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**“WE ARE THE SELFIE GENERATION!”: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC  
STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY BODILY CULTURE WITHIN A  
SCOTTISH SCHOOL AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION CONTEXT**

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## **Abstract**

Schools are rich and intense social environments where young people constantly interact with one another, negotiate social relationships and construct their identities. The school context also influences how young people experience and relate to their bodies. Physical education can be especially influential here – an environment where young people learn about the body and through the body within a highly visible setting. Research has investigated how bodily meanings and power relations are constructed within schools and physical education but these processes are ever evolving. For example, the ingraining of online social interaction within young people’s lives currently adds new dimensions to how young people learn, interact and perceive themselves and their bodies. This thesis presents findings from a year-long ethnographic study located within a Scottish secondary school. Participant observation and qualitative interviews were used to explain the contemporary bodily culture amongst young people and to investigate how engagements with online social spaces were shaping young people’s bodily perceptions and practices. Findings evidenced three overarching tenets of informal pupil culture. These were: the centrality and importance of the body within social life; the omnipresence of online social spaces and online social interaction; and the development of a celebrity-esque culture amongst the pupil population. Accordingly, pupils constructed and negotiated hyper-risky social environments where the body and the self were hyper-visible, hyper-scrutinised and hyper-controlled. Working within a critical realist framework, theoretical insights from Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu were utilised to suggest that the online environment represented a very important and attractive medium for identity construction where young people had opportunities, and felt pressure, to create idealised images of themselves. Online self-presentation also had offline implications for how pupils behaved, viewed themselves and for how they perceived and treated others. Physical education therefore became an especially risky social space as it was characterised by a lack of control over bodily identity, which juxtaposed sharply with the intense control over self-presentation afforded online. The online realm was also a highly influential context for learning about health and the body and a space where looking ‘healthy’ was very fashionable. Accordingly, this thesis suggests that socially safe and critical environments should be constructed in physical education. The thesis also concludes by arguing that physical education has unique potential to contribute positively to young people’s lives through practical, experiential learning. Physical education can foster and create a refreshing culture, contrasting and challenging superficial dimensions of contemporary bodily culture. It can become a space that diminishes the significance of outward experiences: a space where young people positively experience their bodies and the world around them; where they can reflect and marvel upon such experiences; and learn to respect their own and each other’s bodies in a very intrinsic and deep sense.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I, Sarah Louise MacIsaac, have composed this thesis. It is entirely my own work, other than the counsel of my supervisors and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 01/08/16\_\_\_\_\_

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## **List of abbreviations and glossary**

### *Education*

**CfE** – Curriculum for Excellence. The CfE is Scotland’s national curriculum for children and young people aged 3-18.

**PE** – Physical education. The term ‘physical education’ has been used in full throughout this thesis. However, in some cases the abbreviated term ‘PE’ has been used – for example when referring to direct pupil talk.

**S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6** – Scottish secondary schooling is conducted over a period of six years. Pupils commence secondary school following seven years of primary education. Year groups are organised as follows:

	Age at start of year	Age at end of year
S1 (first year)	11-12	12-13
S2 (second year)	12-13	13-14
S3 (third year)	13-14	14-15
S4 (fourth year)	14-15	15-16
S5 (fifth year)	15-16	16-17
S6 (sixth year)	16-17	17-18

\*S1-S4 are compulsory.

### *Online technologies*

**App** – Application. The term is often used to refer to software programs that function on smartphone or tablet devices. Apps can be directly accessed on a device home screen so users do not need to input website addresses (Webwise, 2014).

**Blog** – “A personal online journal that is frequently updated and intended for general public consumption. Blogs are defined by their format: a series of entries posted to a single page in reverse-chronological order” (Rouse, 2007).

**Facebook** – “A popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues” (Dean, 2014).

**Hashtags (#)** - Labels attached to content posted on online social spaces. These allow people to easily find content related to a specific theme. For example, a search for #skinny will quickly collate all images and text that other users have posted alongside this term.

**Instagram** – “A free online photo sharing and social network platform ... [that] allows members to upload, edit and share photos with other members” (McLaughlin, 2012).

**Selfie** – A self-portrait posted online.

**Snapchat** – “A mobile app that allows users to send and receive ‘self-destructing’ photos and videos” (McLaughlin, 2013a).

**Twitter** – “A free social networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets” (McMahon, 2015).

**WhatsApp** – “A cross-platform instant messaging application that allows smartphone users to exchange text, image, video and audio messages for free” (McLaughlin, 2013b).

**Web 2.0** – “The current state of online technology ... One of the most significant differences between Web 2.0 and the traditional World Wide Web (Web 1.0) is greater collaboration among Internet users, content providers and enterprises. Originally, data was posted on web sites, and users simply viewed or downloaded the content. Increasingly, users have more input into the nature and scope of Web content and in some cases exert real-time control over it” (Haughn, 2015).

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Whether we like it or not, nearly everything we do in our lives takes place in the company of others. Few of our activities are truly solitary and scarce are the times when we are really alone. Thus the study of how we are able to interact with one another, and what happens when we do, would seem to be one of the most fundamental concerns of anyone interested in human life (Jones et al., 2015, p.1).

