

## **‘I actually used to like PE, but not now’: Understanding care-experienced young people’s (dis)engagement with physical education**

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## **Abstract**

Young people's experiences of, and (dis)engagement with, physical education has received considerable attention in recent years. Yet one 'group', *care-experienced young people*, remain 'hidden' within the prevailing literature. In light of their apparent invisibility within research, this novel, exploratory study seeks to gain some understanding of the factors associated with (dis)engagement from/with physical education among this youth population. In contrast to the few studies that explore the broader physical culture experiences of care-experienced youth that prioritise the voices of adults, this paper combines data from two studies to give voice to the experiences of four care-experienced young men in England, alongside those of key adults, namely residential staff, foster carers and physical education teachers. Data were derived from participatory research methods with the young people and semi-structured interviews with the adults who work with/for them. Drawing upon Bourdieu, principally his notions of field, habitus and capital, the findings suggest that these care-experienced young people are at a pedagogic disadvantage, since they are not as well positioned to access opportunities for learning and participation or develop, maintain and extend those skills and dispositions that are recognised as valued capital in physical education. Moreover, the changing room, as a sub-field of the broader physical education space, where bodies are particularly on display, may present obstacles for care-experienced young people's engagement due to their prior experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse. This study therefore calls for further research exploring care-experienced young people's experiences of physical education, teachers' understandings of care-experienced youth, and how their pedagogic practice might shape (dis)engagement with physical education.

Key words: Looked-after children, Physical Education, Bourdieu, Ability, Changing rooms

## Introduction

The influences that shape young people's experiences and cause them to (dis)engage from/with physical education has received considerable attention in recent years (e.g. Jachyra, 2016; Lyngstad, Hagen & Aune, 2016). Yet one 'group', *care-experienced young people*, remain 'hidden' within the prevailing literature (Quarmby, 2014). Care-experienced young people include anyone who is currently, or has been at any stage of their life, in care. This includes, but is not limited to, those who have been removed from their biological families and placed in foster care, kinship care or local authority run residential care. The 1989 Children Act, suggests a child is cared for by a local authority in England if they are either provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours, are subject to a care order, or are subject to a placement order (Department for Education [DfE], 2017a). Subsequently, when a child turns 18, they are classed as *care leavers*; young adults eligible for help and assistance from the local authority (DfE, 2017b). Throughout this paper, the term 'care-experienced' will be used in order to foreground the transient nature and experience of being in care and the influence this has on young people's lives.

Children and young people are placed in care for a variety of reasons. In England, as of March 2017, 61% were in care due to abuse or neglect (DfE, 2017a) and unsurprisingly, those subjected to severe neglect, violence or abuse tend to find interacting with wider networks and communities outside the care system particularly difficult (Scott, 2011). Moreover, 15% were placed in care because of family dysfunction, while 8% were due to their family being in acute stress (DfE, 2017a). Finally, 7% were in care due to absent parenting, which includes increasing numbers of older, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (DfE, 2017a). In England, the number of children and young people cared for by a local authority has increased by 3% since 2016 to 72,670 (DfE, 2017a); the largest proportion (39%) of whom are aged 10-

15 years (DfE, 2017a). This increasing care population is reflective of other Westernised countries such as Australia, whereby the number of young people in care has increased by 17% from June 2012 to June 2016 (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017).

While being placed in care is considered a viable means of offering stability to children and young people, in reality, those in care often experience several placement moves (Shaw & Frost, 2013). For instance, although 68% of care-experienced youth had only had one placement during the previous year in England, 21% had 2 placements, while 10% had 3 or more (DfE, 2017a). This results in fewer stable relationships and problems with attachment and lack of resilience (Simkiss, 2013). Care-experienced young people also typically suffer poor physical and mental health, have difficulties with their social and emotional wellbeing and have poorer educational outcomes than their peers (Jones et al., 2011). While it is easy to criticize the care process, young people's experiences prior to entering care (e.g. of abuse/neglect) may account for the disparity between their educational outcomes and their peers not in care. In 2016, just 25% of care-experienced children reached the expected standard or above in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2, in comparison to 54% of their peers who had not experienced care (DfE, 2017b). At the same stage, 57% of care-experienced children had a special educational need, compared to just 17% of those not in care (DfE, 2017b). This educational attainment gap is also evident in later years whereby the percentage of care-experienced young people achieving 5+ GCSEs<sup>1</sup> at grade A\*-C (or equivalent including English and mathematics) in 2016 was 13.6% compared to 53% of their peers (DfE, 2017b).

