances in which children have committed suicide following
44 their experiences as victims of bullying, bereaved parents have also lobbied the government
45 for the introduction of new anti-bullying legislation (Payne & Keenan, 2016). Such concerns
46 appear to be reflected in the recent increase of anti-bullying campaigns in schools (Anti-
47 Bullying Alliance, 2018). In response to concerns about bullying in the UK schools are
48 mandated to have an anti-bullying policy (GOV.UK, 2018).

49 Whilst the prevalence of bullying amongst young people has been increasingly
50 positioned by the government and others as an important moral and political issue (e.g.

51 Department for Education, 2017), there has also been increasing academic debate
52 surrounding the definitional and conceptual issues of what constitutes bullying. Such debates
53 are often based around the close affiliation of bullying to issues such as prejudice,
54 harassment, discrimination and victimization (Volk, Veenstra, & Espelage, 2017). Bullying
55 has also become increasingly difficult to differentiate from ‘banter’, a form of interaction that
56 is often intended to be more jocular, but can include impolite and offensive language and tone
57 (Nichols, 2018). Recent attempts to define the concept of bullying tend to focus on
58 understanding that such behaviours: (a) involve some elements of goal-orientated aggression;
59 (b) are negative, harmful or injurious to the victim; and (c) can be linked to power-
60 imbalances between those parties involved (Volk, Dane & Marini, 2014).

61 With increasing debate surrounding issues of bullying, some academic researchers
62 have sought to emphasize the ‘moral imperative’ for action to reduce instances of bullying in
63 schools (Rigby, Smith, & Pepler, 2004, p.1). At times, such issues have also been aligned
64 with a ‘social justice’ agenda (Polanin & Vera, 2013). Whilst social justice researchers have
65 made important contributions to academic discussions in recent years, there is however also
66 much debate surrounding the concept of social justice. The underpinning aims of much social
67 justice research are to examine issues surrounding fairness, discrimination and social injustice
68 within society. There is often an underlying ideological desire to change and improve the
69 social world and strive for greater equality and distribution of opportunities, benefits and
70 responsibilities for different people and groups through activism and praxis (Long, Fletcher,
71 & Watson, 2017; Riches et al., 2017; Wetherly, Watson, & Long, 2017). For some social
72 justice researchers, the world should be examined through a ‘politics of hope’ that ‘criticizes
73 the status quo and imagines how things *could* be different’ (Trussell, 2014, p.350, cited in
74 Riches et al., 2017, p.218; emphasis added by Riches et al.). The concept of social justice can
75 be heavily value-laden in striving to improve the situation for disadvantaged groups within

76 society. In the field of education, social justice agendas can broadly be seen as a call for
77 critical theorists and educators to engage and respond to the detrimental effects of
78 globalization on issues of equity and diversity within increasingly neo-liberal educational
79 practices (Azzarito et al., 2017).

80 The aim of this position statement is to offer a figurational sociological approach as a
81 means of understanding issues relating to bullying in school-based Physical Education (PE).
82 Malcolm and Mansfield (2013, pp.399-400) have summarized the key underpinning
83 principles of figurational sociology as follows:

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

94 In this position statement, we provide a figurationally-informed synthesis of key themes
95 relating to issues of bullying in PE and begin to offer a critical reflection on recent attempts
96 to label bullying amongst young people as a social justice issue. The more ideologically-
97 driven focus and occasional political involvements of some social justice researchers can, at
98 times, guide such research from the outset, leading such researchers to examine problems,
99 troubles and issues of the day from a more involved short-term perspective. Figurational
100 sociologists argue that examining social processes from a long-term developmental

101 perspective can aid in the development of more detached forms of knowledge (Dunning,
102 1992).

103 **PE, gender and bullying: A long-term perspective**

104 Figurational sociologists argue that a developmental approach in the research process
105 can facilitate a more adequate understanding of the long-term power-struggles that often
106 underpin social inequalities and unequal power-chances for different people and groups
107 within society (Elias, 1978). Elias (1978) argued, this can allow sociologists to consider how
108 people's actions are enabled or constrained through their interdependence with others.
109 Historically, PE has long been a gendered subject, particularly given that PE has (and often
110 continues to be) viewed synonymously with sport. At the time of the emergence of modern
111 sport during the 18th and 19th centuries, gender relations between men and women were
112 vastly unequal in politics, education and public space. Sport was largely a male preserve, a
113 social institution honoured, demarcated and both organizationally and ideologically
114 dominated by males.