### **1.1 The field of study**

Humans are social beings whose lives are lived alongside, and with, other people (Jones et al., 2015). Therefore, engagements in social interaction and negotiations of social relationships are key features of everyday life. Humans are also cultural beings who establish rituals and routines and who construct shared meanings, values and symbols as they interact and live together (Baumeister, 2005; Laker, 2002). The sociocultural context that an individual is immersed within greatly impacts what they do, say and think; how they do, say and think it; how they view themselves; and how they treat others. Even those aspects of life considered highly individualistic are often influenced by socially constructed ideas, meanings and patterns of social relations (Giddens, 2009; Goffman, 1959). All, including myself, experience the familiar nuances of everyday social and cultural life - to the extent that we can become blind to the wider social processes that we are shaped by and that we also create. This thesis is my attempt to make strange some of those familiarities and reveal that which is hidden as I endeavour to engage my sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). Of course, the reasons for attempting this go beyond producing an interesting piece of work. This study is located within the socially constructed sphere of education and has practical implications for teaching and learning, which are fundamentally social processes. Schools are rich social environments, often intensified places of constant interaction where social relations and identities are formed as people are grouped together and co-exist with one another daily. This study aims to make visible, and explain, some of the everyday sociocultural environments and processes that young people<sup>1</sup> negotiate. By doing this, we can hopefully learn how to facilitate positive learning environments for our pupils, particularly within the subject of physical education.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the term 'young people' is used when referring to those within the Scottish secondary schooling age range (ages 11-18).

As well as being social and cultural beings, humans are also embodied beings. This study focuses on young people's social relations and cultural meanings and practices but also explores the centrality of the body within these. Bodies are often "at the very heart of the sociological imagination" (Shilling, 2010a, p.262) and are integral to human experience (Kirk, 2002). We all live within a physical body through which we conduct our everyday lives and interact with others (Leder, 1990). Further, as well as being biological entities - mediums for sight, touch, taste, smell, speech, hearing and movement - our bodies are socially constructed, hierarchically positioned cultural signifiers, key to social life and important within a variety of social situations and institutions. The school is one such institution where bodies are socially salient. The school provides a sociocultural context where socially constructed norms, ideas, values, power relations and practices influence how people experience and relate to their bodies (Evans, Davies and Wright, 2004; Kirk, 1998). This sociocultural context affects how individuals learn which bodies and bodily practices are 'good' and 'bad' and influences how they judge and categorise themselves and others. Issues around the body assume further importance within the school subject of physical education. Although all learning is embodied, here young people are explicitly encouraged to analyse bodies and bodily movements and to learn kinaesthetically. In addition, physical education is a very sociable subject where pupils continually work together, for example participating in team games and activities or working in pairs and groups as they practice various movement skills. Research evidences that social relationships are especially important to young people within the physical education environment and that bodily appearances and competences often mediate these relations (Fisette, 2011; Hills, 2007; Hunter, 2004).

Over the last few decades, in what Shilling (2007, p.1) terms the "rise of the body," the body and body-related issues have explicitly become important areas for study and theorising within the social sciences. As Waskul and Vahini (2006, p.2) claim, this has resulted in an array of literature that could be categorised under the sociology of the body. For example, work has been done around gendered, racialized and classed bodies (Bordo, 2003; Bourdieu, 1984; Connell, 2000; Craig, 2012); ageing bodies (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991); commoditised bodies (Featherstone, 1991); at risk bodies (Burns et al., 2013; Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010); disciplined and controlled bodies (Foucault, 1977); symbolic bodies (Waskul and Vannini, 2006); stigmatised bodies (Farrell, 2011; Goffman, 1963); and sacred bodies (Mellor and Shilling, 2014), amongst many more. To add to this, sociological research has been increasing around the body within schools, and within physical education especially. For example, there have been investigations around the

meanings that young people associate with the body (Burrows, 2008; Halse et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2013; Rich and Evans, 2009); the body-related messages transmitted by teachers and health professionals (Garrett and Wrench, 2012; Welch and Wright, 2011); and considerations around how young people form their physical identities, interact socially and negotiate social power relations within physical education environments (Garrett, 2004; Hills, 2007; Hunter, 2004; Kirk and Tinning, 1994). However, the premise within this thesis is that these meanings and processes are ever evolving within the contemporary societies young people now live in. It is widely accepted that 21st century societies are continually and rapidly changing as advances in technology and new methods of communication impact on how people interact with one other and how they construct and access knowledge (Beck, 2009). The body-related meanings, actions and interactions that young people engage with can alter, however subtly or drastically, from day to day and year to year. Therefore, the bodily culture that young people are part of now can be very different to even a few years previously. To provide one example, the ingraining of online social interaction within young people's lives (Perloff, 2014) is currently adding new dimensions to how young people interact with each other; to how they view themselves and their bodies; and to how they learn and access knowledge. The impact of this has not yet been widely explored.