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<sup>1</sup> The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification usually taken by students at the end of Key Stage 4, when they are 16 years of age.

Interestingly, there is some limited evidence to suggest that physical activity may help care-experienced young people overcome earlier disadvantages (Gilligan, 2000), but it has also been suggested that this group may not always have the same physical activity and sporting opportunities as their peers (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016). This makes engagement with school physical education – a subject that seeks to support lifelong engagement in physical activity – particularly important. As well as developing physical skills for lifelong participation, Bailey (2006) suggests that physical education also has the capacity to contribute to the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills, which may be especially beneficial for care-experienced youth. More broadly, physical education classes have been championed as the optimal space to increase physical activity (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005), enhance health and wellbeing (Cairney et al. 2012) and generally address a panacea of social ills. However, Sandford, Armour and Warmington (2006), among others, argue that despite the *potential* of physical education to address several social problems, for many pupils, the context can be an environment conducive to alienation rather than (re)engagement.

To date, only a few studies have considered the role of sport/physical activity in the lives of care-experienced youth (Quarmby, 2014; Quarmby & Pickering, 2016), with most providing a more generalised account of leisure provision (e.g. Säfvenbom & Samdahl, 2000). While there is some emergent work in this area within postgraduate study (see Woodhouse, 2018) no published studies have yet explored how care-experienced young people engage with, and experience, physical education specifically. In light of the paucity of this research, this study aims to provide insights into care-experienced young people's (dis)engagement with/from physical education and attempts to foreground some of the challenges they face. The study draws on the experiences of a small group of care-experienced young men, as well as the views of adults (including PE teachers) that are involved in their care/education. In the following

section, we first discuss the theoretical lens employed within the study before a description of the broader methodological framework is provided.

### *Theoretical lens*

A Bourdieuan lens has been employed previously to explore young people's engagement with physical education (e.g., Wright & Burrows, 2006) and physical cultures more broadly (e.g. lisahunter, Smith & emerald, 2015). Here, it can be applied to facilitate an understanding of how care-experienced young people's dispositions to engage with physical education are shaped within and across different fields. In particular, the interdependent concepts of habitus, field and capital are useful, since Bourdieu (1984) suggests that individuals' personal histories and current socio-cultural circumstances crucially influence their engagement in specific fields.

Individuals acquire a set of dispositions that can generate a wide repertoire of possible actions, enabling them to make choices and act in certain ways in given situations. These socially constructed dispositions, acquired through interactions across a range of social contexts, come to comprise an individual's *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus is a mediating construct, shaped by the living conditions characteristic of a particular social space or field, yet also generates practices and taste in relation to those fields. Habitus is also a concept that helps us appreciate the embodied nature of social practice. Bourdieu (1984) himself viewed habitus as a system of dispositions; an embodied history of social practice and the means by which the social is written into the corporeal. As such, the concept also holds relevance for analyses of individuals' practice within the field of physical education (e.g. lisahunter et al., 2015).

According to Bourdieu (1993), a *field* is a site in which certain beliefs and values are established and imposed on the people within it through the various relationships and practices

that occur. Thus, fields are sites of ideological reproduction. It is notable, however, that they are not independently ring-fenced; rather they are intersecting and overlapping – configured in different ways depending upon an individual’s unique social context. The boundaries of a field, then, are not fixed by physical properties or structures but rather the intrinsic logic of practice. Moreover, Wacquant (1992, p.17) argues that a field “is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition”, structured internally in terms of power relations. As such, all human actions take place within fields that are hierarchically organised, since the relative power that determines positions of dominance and subordination, and ultimately positions individuals and groups within fields, is determined by the distribution and accumulation of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu’s notion of field therefore offers a powerful heuristic for understanding different social spaces and the interactions that occur therein.