115 Various modern forms of sport/PE started to emerge and develop in the male public
116 schools of the 18th and 19th centuries (Dunning & Sheard, 2005). Sport was an activity that
117 was seen to enhance Victorian ideals of masculinity. The development of masculine ideals
118 within public schools was linked, in part, to the widespread occurrence of bullying in early
119 forms of PE, often linked to greater power-chances for older and/or stronger boys (Dunning
120 & Sheard, 2005). The levels of physical violence that took place between pupils can appear
121 somewhat severe and, at times, brutal when examined from a more modern-day perspective.
122 However, these levels of violence were legitimized through the emerging prefect-fagging
123 system, which was implemented to maintain power imbalances, control and hierarchies both
124 between teachers and pupils and amongst the young males themselves (Dunning & Sheard,
125 2005). This experience was even considered by many teachers and parents at the time as an

126 important aspect of character development for instilling ‘manliness’ amongst male pupils
127 (Dunning & Sheard, 2005).

128 In the late nineteenth century, the emergence of public schools for middle-class and
129 upper-class girls involved physical activities that took place away from public view, behind
130 closed doors (Hargreaves, 1994). Whilst contributing to the tendency to omit female
131 participation from the history of early forms of modern sport, this provided an enabling
132 female-only space where more male-dominated sports and activities – including sports like
133 cricket – could be played (Velija, 2015). There was nonetheless still an expectation that
134 girls/women who were playing sport within public schools would adhere to strict behavioural
135 codes that emphasized notions of femininity, thus posing no direct challenge to the
136 dominance of male sport (McCrone 1998).

137 In the intervening period, there have been important changes in gender relations
138 during the course of the 20th century. In line with broader civilizing processes and ongoing
139 long-term power-struggles, the diminishing focus on manual labour work and women’s
140 growing access to social, political and educational spheres have contributed to gradual
141 processes of functional democratization (equalizing trends) between the sexes (Liston, 2018).
142 However, sport remains an area in which gendered power relations remain unequal;
143 something that also still remains evident in the design and delivery of PE in schools. In the
144 UK, young people are involved in physical activity through the formal PE curriculum as well
145 as extracurricular opportunities. Despite this, girls tend to be less physically active both in
146 and out of school settings (Green, 2010). The recent co-authored Youth Sport Trust and
147 Women in Sport survey (2017) reports that 71% of boys compared with 56% of girls enjoy
148 and are happy with the amount of physical activity in which they take part. This is despite the
149 introduction of the 1992 National Curriculum in England and Wales for all children in state
150 schools, which was intended to equalize the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils.

151 The national curriculum is compulsory for all pupils and was partially designed to be
152 inclusive, yet to some extent, the gendered nature of the NCPE contributes to negative
153 experiences for girls and does not inspire lifelong participation. A critical perspective from
154 the outset expressed concern about: (1) the emphasis on games; (2) the optional nature of
155 dance; and (3) the place of outdoor education (Penney, 2002). The continued dominance of
156 games over other forms of physical activity has implications for gender equity for two
157 reasons, namely, that the content of games in PE have been most persistently associated with
158 sex differentiated provision and that the delivery of these activities has been most closely
159 associated with gendered patterns (Penney, 2002). Today, PE continues to be a subject area in
160 which dominant gender ideologies are socially constructed by teachers delivering the
161 curriculum and by pupils, who often begin their experiences of PE with notions of gender and
162 sport that, in many instances, are already fairly established (Williams & Bedward, 2002).

163 Another important development in schooling during the course of the 20th century, to the
164 present day, has seen long-term changes and/or increasing concerns regarding instances of
165 bullying. Such developments are indicative of long-term and complex interweaving civilizing
166 processes, in which people's sensitivities to instances of violence (as well as other forms of
167 behaviour that were considered to transgress expected social norms) have become
168 increasingly heightened (Elias, 2000). With gradual trends towards more civilized forms of
169 behaviour – in which greater levels of self-control were increasingly expected and required
170 from people in many areas of social life – being labelled 'a bully' has, over time, increasingly
171 tended to elicit feelings of shame and embarrassment. This is not to suggest that bullying in
172 and of itself has decreased, but people's perceptions of (and attitudes towards) bullying has
173 changed over time. The gradual growing levels of repugnance towards physical aggression
174 offers one explanation for why there is now a greater variation in the types of bullying, which
175 now tends to be more verbal or indirect through forms of social exclusion and gossiping.