Further, although there is an international base of sociocultural research around the body and physical education, there is a pressing need for research within a Scottish context. Within Scotland, health promotion objectives are very prominent in educational policy – 'health and wellbeing' is a central curricular area to which physical education is highlighted as having a key contribution (Gray et al. 2015; Horrell et al., 2012; Scottish Executive, 2006). Health and wellbeing is intended as a holistic concept, encompassing social, emotional, mental and physical components (Scottish Government, 2009). However, some discourses around health and the body, which are dominant in Western societies such as Scotland, can influence young people's health and wellbeing negatively (Johnson et al., 2013; Rich and Evans, 2005). Research in this area would be of interest to all teachers working in Scotland as *all* have a responsibility to nurture and protect young people's wellbeing (Scottish Executive, 2006).

## **1.2 Research aims, their evolution, and means of investigation**

The research aims of this thesis were initially broad and exploratory. In the first instance, this thesis was an attempt to understand, interpret and explain the contemporary body-related

culture amongst young people within the social context of a Scottish secondary school. This involved analysing how these young people constructed, interpreted and negotiated shared bodily meanings, values and identities. It also involved explorations of how these young people behaved socially and negotiated social relationships in relation to their bodies. The thesis aimed to investigate how informally constructed bodily meanings and social relationships may influence young people's experiences of, and engagement with, the physical education environment.

An ethnographic approach was deemed the most suitable means of investigating the above research aims. Studying a people's culture ethnographically means considering their social relationships, their social practice and ways of acting (their actions, interactions, habits and rituals) and their ways of thinking and talking (their beliefs, values, meanings, discourses and norms) (Kahn, 2011). It also involves attempts to see and understand social and cultural life from their perspectives, learning their culture from the 'inside' and trying to talk about issues salient to them. This study therefore involved going into a research site with broad aims, like those above, and letting the focus of the research and research questions evolve and narrow as data was collected. Once in the research site, it became clear that online social networking and social media sites were very influential to how young people interacted with one another and to how they perceived and experienced the body. Due to the strength of this theme, the research questions of the study gradually focussed around young people's engagements with online social spaces.<sup>2</sup>

As previously suggested, much research focusses on body-related issues within schools and within physical education particularly. Some research is also beginning to examine how young people's engagements with online spaces effect their relationships with their own bodies and perceptions of other people's bodies (Fardouly et al., 2015; Mabe et al., 2014; Meier and Gray, 2014; Tiggeman and Slater, 2013). However very little, if any, research considers young people's engagements with online social spaces in relation to the school environment and no research considers how this may be impacting upon their experiences of the physical education environment. Further, only a small number of studies

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, the term 'online social space' will be used to encompass what are commonly referred to as social media and social networking sites. These include online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram where individuals interact online using their offline identities. Online social spaces can also encompass other avenues prominent on Web 2.0 that allow for user-generated content and interaction such as blogs, video-sharing sites, websites, online gaming and apps. For further information regarding the classification of online social spaces see Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). However, in some instances the more popular term 'social media' will be used, particularly when referring directly to pupil talk and conversation as this was a term that pupils themselves frequently used and identified with.



exploring the influence of online social spaces on young people's lives and bodies are based on qualitative insights that give voice to the young people concerned (Berne et al., 2014). Therefore, it was considered both significant and timely to examine more specifically:

- 1. How young people within a Scottish secondary school are engaging with online social spaces, particularly in relation to their bodies and bodily appearances.**
- 2. How these engagements with online social spaces are influencing young people's perceptions of the body and their body-related social actions within the school context.**
- 3. The impact online bodily culture might have on young people's experiences of, and engagements with, physical education.**

Such investigation adds to the work previously and currently being done by the 'community' of researchers within sociology and the sociology of physical education who apply "various forms of social theory and the methodologies of the social sciences to the study of the body in contemporary society" (Evans and Davies, 2006, p.110).

### **1.3 Personal reflections and my position within the research**

As ethnographic principles were drawn upon throughout this study, it is important at the outset for me, the researcher, to introduce myself to you, the reader. The researcher is a key figure within an ethnographic study as they are the subjective research instrument through which all information is sourced, obtained, interpreted and presented (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). For this study, I adopted the role of physical education 'teaching assistant'<sup>3</sup> and aimed to immerse myself within one school for a whole academic year. Inevitably then, I continually influenced the social context I was researching, including the participants I worked with, whilst also being influenced by such a context myself (Greenbank, 2003; Robson, 2011). Further, my own previous experiences, socialisation and ways of seeing the world influenced how I formulated, conducted and reflected upon my study (Berger, 2015). In the following account, I consider my own position and presence within the research process, making visible my past and present experiences and beliefs and examining my relationship to the topic being studied, to research participants and to the macro and micro social contexts within which the research is situated. Of course, reflexive accounts must be

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<sup>3</sup> I was able to adopt this role comfortably as I am a qualified physical education teacher and have experience of working within physical education departments and of working with young people.

purposeful rather than being self-indulgent and superficial ‘add-ons’ which are of limited assistance to neither researcher nor reader (Coffey, 1999; Finlay, 2002a). Reflection should principally be used to make research better and to inform the gathering and analysis of data. However, I am making this account ‘public’ to assist readers in more authentically interpreting my study, findings and conclusions. The following account is selective, detailing what I consider to have significantly shaped the ways I approached, designed and conducted my study. It is not, and cannot be, an all-encompassing story, nor is it a fixed narrative. People and their views and beliefs change over time. As Mauthner and Doucet (2003) suggest, reflexive accounts are always partial, regardless of how holistic or comprehensive an author intends them to be.