Individuals try to accumulate economic, cultural, physical, social or symbolic *capital* in order to maintain or improve their position within the hierarchy of the field (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of capital are, according to Bourdieu (1985, p.724) “like the aces in a game of cards” and represent the “stakes at stake”; imbued with ‘value’ and the capacity to confer power to the holder. Broadly, economic capital is concerned with wealth, while cultural capital relates to the product of education and is connected to objects such as books, qualifications or valued goods that might give an individual a higher status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). While Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised physical capital as an embodied form of cultural capital, Shilling (1991) argued that physical capital encompasses the social formation of the body in the form of shape, physique and appearance. This form of capital, as discussed later, has particular relevance for the field of physical education, in which the body is so central to practice (Sandford, in press). Social capital consists of a “network of lasting relations, a belongingness or connectedness with others in the field” (Hunter, 2004, p. 178), while symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1998) draws

from any of the aforementioned capitals and is used to describe what is recognized as legitimate and/or valuable in a field. Importantly, symbolic capital “does not exist and function except in relation to a field” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101) and therefore the accumulation of symbolic capital influences one’s location in a given field.

Importantly, it is a combination of an individual’s habitus and capital – moreover, the ‘exchange value’ of this capital (Shilling, 1991) – in relation to a given field that shapes their practice. In relation to this paper, the focus is on how such processes influence an individual’s (dis)engagement with/from physical education. More specifically, this study sought to understand how an individual’s cumulation of capital, or lack thereof, can function as a source of distinction to shape care-experienced young people’s engagement with the field of physical education.

## **Methodology**

A recent literature review noted the domination of adult voices in the few studies that explore the broader physical culture experiences of care-experienced youth (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016). Drawing together data from two UK-based research projects, this paper attempts, in part, to address this issue, since both projects shared the key objective of understanding care-experienced young people’s attitudes towards, and engagements with, physical education. The first project acknowledged the value of centralising youth voices in research with vulnerable groups (Sandford, Armour & Duncombe, 2010) and privileges the voices of care-experienced youth through a qualitative, participatory methodology that took place over a 6-month period. There were, however, inherent challenges in gaining access to participants; something widely noted within research undertaken with vulnerable or marginalised youth (e.g. Goredema-Braid, 2010). Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles (2007) have argued that adult gatekeepers, particularly



those working with/for vulnerable youth in social institutions (e.g. in residential children's homes), are often responsible for making decisions on behalf of the young people in their care, including whether or not to grant access to researchers. This was certainly experienced within the first study and, as such, there were time-consuming difficulties in gaining access to both the institution and, thereafter, the young people themselves. This complex process required multiple levels of negotiation with various adult gatekeepers within the local authority and reflected what Hood, Kelly and Mayall (1996, p.120) refer to as a 'hierarchy of gatekeeping'. Given the aforementioned difficulties, the second project focused on the perspectives of key adults who work with/for care-experienced young people. This second project also used a qualitative methodology, with the data from adults presented here to complement those generated from the youth respondents.

### *Participants*

This paper draws on the voices of four male, care-experienced young people who were living in a local authority run residential children's home at the time of the research, along with three members of staff who worked with them (project one). In addition, it also highlights the perspectives of a further two residential staff, five foster carers and five physical education teachers, whose voices add to and enhance those of the first study participants (project two). While these adults from the second project were from the same local authority area (Yorkshire, England) as the participants from project one, they did not necessarily know the young people involved. The young people were initially recruited through the care home manager and invited to participate via an information letter and informal meeting with the lead author who explained the nature of the study and provided opportunity for questions. Participants were then given time to decide whether they wished to take part, and of the five young men living in the residential home, four chose to participate. In total, the discussion here draws on the voices of

four youth respondents (all male, aged 12-17 years) and 15 adult respondents (male and female).

Both studies gained full ethical clearance from the lead author's institution before commencement of data collection and followed careful negotiation and correspondence with key local authority personnel. Following Morrow (2008), the youth participants were informed about ethical guidelines, which require participant's names to be disguised to protect anonymity and confidentiality, and asked to choose their own pseudonyms as a means of promoting their engagement with the research. Hence, the four youth voices presented within the following discussion belong to Matt (aged 17), Pete (aged 14), Adam (aged 13) and Nathan (aged 12). All had been in care since a young age and had experienced a variety of different care settings (e.g. foster care and other local authority run residential homes) within and outside of Yorkshire. They had each been living in the latest care home for approximately two years at the time of the study and all had a variety of special education needs including emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that care-experienced young people are not a homogenous group (Armour, Sandford & Duncombe, 2011) and that whilst they may share common care experiences, their special educational needs are not unique to, or defined by, this context and will be shared with many other young people living in different home/family circumstances.