176 Along with the emergence of cyber-bullying, these forms of bullying are also more
177 pervasive, as they are harder to escape from, detect and regulate. Equally, a consequence of
178 long-term civilizing processes is that, within schools, young people are increasingly expected
179 to respect the feelings of others and exercise foresight into the consequences of their actions,
180 or at least refrain from verbal or physical conflict. However, young people are involved in
181 increasing complex networks of interdependencies which involve tension-balances and
182 power-relations which are always in flux. Part of their individual civilizing process
183 (becoming more rational) therefore involves learning to relate with others in a socially
184 acceptable manner and internalise a growing number of behavioural polices, such as school's
185 behaviour and anti-bullying policies.

186 **Gender-based 'bullying' and 'space' in secondary PE**

187 In the UK, young people often only experience PE classes for up to two hours per
188 week, although this can be expanded if they engage in school sport and extra-curricular
189 activities. Whilst minimal, this time has been considered pivotal in young people's
190 understanding, development and expression of gender (Connell, 2008). Most primary schools
191 in England include mixed-sex PE lessons, whilst PE in most secondary schools is single-sex
192 with a same-sex teacher. Noret et al.'s (2015) four-year study of 15,023 young people at
193 primary and secondary schools in England provided sex-variance data regarding the
194 occurrence of bullying in single-sex PE environments. They found that an equal proportion of
195 secondary school young males and young females reported being bullied because they are
196 good at sport, a finding that somewhat contradicts the more common assumption that being
197 good at sport offers males, in particular, kudos amongst their peers. However, they also found
198 that more young males reported being bullied because they are not good at sport, a finding
199 that aligns more with established notions relating to cultural ideas and stigma of gayness,
200 effeminacy and physical weakness.

201 Often synonymous with competitive sport, secondary school PE often values and
202 indeed celebrates traditional masculine ideals of strength, power, physicality and skill
203 (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). Therefore, with few other spaces in school normalizing,
204 accepting and, at times, rewarding masculinized cultures, some young males experience a
205 gendered pleasurable excitement in male PE (Gerdin, 2017). However, young males’
206 attempts and necessity to embody this value-system inevitably creates a hierarchy premised
207 on ‘those who can’ and ‘those who can’t’. The visual nature of the power discrepancies
208 derived from this process can present opportunities for some young males to ridicule and
209 bully others (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011). For some dominant young males, the
210 pleasurable excitement that they experience in PE is informed by their dominance over
211 certain ‘weaker’ peers.

212 Whilst the severity of physical aggression may have diminished in schools in line
213 with long-term civilizing trends, the highly visible external body in PE means that feelings of
214 embarrassment and humiliation in relation to young people’s physical ability/competence has
215 arguably increased. These feelings and power imbalances between young males are often
216 highlighted and maintained through gendered peer-commentary e.g. ‘you bunch of girls’,
217 ‘you throw like a girl’. One increasingly popular means by which pupils engage in more
218 indirect verbal forms of bullying is through the guise of ‘banter’. Banter has become
219 synonymous with ‘lads’ and is often associated with sport settings. Banter seems to have
220 risen in popularity as a term to explain and excuse language which is on the margins of
221 acceptance (Nichols, 2018). Viewing banter from a long-term developmental perspective, the
222 term, and its use, could be understood in response to certain males’ resistance to the
223 perceived restriction on certain masculine habitus and concerns with the increasing
224 feminization of society.

225 Changing rooms have often been identified as a particularly prominent space for
226 bullying in school PE (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Irrespective of the rise of co-educational
227 PE, during secondary school, young people get changed in single-sex changing rooms. This
228 single-sex space has been described as a ‘hidden’ gendered curriculum whereby some young
229 males face ‘ritual (and indeed, systematic) bullying and humiliation’ (Atkinson & Kehler,
230 2012, p.166). Young males’ narratives of changing room cultures recall tormenting, verbal
231 abuse, physical confrontation and outright violence (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Of note here
232 is that these bullying relations take place in a space often devoid of adult presence, largely
233 due to teachers’ perceptions of youth privacy and fears of being accused of breaching child
234 safeguarding procedures (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). Without a key authoritative figure,
235 certain young males have been able to exercise their power advantages over perceived
236 weaker peers in this confined space, at times making PE a ‘chilly’ and ‘toxic’ environment
237 for other male pupils (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012, p.166).