I was born and brought up in a rural island community where I developed a love for being outdoors and being physically active from a very young age. Many of my childhood memories involve horse riding, going on long cycle rides with my friends, running, dancing, swimming in the sea and exploring. Resultantly, I still particularly enjoy exercising in the ‘middle of nowhere’ and looking out to expansive landscapes with only the sounds of nature breaking the quietness characteristic of my early Hebridean life. Similarly, I have long found satisfaction in the feelings of accomplishment that I get from physically challenging my body, whether that be from having aching limbs after hours of building dens when I was younger or now the feeling of getting my breath back after running against a strong headwind to the top of a hill. In many ways, I have always associated physical activity with joy and contentment, an intrinsic pursuit and solace, which keeps me emotionally and mentally well. Nevertheless, I have also had a troubled relationship with my body and physical activity at times. As a teenager, I began to focus seriously on athletics and cross-country running. I found much pleasure in this for the reasons above, and still do. However, I was also naively competitive, training all weathers whether tired or ill, and always pushing and disciplining myself to run further and faster than before. Here, I gradually began to equate fitness with thinness – the thinner I was, the faster I would become. I began limiting my food intake, avoiding ‘bad’ food such as butter and crisps and would panic when made to eat such things or when training was missed. Day after day, I became more obsessed with finding excuses to be physically active as I ate a little less and constantly calculated whether I had exercised enough to ‘burn off’ any calories consumed. Although I initially viewed myself as healthy - I was (very) thin, I avoided fatty foods, I exercised - my thoughts and actions eventually took me to the point where I was not healthy and deep down I knew it. Family, friends and teachers were concerned about me; my mind had little space for anything but obsessions around body size and I was constantly cold and lacked energy and enjoyment

in social activities. Further, my running performances dipped as I trained and raced on 'empty'. I was physically, mentally and emotionally tired but this was not enough to immediately stop me putting strain on my body or damaging my health further. I also used the fact that I was eating 'well' and being active as justification for my actions and positively framed any feelings of hunger, tiredness or even overt health implications as evidence of my ability to discipline myself and work hard. Most sadly, running, the activity which brought me such intrinsic joy and satisfaction, was also becoming a chore. As Zanker and Gard (2008, p.56) suggest, physical activity can mean different things to one person at the same time, sometimes being "both soul mate and ever-vigilant taskmaster."

In my twenties, I am still a runner. I still competitively discipline my body. However, my view of health and my relationship with my body is gradually changing. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) advise researchers to acknowledge academic, as well as personal, biographies when being reflexive as these also influence how researchers relate to a phenomenon. As a physical education student, I became interested in literature deconstructing taken-for-granted 'truths' around health and the body. This was partly due to my previous personal experience but I was also inspired by university lecturers to view health more holistically. I found the process of critiquing and challenging my long-established views and practices enlightening and was interested in finding out why I was personally governed by certain socially constructed 'truths' and power relations around the body. I therefore began to conduct my own research in the area (Johnson et al., 2013) and was motivated, perhaps selfishly at that time, by a desire to use insights from other people's experiences to piece together and explain what causes may have been at work in my own life. My interest in this area developed further once I left university and began working full-time as a physical education teacher. Here, I informally observed how ideas around the 'ideal' body grouped pupils socially and influenced their engagement with each other and with physical education. A number of my pupils explicitly voiced their body anxieties to me, with already slim pupils asking for advice on how to lose weight. Consequently, I became passionate about helping young people for whom the potential joy of physical activity may have been becoming lost in amongst pressures to look a certain way or to be a certain size. I also wanted to do something for pupils who I had witnessed being socially excluded, teased and bullied for their appearance and for those whom the physical education environment was emotionally, mentally and physically painful. My mind-set was becoming less about me and my experiences and more about my pupils and theirs. As such, my research and professional practice has unashamedly been driven by an agenda to help such pupils and I make visible my commitment to removing and transforming oppressive structures within their lives and

the lives of others. However, I have experienced frustration as a young teacher, understanding the importance of helping such pupils and addressing such issues, but being unsure of what this help would look like in practice.