### *Methods*

The process of engaging with the care-experienced youth in this study centred around the mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001), acknowledging young people and adults as co-constructors of meaning (Clark & Moss, 2001). Within this approach, we sought to engage with care-experienced young people through a variety of participatory research methods; a

diverse set of techniques concerned with actively involving research participants in the construction of data (Gallagher, 2008). These methods help participants share, in their own language, their experiences and understandings of their worlds and are viewed as a way of treating children as experts in their own lives (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012; Thomas & O’Kane 1998). Participatory research therefore aims to empower participants in the research process, in an attempt to counter the institutionalisation of young people’s lives, whereby adults frequently make decisions on their behalf (Heath et al. 2007). However, while participatory research methods attempt to ‘give voice’ to young people and offer an opportunity to disrupt traditional power relations, it is recognised that they may be unable to transcend adult-child hierarchies and therefore power imbalances between researcher and researched may still exist (Mannay, 2016).

Although care-experienced youth were not involved in designing the research, participatory techniques were particularly useful as they provided participants with greater control over the data generation process and how information about their lives and experiences was shared (Kendrick, Steckley & Lerpiniere, 2008). The participatory methods drawn on here included activity-based tasks such as timelines, mind maps and drawings; generated in a separate, open room without any of the adult staff present to ensure the young people’s voices were being heard.

In relation to the timelines, participants were asked to reflect on contexts and activities in which they engaged in physical education and to plot any ‘critical incidents’ that positively or negatively impacted their engagement (e.g. being chosen to demonstrate or being asked to leave a lesson) (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). These critical incidents were those the participants perceived as having important consequences for their relationship with physical education

(Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012). In contrast, mind maps allowed participants to organise their thoughts and writing in less linear, yet equally visual ways (Buzan, 2003). The young people were given a piece of A3 paper with the words 'physical education' in the centre and then encouraged to use a variety of words, colours and visual images to describe and illustrate its meaning to them. Finally, drawings were also employed to elicit their experiences and perceptions of physical education (Sharpe, Greaney, Royce & Fields, 2004). Drawings were considered a fun, quick and efficient way to elicit large amounts of information, since no training or practice was required by the participants (Sharpe et al. 2004). Moreover, MacPhail and Kinchin (2004) suggest that most young people are able to participate, regardless of an individual's level of writing or literacy. Drawings are not though, unproblematic, and can raise issues in relation to artistic ability and how well ideas can be visually represented. Rather than providing an insight into their experiences, a lack of confidence in drawing ability may mean some aspects of young people's lives are made invisible (Mannay, 2016).

However, each of these participatory methods subsequently generated research artefacts that formed pieces of the mosaic (Clark & Moss, 2001). These artefacts were generated in group settings and Mannay (2016) argues that artefacts do not exist in a vacuum but in relation to the person's experiences who created them, and through a dynamic relationship with the lead author and other young men present at the time. As such, there were times when some voices may have been marginalised by the more dominant young men living in the home, which raises questions about whose voice was being heard at those particular times. That said, the artefacts were drawn together and used to elicit conversation in semi-structured (individual) interviews with the young people. Here, questions could be asked about what was not included in the drawings (timelines and mind maps) in an attempt to reveal aspects of their experiences that

might otherwise have been hidden through concerns about their drawing ability (Mannay, 2016).

In order to further complement the data generated by the young people, additional interviews lasting between 30 minutes and an hour were subsequently conducted with a range of additional adults who worked with/for care-experienced young people. These interviews centred on adults' perceptions of the value of physical education for care-experienced youth and the challenges they may encounter in participation. For the purpose of these interviews, physical education was defined as planned learning in, about and through physical activity that takes place in timetabled, school curriculum time and is delivered to all students.