238 The issues that pupils experience within the changing room environment can be
239 explained in relation to broader long-term civilizing processes. Elias (2000) argued that, over
240 time, the naked body has gradually come to be associated with heightened levels of shame
241 and embarrassment, and thus, has become increasingly pushed behind the scenes of public
242 life. The process of changing from school uniform to PE kit therefore publicizes an otherwise
243 private experience. Young people’s mandatory exposure of their semi-naked bodies to peers,
244 for whom they may or may not have established relations based on friendship and respect,
245 comes at a pivotal time during their development of body consciousness and gender identity.
246 This process is further impacted by modern sensibilities concerning adults’ surveillance of
247 young peoples’ semi-naked bodies, meaning that despite their professional status, teachers
248 minimize their entry to changing rooms. One unintended outcome of such modern
249 sensibilities is the provision of opportunities for undetected bullying.

250 **Power-relations in PE and everyday interpretations of ‘bullying’**

251 Green (2003) has argued that there is a tendency to reify PE, that is, to conceptualize
252 it as an entity in and of itself. However, we must not forget that PE is inherently a social
253 construct, one that is co-constructed by teachers and young people (Green, 2003). One way to
254 avoid reifying PE is to consider PE as a figuration, ‘a structure of mutually oriented and
255 dependent people’ (Elias, 1978, p.261). Adopting this sensitizing research tool helps to place
256 human relations at the centre of any PE-related conceptualizations. In secondary PE in
257 England, mutuality is created through the mandatory nature of the subject, whereby young
258 people are usually categorized by gender and ability-sets. Therefore, young people’s
259 relationships with peers may include ‘new’ relations with peers who are not usually in their
260 other classes.

261 PE teachers are pivotal in the PE experience and young people often consider them as
262 role models for the promotion of caring peer-relations (Gano-Overway, 2013; Smith & St.
263 Pierre, 2009). However, media portrayals regularly depict PE teachers as drill
264 sergeants/bullies, whose harsh authoritarian pedagogies fail to create inclusive environments
265 (McCullick et al. 2003). There is some evidence that PE teachers can be complicit in
266 normalizing behaviours usually deemed as bullying in other facets of school, as well as
267 promoting and engaging in bullying relations between young people. For example, O’Connor
268 and Graber (2014) found that male and female PE teachers acculturated a bullying climate
269 by, amongst other things, promoting aggression and violence through implementing
270 inappropriate curricular selections. Some PE teachers even perpetuated peer-ridicule through
271 sarcastic comments or mocking demonstrations of poor skills (O’Connor & Graber, 2014).

272 At the centre of this teacher-pupil relationship was a discrepancy between banter and
273 verbal bullying, which illustrates, amongst other things, differing adult-child sensibilities to
274 commentary based on difference and levels of offense caused. The difference between adult

275 and child interpretations causes further tensions when PE teachers are tasked to adopt a
276 whole-school universal anti-bullying policy. Despite expressing desires to combat bullying,
277 previous research has shown that PE teachers held little knowledge of their school's anti-
278 bullying policies and adopted diverse strategies of dealing with bullying, which included
279 verbal put-downs and making light of the situation (O'Connor & Graber, 2014). The
280 normalization of jocular interactions in PE is further evidenced by young people reporting PE
281 teachers as present in 55% of peer-teasing incidents, but recalling that teachers ignored it,
282 brushed it off, or, on some occasions, laughed at crude peer-comments (Li & Rukavina,
283 2012). Other teacher interventions included telling victims to ignore comments or avoid
284 perpetrators (Li & Rukavina, 2012). Adding further weight to claims of a normalization of
285 verbal teasing/bullying in PE, researchers observed and young people reported that PE
286 teachers were more likely to intervene in incidents of physical bullying compared to verbal
287 bullying, resulting in many young people expressing how they felt that their teachers did not
288 care about bullying (Li & Rukavina, 2012).

289 A further concern with teacher-pupil relations was the perceived inequality within
290 these relations. PE teachers' use of banter involved certain young people within the class and
291 not others. Some young males bemoaned teacher-pupil bonding, which they perceived as
292 teacher favouritism (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012). These young males recounted how their male
293 PE teachers bonded with their perceived sporty peers through what they perceived as over-
294 praising and regularly joking with them, whilst 'non-sporty' males received negative
295 feedback and were mocked or neglected by male PE teachers (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012).
296 This level of favouritism was cited by some young males as a contributory factor for why
297 they or their peers failed to intervene and/or report instances of bullying as victims or
298 bystanders (Atkinson & Kehler, 2012).