Considering the above, I am aware that I do have an emotional attachment and personal interest in the topic I am researching. I do not want this to blinker my research focus, skew my findings or prohibit my ability to approach my research open-mindedly. Particularly, I do not want my own experiences and beliefs to supersede those of my participants. Ethnographic researchers have traditionally been criticised for their ethnocentrism - entering a research site, putting their interpretations on participants' lives and cultures and presenting these as the participants' own (McLaren, 1992). I have tried not to impress my principles, beliefs and perspectives on participants' responses and actions or assume that they see things as I do. However, I cannot claim to 'know' my participants and their culture fully or assert that their voices as presented within my thesis are completely their own. The outcome of a qualitative research study will always be an amalgamation of both the researcher's and participants' stories, with fragments of each coming together within the researcher's analysis and interpretation (Finlay, 2002b). This uniting of researcher and participant experience can lead to thick description and enhanced understanding of a phenomenon (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, I have not completely subdued my personal experiences as I am aware that they can strengthen my insight as a researcher and can be used to relate to my participants' situations (Watt, 2007). However, as Pillow (2003) notes, researchers must negotiate this constant tension between using their own familiarity to construct a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and between protecting against constructing a biased account where participants' voices are silenced and their own is amplified. I have tried my best to make visible some of the influences that I consider to have shaped my research. I hope that this enables us to achieve an authentic and holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

#### **1.4 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is organised fairly traditionally around nine chapters, which build upon each other to construct an overview of young people's bodily culture. As such, these chapters may be best read linearly but this is not essential. The 'write-up' of this thesis was continual and began at the outset of the research process. The content of these chapters tell a story of my own thought and evidence the evolution of my study. However, much of the writing process

involved moving back and forth between various sections of work. Throughout this study, any work done was used to inform future work and decisions, which, in turn, were used to inform, refine and edit that which came previously.

**Chapter two** provides some points of departure for the study by examining and critiquing literature referring to the body in social life and the body within schools and physical education. This review of literature begins by exploring how bodies are symbolic within society – for example, symbolic of ‘ideal’ and ‘tainted’ selves, health, morality and success. The review also examines how people are perceived, valued and treated by others based upon bodily meanings. The chapter then focusses upon the body within school life. Previous literature is used to depict how bodily meanings and related social hierarchies are constructed within schools and to explore the resulting implications for pupils. The role that physical education plays within these processes is deciphered, and pupils’ experiences and engagements with the physical education environment are examined. The chapter ends by reviewing recent research around the body and the online realm. From this, a rationale is constructed for bridging the sociological work done within schools and physical education with research focussing specifically on how bodies and bodily meanings are represented and constructed within online social spaces.

**Chapter three** builds upon the review of literature by considering a number of theoretical concepts that can be used to explain how young people construct and negotiate bodily culture, social relationships and their bodily identities. Here, theoretical explanations constructed by Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are analysed and assessments are made of their capacity to support inquires within the social sciences in terms of health, the body and physical education. Goffman’s theorisations around the presentation of the self, identity and spoiled identities are used to highlight how people consciously act to present themselves favourably to others, manage impressions and avoid stigmatisation (Goffman, 1959; 1963). Foucault’s work around discourse, knowledge/power, technologies of power and technologies of the self illuminates the roles that relations of power play in shaping knowledge, the self and social actions (Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1997). Finally, Bourdieu’s work around social practice (utilising the concepts of habitus, capital and field) alerts us to the subconscious internalisation of wider social structures and individuals’ conscious efforts to accumulate capital and gain distinction within various social fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Some of these initial ideas are then developed within following chapters to assemble a theoretical framework for explaining the contemporary context.

**Chapter four** bridges the preceding theoretical chapter and the upcoming methodological chapter by outlining the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the study. This thesis is sociologically driven, assuming that social happenings, interactions, relationships, meanings and values all impact people's behaviours and perceptions. These social practices, meanings and values are constructed by and through people, their interactions and social relationships. Further, the research process has been informed by the philosophy that knowledge is relative, subjective and fallible but refers to a real world. This philosophical stance could be considered a variant of realism. Maxwell (2012) explains that there are various 'versions' of realism espoused within the social sciences such as 'critical' realism (Bhaskar, 1975; 1979) and 'subtle' realism (Hammersley, 1992). Like Maxwell (2012), I have broadly drawn upon the overarching tenets of such perspectives. I have mostly engaged with 'critical realist' literature (Danermark et al., 2002; Porter and Ryan, 1996; Sayer, 2000; Shipway, 2011) but do not claim to construct a 'pure' critical realist account.

Once key ontological and epistemological assumptions have been made visible, **chapter five** details how the research was conducted. This chapter explains how the research design of the study was intensive, flexible and evolutionary in nature. Key principles of ethnographic research are delineated and the practicalities of implementing such an approach are detailed. Processes of data analysis are explained and issues of trustworthiness are also discussed. The chapter also introduces the school context within which the research took place.

The results of this study begin to emerge within **chapter six**. Three over-arching aspects of pupil culture are outlined. These are: the centrality and importance of the body within social life; the omnipresence of online social spaces and online social interaction; and the development of a celebrity-esque culture amongst the pupil population. The chapter argues that these tenets of pupil culture facilitated and created a hyper-risky social environment where the body and the self were hyper-visible, hyper-scrutinised and hyper-controlled.