#### *Data analysis*

Verbatim transcripts from both the young people and adults were combined and analysed thematically. Each author independently read through the transcripts and began to assign codes. The authors then met to share and discuss their independent analysis and emerging patterns. Each described their justification for the codes and placement of the data, resulting in the data being categorised into first-order and second-order themes. There was a good alignment of views, with few areas of disagreement. These codes and resultant themes were assigned in both an inductive ('bottom up') and a deductive (theoretical or 'top down') way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For instance, the themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves without trying to fit them into a pre-existing coding frame. Despite this, it is important to note that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and so a deductive approach allowed for a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual tools, specifically around conceptions of different forms of capital. Though we sought negative or disconfirming cases

as a means of enhancing the validity of the study (Guest et al., 2012), none were identified, perhaps due to the relatively small sample size.

## **Findings and discussion**

The findings presented below illustrate how physical education can be viewed as a specific field that values particular forms of capital that care-experienced youth may find difficult to accumulate. Moreover, they highlight how some of the data generated also identify the changing room – as a sub-field of physical education and as a particular space – presents an obstacle to some care-experienced young people’s engagement.

### *Developing ability: the importance of prior experiences*

Physical education acts as a social space that has a clear hierarchical structure, with the physical education teacher(s) holding the most power and determining the rules of the field. In physical education, movement and performance are meaningful activities that are differentiated by levels of skill, competence and ability. Teachers compare pupils in physical education by ‘performances’ and their physical dimensions, including height, weight and strength (Hunter, 2004). Those who possess valued attributes and who are ‘good’ (or successful) at specific physical activities are considered to have higher levels of physical capital and are thus defined by teachers as having higher ‘ability’ and status (Evans & Penny, 2008; Hay & Macdonald, 2010). Young people’s positions in this specific field are therefore shaped by their stock of valued capital, particularly their physical abilities, many of which have been developed in out-of-school contexts (Evans & Davies, 2010). This means by the time that young people enter physical education, they are *already* differentiated in terms of their physical capital. Both the young people and adults in this research recognised the challenges of care-experienced young

people in this respect, noting the difficulty, in particular, of developing valued ‘abilities’ prior to entering physical education. For instance, as Pete said:

*I’m no good at PE. I was never given the chance to do much before I started living here, like sports or activities. No one did anything with me and then sometimes when I’m here I can’t always do what I want to do.*

This is equally reflected in the voices of residential staff and foster carers who reported the challenges of prioritising physical activities beyond or prior to entering school:

*If you look at young people in care, compared to their peers, they are often behind because nobody has given them the opportunity or time to foster their ability in particular activities (Residential children’s home staff 3)*

*The money that’s involved in funding different sports and activities... at home... before they come into care... in neglectful families’ eyes, there’s heroin and alcohol that comes on top of the shopping list. Sporting activities doesn’t [factor] (Foster Carer 4)*

In some instances, as identified above, because of what was valued in their family environment prior to entering care (e.g. heroin or alcohol, rather than physical activity) and the schemes of disposition, appreciation and perception at play, young people do not always have opportunity to convert different forms of capital into physical capital. In these cases, perhaps, the family habitus served to distance young people from the practices of the physical education field. Developing physical capital was also recognised as particularly problematic for those living in residential children’s homes, where the rotation of staff meant there was inconsistent support available to young people to help them to engage regularly in activities.

*Rota issues mean that with sickness, sporting activities and the support for them are the first to be cancelled so there’s inconsistent support... In fact, staff input is so*

*inconsistent. An example would be... a lift home from after-school training, not every other week [but only] when John or whoever is on duty (Residential children's home staff 5)*

Similarly, a physical education teacher emphasised the importance of developing physical capital, in the form of ability for particular activities, prior to coming into physical education:

*If they [care-experienced young people] haven't had the opportunity at home like they may not have had the opportunity to develop or discover a talent... they're genuinely less able but if they are, it's down to a lack of previous opportunities and learning experiences (PE Teacher 4)*

Hill (2015, p.762) shows how boys typically 'invest' in their bodies by doing particular types of physical activity that "enable them to develop muscularity, fitness and/or motor competence, to attain or retain physical and social capital in school". However, all of the young men here identified themselves as not being sporty, largely as a result of limited previous opportunities. They didn't participate in many physical activities outside of school and, as a result, didn't necessarily engage with physical education.

Evans and Davies (2010) show how some families invest significant amounts of time, money, energy and socio-emotional development in their children, thus supporting the development of their offspring's symbolically significant forms of capital. It is easy to appreciate – as the above comments illustrate – how care-experienced young people may be disadvantaged in physical education as a result of their prior impoverished out-of-school experiences. The lack of opportunities to participate in activities where they might develop those skills and dispositions recognised as valued 'abilities' (Evans & Davies, 2010), positions care-experienced youth as pedagogically disadvantaged by the time they come to physical education.