299 The findings presented here illustrate a generational divide between teachers and
300 young people's interpretation of socially acceptable and inappropriate behaviours. PE
301 teachers have a significant power advantage in the PE figuration due to their status as adults
302 and professional teachers. Therefore, as described here, they play a significant role in the
303 normalization and everyday perceptions of bullying and banter in PE. Power-relations in PE
304 are not fixed or static, but should be considered as a series of shifting tension-balances. For
305 instance, the influence of PE over young people may differ depending on their level of
306 experience, teaching approach or the age of pupils in the PE class. Equally, whilst historically
307 PE teachers appeared to benefit from greater power chances through authoritarian teaching
308 pedagogies that created a clear power hierarchy between them and young people, accounts of
309 young people bullying teachers suggests that power-relations between the two can or are
310 shifting to a more negotiated position (Espinoza, 2015). This apparent shift in teacher-pupil
311 relations can be explained through broader shifts in power-relations between adults-children
312 that have taken place as consequences of long-term civilizing processes, a process that Elias
313 (1978) referred to as functional democratization.

314 As co-constructors of PE, young people and their relations need to be considered in
315 their own right. The literature on bullying in PE suggests that bullying almost always takes
316 place within a peer-group setting and is more likely to be verbal than physical. One example
317 of this is Symons et al. (2014) study of 536 young people, including 399 self-identified same-
318 sex attracted and gender diverse youth, who found that 20% of young people encountered
319 physical abuse in PE (shoved, pushed, etc.) compared to 32.3% who indicated that they were
320 verbally abused (name calling, threats, etc.) at least semi-regularly (sometimes, often or
321 frequently). Comparatively, Hurley and Mandigo (2010) found that 11.6% of young people
322 reported being physically bullied, whilst 13.6% experienced verbal bullying. The difference
323 in variance between these studies may be linked to differences in sample characteristics and

324 mixed-sex and single-sex class dynamic. Verbal and social bullying (exclusion and
325 gossiping) amongst young people was centred on perceived differences, primarily in
326 appearance and physical competency (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010). Specifically, young people
327 cited appearance-based differences as including body-size, personal attire, personal
328 characteristics (such as hairstyle) and perceived lack of attractiveness (Hurley & Mandigo,
329 2010). It was often young people lacking in physical competency, based on sporting skill and
330 athletic ability, that were bullied, but there were some instances reported whereby those
331 highly skilled were bullied (Hurley & Mandigo, 2010).

332 As demonstrated, due to de-routinized practices and more informalized relations and
333 behavioural norms, PE differs somewhat to other classroom-based subjects. These
334 behavioural norms inform those involved perceptions of banter and bullying within PE,
335 which can differ between and within the two social groups (teachers and pupils) and lead to
336 school anti-bullying policies not being implemented. The informality of PE/sport spaces
337 (whereby the use of banter may resist the more rigid forms of civilized restraint that are more
338 common in classrooms) means that young people are confronted with a need to be able to
339 'do', 'take' and 'not perceive' banter as verbal bullying. Therefore, the normalization of
340 physicality and verbal jousting in PE helps to explain relationally-informed subject-specific
341 interpretations of bullying in PE and discrepancies between those individuals involved. In
342 these more informalized settings, certain behaviours become normalized and exploitation of
343 socially constructed power differentials by some young people can go unpunished.

344 **Why adopt a figurational approach to bullying in school sport and PE?**

345 This position statement has argued that PE is an environment whereby everyday
346 interpretations of 'bullying' are less heightened than those in other facets of schooling. In this
347 sense, we agree with Rivers's (2010) call that school-based research needs to be more
348 subject-specific in order to gain a greater situational understanding of bullying. By focusing

349 on figurational dynamics within broader figurations, a figurational approach helps avoid
350 generalized conceptions of bullying in schools. It also helps emphasize the need to consider
351 the sub-cultural variances between and within different social groups, as well as key
352 contributory factors such as gender and sexuality and, although not discussed here, issues of
353 race, dis-ability and class. The following discussion expands on how a figurational
354 perspective can be used to understand the issue of bullying in PE.

355 A long-term processual approach helps provide a more detached account of bullying,
356 which is necessary to better rationalize and understand how such conceptions and emotional
357 attachment towards bullying came to be as well as contextualizing long-term changing
358 perceptions of what constitutes ‘bullying’ in different eras and appreciating that such issues
359 remain dynamic. Whilst definitional notions of repetition and intent will remain subjective,
360 focusing on flux asymmetrical power imbalances helps to understand how and why bullying
361 in PE may take place. It is from this position that we are able to better consider means of
362 addressing significant power differentials that underpin bullying, and not get tied to or
363 embroiled in definitional clarity or issues.