**Chapter seven** discusses, theorises and explains the implications of findings for young people themselves. This chapter suggests that online social environments were important and attractive sites for identity work amongst the young people. Further, it argues that these young people were becoming very skilled at watching one another and strategically presenting themselves through their engagements with online social spaces. Online social spaces provided them with more opportunity to present an 'ideal' self through

the construction of virtual idealised fronts (Goffman, 1959) and this could lead to the accrual of virtual physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Chapter seven also considers how contemporary aspects of bodily culture may influence young people's experiences of, and engagement with the physical education environment. Focussing on the overlaps between online and offline life, the chapter especially considers how a lack of control over identity work within physical education juxtaposes sharply with the intense control young people have online. Physical education becomes a site where young people can become 'discredited' as they negotiate discrepancies between their online and offline representations of themselves (Goffman, 1963). However, the physical education environment shares some similarities with online environments, for example both are 'risky' environments where the self and body were under much social surveillance.

**Chapter eight** responds by outlining future considerations and possibilities for the physical education profession in response to the issues discussed within this thesis. Three key suggestions are made - founded upon previous literature and the theorised findings of this study. These suggestions centre on the importance of creating socially safe environments within schools and physical education; the value in encouraging pupils to critically inquire around the body and bodily culture; and the benefits of approaches within physical education that enhance young people's embodied experiences.

**Chapter nine** concludes by summarising the study and its findings, acknowledging any limitations and suggesting how this research can be extended upon in the future.

## **Chapter Two: Review of literature**

### **2.1 Introduction**

An increasingly large international literature base analyses the physicality of the body within the sociocultural contexts of education and physical education (Azzarito, 2009; Burrows and McCormack, 2012; Cliff and Wright, 2010; Evans, Rich and Holroyd, 2004; Garrett and Wrench, 2012; Halse et al., 2007; Kirk, 2004; Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Rich and Evans, 2005; Tinning and Glasby, 2002). Resultantly, a wealth of literature contributed towards forming and addressing the research aims of this study. Before focussing specifically on issues relating to the body within schools or physical education, this chapter looks more broadly at the body and social life. Here there is exploration of how the body is symbolic within society, representative of both the ‘ideal’ and the ‘tainted’ self, and a metaphor for health. The implications of this for people’s social practices and for how they are valued and treated by others are also examined. Literature relating more specifically to the body, schooling and physical education is then attended to. This involves considering how social meanings and practices relating to the body are negotiated within schools and within the informal social networks pupils construct amongst each other, before investigating how this occurs within the more formal physical education environment. The chapter concludes by analysing literature relating to the body and online social spaces. Much of the available research within this area does not pertain to educational or physical education environments. Therefore, an argument is made suggesting a need for research that makes connections between physical education and this aspect of contemporary bodily culture.

### **2.2 The body and social life**

Shilling (2010b) argues that outward appearances are becoming increasingly important within Western societies where bodies are symbolic, imbued with meaning and often considered representative of the self. Bourdieu (1984, p.192-193) similarly theorises how the body is thought to offer insight into a person’s inner nature, becoming an indicator of “moral uprightness”. Therefore, people “glean clues” from a person’s “conduct and appearance” and “apply untested stereotypes” to them (Goffman, 1959, p.1). This means individuals frequently evaluate their own and others’ bodies and strive towards achieving what they perceive to be the ‘ideal’ appearance and therefore the ‘ideal’ representation of them as a person. The body also becomes a currency, affording or denying individuals certain



privileges, and influences how people are categorised, labelled and positioned socially (Bourdieu, 1984; Shilling, 2012).

### 2.2.1 The body symbolic of the 'ideal' self

Within contemporary Western societies, bodily 'perfection' is often perceived in relation to narrow, and predominantly gendered, ideas of beauty and virtue. For example, feminine body 'ideals' are linked to being slender and petite, lean and toned, yet also 'curvy', whereas masculine 'ideals' seek an absence of fat without the diminution of muscle size or strength (Azzarito, 2009; Bordo, 2003; Garrett, 2004; Kennedy and Markula, 2011; McCreary and Sasse, 2000; Pope et al., 2000). Bodies attaining such standards of perceived visual perfection are often considered to belong to 'good' people who are, for example, hardworking, happy and successful, with self-discipline considered a particularly respectable quality (Evans, Rich and Holroyd, 2004; Halse et al., 2007; Rich and Evans, 2009). In order to achieve bodily 'excellence', individuals must remain vigilant of their bodies and consciously labour to cultivate, maintain and manage the ideal appearance. This can be done through a variety of practices such as dieting, exercising, waxing, fake tanning, anti-ageing treatments, skin regimes, hair styling, cosmetic surgery and dentistry (Shilling, 2010b). Striving relentlessly for perceived perfection can therefore take up a lot of time, energy and thought space (Hardin, 2003). However, if people are aware of the "material or symbolic profit" that they may gain from investing "time, effort, sacrifice and care" in self-presentation, they may consider such sacrifice worthwhile (Bourdieu, 1984, p.202). For example, individuals may observe the social advantages afforded to physically 'attractive' people, with some research claiming that physical attractiveness can be linked to higher earnings and greater life chances (French, 2002; Gordon et al., 2013). Of course, physical attractiveness may also be detrimental in some situations. The 'when beauty is beastly' hypothesis, suggests that attractive people may not be taken seriously in certain roles (Johnson et al., 2010). Gordon et al. (2013) also found that young people perceived as attractive are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours and alcohol drinking. However, on the whole, physical attractiveness is often considered socially advantageous.