*Physical capital and the presentation of self: Having the 'correct' PE kit*

As noted earlier, physical education is a field where bodies are particularly visible and where individuals are often required to dress in a particular way: one that often emphasises the body on display (Sandford, in press). The physical education 'kit' is common in English schools and seen as part of high standards and 'looking the part'. It is also another sign of physical capital and a marker that individuals are aware of the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1984). For boy's in particular, another sign of students 'knowing the rules of the game' is to be able to demonstrate 'ability', particularly in 'masculine' invasion games such as rugby or soccer (e.g. Gerdin, 2016). Hill (2015) shows how this emphasis on physical ability in competitive games results in some boys worrying about being perceived as *incompetent* in physical education (Hill, 2015). This was particularly the case here for Pete who categorically stated he didn't like physical education because he *'was useless and [doesn't] have the right skills for certain sports'*. As such, Pete chose to avoid physical education by deliberately not bringing his kit, engaging in what Lamb (2014) identified as an 'opting out' strategy.

*Yeah, I forget my kit all the time. Well I don't forget it by accident you know... I just don't bother bringing it coz I don't wanna do PE (Pete).*

This was also recognised by a member of staff in Pete's care home:

*I mean Pete hates PE and he'll openly say that... it just they've [the school] had loads of problems with him forgetting his PE kit and being sick and all that sort of stuff but he just says he doesn't like it... (Residential children's home staff 2)*

It has been suggested that pupils employ opting out strategies or hiding techniques when they find it difficult to see themselves in a positive light in physical education; perceiving themselves outside of much of the social interaction within the class (Lyngstad et al., 2016). Research suggests that pupils are more likely to avoid opting out and engage if they have an interest in, or experience of, particular activities and if there is some degree of agency in their

selection (Sandford & Rich, 2006). Interestingly, Woodhouse's (2018) recent study emphasised the importance of activity relevance with regard to care-experienced youth's participation in physical education and school sport.

While Pete's perceived lack of skills and ability resulted in him withdrawing from physical education, the same was not evident for Matt. In his case, Matt was continually told off for not having the correct kit, despite his desire to participate.

*I actually used to like PE but not now... I think it's because I moved round a lot and I couldn't get my PE stuff, you know, my uniform and I was always being told off pretty much all the time in PE... so I didn't really like it that much... and although they [PE Teachers] knew I was constantly moving around they just hated it coz they thought it was like an excuse*

Having the correct physical education kit for Matt, and other young people in care is often problematic due to circumstances outside of their control, including placement moves. Hunter (2004) would suggest that Matt being disciplined and labelled as a bad student by the teacher for offering resistance, represents a form of symbolic violence that keeps students in their place. An account by a member of the care home staff also reflects the challenges associated with ensuring the right kit is available at the right time.

*A comparison I would make is my own children... I would have had a fair idea of when they were doing PE and so the night before you make sure that the PE kit is there in the bag you know you do whatever's necessary to actually... you're around that evening to say right well it needs to go in the wash now but if you're in residential, obviously, there's staff changing and with the best will in the world you're not there from Monday to Wednesday to see that whole process through (Residential children's home staff 1)*

It could be argued that having the correct kit may be influential in helping a pupil fit into the field; facilitating an appropriate presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) and ensuring they are seen to be ‘playing the game’. Certainly, some teachers recognised that not having the correct kit would highlight care-experienced pupils as visibly ‘different’, and a number outlined elements of school practice that were perceived to help address this issue, such as giving out ‘store kit’ or allowing young people to wear kit from a previous school:

*If they don't have the right kit like if a child starts a new school and their carers haven't had time to get the right PE kit it might put the pupil off joining in PE... it's like another way they stand out, as well as being the new pupil or the new kid as they would probably put it” (PE Teacher 4)*

*If people arrived from different school settings, they are allowed to wear their uniform from a previous setting (PE Teacher 3)*

*We provide them with PE kit... we keep it in school and we wash it for them and it's ready for them and it's one less thing to worry about... if they're kind of... not in a stable environment outside of school (PE Teacher 1)*

While the correct kit acts as a form of capital in the field of physical education, it is clear that it can also be used by care-experienced young people as an excuse to avoid engaging with the lessons, by teachers as an excuse to label young people as ‘bad’ students, and inadvertently, as another physical marker that contributes to these young people standing out as ‘different’ from the rest of the field.