364 A long-term processual understanding of human-relations also helps identify the
365 ‘sociological inheritance’ (Elias, 2000) that young people have to embody as part of their
366 individual civilizing process. This process refers to a period of socialization in which issues
367 of self and external restraint are shifting, whereby young people are increasingly expected to
368 refrain from emotional outburst (physically and, increasingly, verbally). Increasing levels of
369 behavioural and emotional refinements reflect changing power relations in which societies
370 with relatively tight-knit networks of interdependencies and relatively strong mutual
371 identification and mutually expected self-restraint is required (van Stolk & Wouters, 1987).
372 These relations are no less constraining than previously. If anything, they require greater
373 levels of mutual identification and self-restraint from young people, a process which

374 demonstrates the complexity of modern relations and self-restraint. For instance, we have
375 referred to how young people are challenged to identify and understand what banter is and
376 what verbal bullying is, whilst simultaneously having to interpret when peers (and teachers)
377 are adopting banter rather than verbal bullying. These complex emotions and relations with
378 others demonstrate the demands on young people to learn to restrain their thoughts and
379 behaviours in ever more complex socialization process. Helping young people to understand
380 their relations with others, as well as power imbalances and their 'figurations', may enable
381 them to better understand their emotions, and their emotional responses to others.

382 Given these increasing complex processes of socialization there has been an extension
383 of the notion of youth, epitomized through the introduction of mandatory schooling until
384 eighteen in the UK, whereby young people have longer to develop emotional self-control.
385 Linked to this, in discussing the hinge, Elias emphasizes how the physical body and self-
386 regulation are interwoven with learned mechanisms that emerge at different points in time
387 (Atkinson, 2012). The hinge is introduced by Elias to challenge the nature-nurture dualism
388 and convey a relationship which heightens our awareness that the two are fundamentally
389 linked and could not exist in separation (Velija & Malcolm, 2018). *The Civilizing Process*
390 can be viewed as a case study of the hinge, 'illustrating how self-restraint is partially an
391 unlearned human drive, but forged in relation to changing, more interdependent, pacified,
392 centralized and functionally democratic environments' (Atkinson 2012, p.55). Considering
393 the relation between learned and unlearned behaviours may enable young people to
394 deconstruct gendered elements in PE and challenge these. This would require PE teachers to
395 be able to do this and thus challenge their views and occupational/gendered habitus in which
396 they consider gender to be biologically fixed and do not question these taken for granted
397 assumptions which continue to separate boys and girls in PE, drawing on established ideas
398 about the capabilities of male and female bodies.

399 A relational approach not only helps with historical to modern comparisons, as
400 mentioned above, but also helps us to consider how bullying is often: (a) manifested
401 differently within different educational settings; (b) relationally conceptualized along socially
402 constructed behaviours deemed ‘acceptable’; and (c) determined through adult eyes and
403 heavily influenced by adult norms. Linked to this, a relational approach also helps
404 encapsulate the increasing speed of change in more modern societies within acceptable adult
405 and child behaviours, alongside broader changes in adult-child and gender relations, over the
406 last few decades, which can offer a more detached understanding of what a short-term
407 perspective may consider as fixed, static and inappropriate teacher conduct and teacher-pupil
408 relations.

409 The positioning of bullying in schools as a social justice issue is, in itself, not
410 surprising and can be broadly understood as a reflection on changing adult and child
411 relations, the emotive response to children in distress, increasing constraints on parents and
412 parenting styles, teaching styles, and broader changes in education, which prioritize research
413 agendas that have impact. However, the two are not as mutually exclusive as they may seem,
414 as a researcher can contribute to knowledge and understanding and be concerned with social
415 issues (or social justice). However, the method for doing so may differ. As Dunning (1999,
416 p.9; original emphasis) has noted, a ‘concern with relatively detached understanding has to be
417 tempered by a motivating and familiarity-conferring *involvement*’ which, amongst other
418 things, assists in understanding the experiences and views people express about their
419 situations and life worlds. We echo the work of Smith et al. (2018) here to say that whilst our
420 concerns might indeed be primarily academic, namely to develop a relatively detached
421 understanding of bullying, this is needed to develop a relatively detached understanding for
422 the development of more effective short-term and long-term policy formation and enactment.
423 Future research should concentrate on the workings of power within PE and figurational

424 dynamics and dominant social processes that enable the development and maintenance of
425 significant power imbalances between young people in PE.

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