Perceptions of the 'ideal' female body have been researched particularly extensively, leading to a wealth of literature relating especially to the thin ideal that females admire, attempt to align themselves to and feel socially pressured to attain (Bordo, 2003; Brown and Slaughter, 2011; Harper and Tiggeman, 2008; Wolf, 1990). The most recent World Health

Organisation international report of health behaviour in school-aged children (Inchley et al., 2016) suggests that being female is the strongest predictor for feeling fat and for desiring and attempting to lose weight. Therefore, much research relating to female adolescents has focussed on their desires for thinness and weight loss, with some studies also detailing the prevalence of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa amongst young females (Halse et al., 2007; Rich et al., 2004; Smink et al., 2012). Some feminist scholars argue that this socially constructed thin ideal reinforces dominant male-female power relations and an ideology that females are the weaker sex who need to be protected and looked after by strong men (Bordo, 2003; Wolf, 1990). The female body is considered delicate, submissive, and even frail, whilst the muscular body shape, considered socially desirable and appropriate for males, symbolises dominance and strength (Bordo, 2003). In one sense, the thin body is socially framed as more appropriate for females, who are encouraged to take their 'rightful' place in the background by disappearing as they become smaller and smaller (Wolf, 1990). However, research also evidences that some females frame the thin ideal as 'empowering', considering it to signify success, willpower and strength of character (Halse et al., 2007; Rich, 2006).

The quest for female slenderness became highly fashionable during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the popularity of young, petite, 'style icon' models in the 1960s. These models signified a shift away from the full-figured, hourglass ideal, previously favoured for symbolising a women's child bearing ability (Grogan, 2008). Thin ideals became particularly dominant and increasingly waif-like within the 1990s (ibid). However, recent years have seen attempts to redefine feminine beauty in relation to a curvy ideal, with campaigns to ban very thin or 'size zero' models and efforts to use 'real women' within advertising and media (Dove, 2016; Samuel, 2015). Therefore, equating extreme slenderness with femininity is not always straightforward. For example, some consider the thin ideal to be less feminine than a more 'mature' and 'womanly' fuller figure with soft curves (Tischner, 2013). Often, an amalgamation of these contrasting 'ideals' is socially favoured – the difficult to attain, curvaceously thin female body (Harrison, 2003; Overstreet et al., 2010). Further, female body trends are currently evolving to encompass and favour the fit-looking body, that is a body which is very toned and lean, with muscular curves, yet not overly burly (Boepple and Thompson, 2016; Stover, 2014). Here, 'girl power' inspired messages frame 'strong' as the 'new skinny' and females are encouraged and inspired to visually evidence their empowerment (Azzarito, 2010). As Overstreet et al. (2010) remind us, although thinness is a dominant standard of beauty in Western societies, it is not the only standard to which women compare themselves.

The athletic feminine ideal has only recently gained popularity. However, a muscular, strong and fit-looking physique has long been considered desirable for males – a physique with broad shoulders, a muscular chest and arms, a narrow waist and defined abdominals (Johnson et al., 2013; McCreary and Sasse, 2000; Smolak et al., 2005; Stanford and McCabe, 2005). Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this male ideal has varied in how muscular and bulky it should be. For example, heavyweight bodybuilder physiques were particularly popular from the 70s through to the 90s, whereas a muscular yet lean look later became favoured (Pope et al., 2000). However, whether favouring muscle mass, definition, or both, muscularity and masculinity are often very strongly aligned. Research therefore reveals that young males may feel worried that they are too ‘skinny’ and under-developed, particularly when they perceive their peers to be more physically mature than themselves (Stanford and McCabe, 2005). Kehler (2010) also illustrates how young males desire to be in ‘good shape’, that is muscular and strong-looking, in order to be considered as ‘manly’ or as ‘real men’ who are physically able and can stand up for themselves. However, just as female body ideals are not static, it is important to acknowledge that other bodies are sometimes considered socially ‘acceptable’ and ‘desirable’ for males. For example, other looks are, and have been, stylish within popular culture, the fashion industry and amongst various subcultures. These include, trends towards a more androgynous slim-line male body adorned in clothing that emphasises a lithe silhouette (Rees-Roberts, 2013).

Regardless of what male body ideals are, there is consensus that pressures on males to care aesthetically for their bodies are intensifying. For example, the male body is becoming increasingly visible and scrutinised within contemporary societies (Grogan, 2008; Kehler, 2010; Pope et al., 2000). This visibility is becoming more like the visibility of the female body, which has long been considered an object to be gazed upon and been treated as a commodity within the media and advertising (Harper and Tiggeman, 2008; Rysst, 2010; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). Therefore, both males and females are increasingly being subjected to images of ‘perfect’ bodies that they are under pressure to attain. These bodies are often used to sell products where looks and materialism are associated with idealistic lifestyles and happiness (Featherstone, 1991). Research has suggested that adolescent males do worry about their bodies but they often do so less outwardly than females for whom it has been traditionally considered more socially acceptable to talk about body concerns (Hargreaves and Tiggeman, 2006). However, some research suggests it is becoming more commonplace and expected for males to be openly concerned with how they look and to take care over their outward appearances (Ricciardelli, 2011).