*Last one standing: Lacking social capital in the physical education field*

Within physical education, individuals are privileged or marginalized based on their accumulation of symbolic capital, including as noted above, the ‘right’ clothing, or more importantly, the right kind of ‘ability’. However, an individual’s position within the field may also be influenced by the accumulation of social capital. Morrison and Nash (2012), for instance, have suggested that social status and peer support influence pupils’ views on physical education and, ultimately, serve to shape their participation. This was recognised by residential staff and foster carers as a particular challenge for the young people in their care, and was especially evident for one youth respondent, Nathan. For instance, after one of the drawing activities, Nathan discussed the following:

*Interviewer: So, can you tell me about this PE lesson?*

*Nathan: It’s indoor like Kwik cricket.*

*Interviewer: And who are the other people in your drawing?*

*Nathan: I don’t know. I don’t know anyone’s name. I just do my own thing coz I don’t get picked for the teams in PE... Like I just get picked last coz they think I’m no good at cricket.*

A recent study by Jachyra (2016, p.128) identified that so-called ‘non-dominant’ boys in physical education are often selected last or simply added on to teams by teachers, reflecting an “explicit pedagogical method of symbolic exclusion”. This works to maintain the status quo of the field by hierarchically arranging and excluding individuals based on who they know and their perceived stock of physical capital (i.e. their abilities or physical characteristics), which can ultimately lead to them disengaging with physical education.

A lack of confidence, combined with a lack of friendship groups, was also recognised by residential staff as challenges these young people encountered when engaging with this field.

*They don't engage in any after school sports and I think funnily enough they struggle with PE... but I think that's more to do with confidence, they don't have the friendships... they've got low self-esteem I think they struggle with school in general and I think that's more the case with PE (Residential children's home staff 2)*

Arguably, peers may hierarchically group by ability and pick their friendship groups based on who shares similar tastes, characteristics or interests. This perhaps explains how Nathan and Pete, who, through various practices may come to be recognised as 'different', and who themselves recognise their lack of physical capital due to limited previous experiences, may become marginalised in physical education lessons. For care-experienced young people who may well move school several times, like Matt for instance, building social capital is particularly challenging.

#### *Bodies on display: The changing room as a sub-field of physical education*

Arguably, the changing room could be viewed as a separate sub-field of physical education since the power dynamics and hierarchical structure of the field differs. Unlike the physical education lesson itself, the changing room is a relatively ungoverned and unregulated space that sits outside of the purview of teachers (Atkinson & Kehler, 2010; O'Donovan, Sandford & Kirk, 2015). O'Donovan et al. (2015) suggest that the changing room can be a particularly problematic space for some pupils. It is a space where bodies are centrally 'on display', opening up the possibilities for comment, teasing and/or bullying on the part of some students against any perceived to be 'different' (Bramham, 2003). This is certainly the case for some care-experienced young people who may have been subject to abuse or neglect prior to entering care; something alluded to by adult respondents within the second study:

*If they have had a traumatic experience involving sexual abuse it may make the changing room environment uncomfortable for them which could really have an effect*

*on their participation. I mean if the child is adamant they do not want to change in that sort of environment and the teacher doesn't have the knowledge it could cause problems... being in that situation could really affect that child's mind-set and could mean they disengage from the lesson and could cause problems outside of PE (Foster Carer 5)*

*If there's been any sexual abuse or exploitation or inappropriate... sexual concerns before the child's been brought in to care... changing rooms, getting changed for PE, taking their clothes off, in fact if there's been any physical abuse and the child has been used to making sure they don't show any parts of their body, even if they've no longer got any bruising, they can still be very self-conscious about their bodies and [they would be] extremely self-conscious about changing in front of other people... PE is the only subject where you actually need to take your clothes off and get changed (Foster Carer 4)*

In the changing rooms, young people expose their bodies to the gaze of others and within this space, the proximity to other bodies facilitates (even necessitates) a process of comparison, surveillance and self-regulation (O'Donovan et al., 2015) and may be particularly concerning for care-experienced young people with difficult histories. This was the case within Woodhouse's (2018) recent study, whereby one Head of PE noted the changing room as being a particular challenge for care-experienced youth.

While none of the young people here discussed the changing room specifically, one member of care home staff did reflect that this space may be difficult for some:

*The fact that they [care-experienced youth] are different and they're not necessarily accepted by other kids, they do find it hard. Pete, for example, every single week I think he does it twice a week he forgets his PE kit and he does it on purpose [because] he doesn't want to get changed in front of others and doesn't want to do PE... (Residential children's home staff 1)*

Importantly, some of the teachers involved in the second study were aware of the challenges presented by the changing room:

*Changing rooms... you wouldn't need to know the specifics of it but just to be aware of that particular barrier to that child's experience of sport because it might be something that you can get around in terms of if it's a changing issue then they could arrive changed (PE Teacher 3)*

However, there was also a clear concern among some teachers that they simply didn't always know who was care-experienced or, if they did, the knowledge often came too late to influence their practice:

*We don't receive information on pupils in care... we don't know who's in care (PE Teacher 2)*

*I'm aware of who is looked after [but] sometimes the information comes later which isn't always helpful (PE Teacher 3)*

If changing rooms operate largely beyond the gaze of teachers, with a different set of power dynamics, then dominant boys (in male changing rooms) may be able to police and normalise particular bodies, masculinities and forms of physical capital (Jachyra, 2016). Those not possessing these attributes may find this space particularly volatile and humiliating (Atkinson

& Kehler, 2010; Jachyra, 2016), impacting on their engagement with physical education. While these are issues that relate to all young people, it may be particularly heightened for care-experienced youth.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to begin to understand how care-experienced young people experience physical education and come to (dis)engage with/from it. Bourdieu's theoretical tools were helpful in understanding the dispositions of these young people toward physical education and for recognising the ways in which they may be positioned within the field. Importantly, physical education is a discursive space where particular forms of capital (including gendered forms) are valued (Hunter, 2004). This may be particularly problematic for care-experienced young people, whose opportunities to accumulate symbolic capital (in the form of physical abilities, the correct kit, a social network) are, through no fault of their own, restricted both before entering care and whilst in care. Reduced social capital, perhaps due to a recent placement move, is heightened in the field of physical education where friends interact and play with each other. Like many others, care-experienced youth are more likely to disengage and be 'turned off' from physical education if they have low self-efficacy and low perceived competence in physical activity (Cairney et al., 2012); factors that apply disproportionately to this group (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016). Ultimately, those who actively withdraw are missing out on experiencing the affective pleasures that physical education offers (Jachyra, 2016).

These findings have implications for teachers, who need to be aware of the social and psychological factors that shape engagement and influence learning and consider student's prior knowledge and experiences both in- and out-of-school. As well as being aware of the



social climate that they might create within the physical education lesson, teachers also need to acknowledge that care-experienced young people may have chosen to disengage even before they get to class. Teachers must therefore take account of the complex field that is physical education, including the practices associated with various sub-fields (e.g. changing rooms) and how this might be more or less inclusive for care-experienced youth. However, our research suggests that while there is much goodwill, there may be some physical education teachers who are simply not aware of who might be ‘in care’ in their lessons, nor necessarily appreciate the challenges that these young people may encounter.

As well as identifying how care-experienced youth may (dis)engage with/from physical education, this paper also raises some initial questions about youth voice and the ability of participatory research methods to fully address hierarchical power relations. While the novel approaches described here provided a means of ‘giving voice’ to youth, at times some voices may still have been marginalised by the dynamic power relations evident with other participants. Thus, in building on this initial study of care-experienced youth’s experiences of physical education, future research should consider the challenges of accessing this particular cohort and seek to draw on a larger sample (given the relatively small sample in this study), while also reflecting on whose voice is being heard and how changes in power relations might change youth voice (Mannay, 2016). There is also value in considering youth voice with regard to unstructured physical activity outside of school, though this was beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, since our study only recruited young men, it will also be important that future research explore young women’s experiences of physical education. Finally, future research should examine teachers’ understandings of care-experienced young people, and how their pedagogic practice might shape (dis)engagement from/with physical education.

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