The preceding literature evidences that socially constructed body ideals are not completely static. What is considered the 'ideal' body differs, sometimes significantly, across time, place and culture (Volkwein-Caplan, 2014). Although Western ideals are becoming increasingly dominant and are infiltrating more and more cultures partly due to the globalised influence of mass media (Isa and Kramer, 2003; Yan and Bissell, 2014), Fedorak (2008) explains that each culture constructs their own perceptions of beauty and attractiveness. She uses the traditional Chinese practice of foot binding<sup>4</sup> to exemplify this. However, the main issue is not so much what the ideal is, whether that be thin, curvy, strong, toned, pierced or painted, but more what these ideals represent, the associated judgements on people who are close or far from them and the pressures on people to regulate their bodies accordingly (Hardin, 2003).

The social pressures to attain and maintain an 'ideal' body can be very strong. Although the 'desirable' body is often assumed to be something that can either be straightforwardly purchased or gained through personal effort and sacrifice, it is unachievable for many people. This can especially be the case when it has departed from the 'real' through, for example, surgical or digital enhancement (Shilling, 2010b). Nevertheless, research exemplifies the persuasive influence of discourses emphasising an individual responsibility to look after the body. For example, individuals whose bodies depart from societal ideals verbalise feelings of personal guilt and anxiety stemming from body preoccupations (Wright et al., 2006). Additionally, those whose bodies are close to the 'ideal' are not immune from these feelings as they must deal with the constant threat and concern of perfection slipping away (Wright et al., 2006; Wyn, 2009). Further, Azzarito (2010) highlights how individuals can feel especially troubled when there is discord between their hopes of becoming, and being seen as, a certain type of person due to their bodily image and the reality that they do not have the opportunity, choices or resources to do so.

### **2.2.2 The body symbolic of the 'tainted' self**

Just as some bodies are considered socially 'ideal', there are others considered not to be ideal. The boundaries between bodies considered 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' are often quite clearly defined (Jeanes, 2011). For example, within contemporary Western cultures the 'overweight', 'obese' or 'fat' body runs counter to the 'ideal' body and societal members

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<sup>4</sup> Within the practice of foot binding, toes are gradually manipulated to become bent under the soles of the feet so that the foot develops a pointed shape.

often consider it representative of an individual “letting oneself go” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.193; Evans, Rich, Davies and Allwood, 2008). As such, those classed overweight or fat can be stigmatised and ostracised by societal members due to their external appearance but also due to their perceived deviant personal traits (Farrell, 2011; Goffman, 1963). Of course, it should also be noted that the ‘fat’ body has not always been attributed negative connotations, nor has it been perceived negatively within all cultures. Within some cultures this body is, and has been, associated with wealth and prosperity (Farrell, 2011). However, this contrasts with many current attitudes towards fat bodies within Western societies. For example, there is evidence of ‘overweight’ individuals being framed negatively within Western cultures, as lazy ‘couch potatoes’ who evoke disgust in others (Burrows and Wright, 2004; Gard, 2010). Further, fat bodies are frequently mocked and poked fun at here where prejudice against overweight individuals is frequently articulated freely (Harwood, 2012; Sykes and McPhail, 2008; Weinstock and Krehbiel, 2009; Windram-Geddes, 2013). Being or becoming fat, for many then is therefore something to be avoided and feared and, as Bell and McNaughton (2007) argue, this is very much the case for males as well as females. Exemplifying this, Windram-Geddes (2013, p.47) talked to primary school pupils in Scotland (aged 11 and 12) who referred to the idea of being, or becoming fat as “scary” and a “nightmare”.

It is not only fat bodies that are considered ‘tainted’ within contemporary Western societies. The personalities and states of minds of those ‘too thin’ are also judged and stigmatised. Negative stereotypes are particularly directed to those perceived to have any form of eating disorder (Crisafulli et al., 2008; Rich, 2006; Whitehead and Kurz, 2008). For example, those visibly suffering from anorexia nervosa are frequently labelled too disciplined - obsessive perfectionists who are both needy and seeking attention. For many their eating disorder becomes their identity (Rich, 2006). However, people with eating disorders resulting in weight loss also detail how their illness sometimes encompasses positive as well as negative social responses (Williams and Reid, 2010). Evidencing this further, Whitehead and Kurz (2008) analyse how anorexia and obesity are discursively constructed within media texts. Here, anorexia is framed more desirably and virtuously through associations with self-control, denial, achievement and strength of character. However, obesity is more often perceived self-indulgent, sinful, uncontrolled and gluttonous. They also claim that bulimia sufferers are perceived similarly to obese individuals due to a perceived lack of control around food, making bulimia even more ‘taboo’ than anorexia.

As alluded to above, it can be socially important to have an ‘ideal’ body but perhaps even more important not to have a body classed as ‘extreme’ or ‘abnormal’. Having a body

classed as normal can be important to young people (Johnson et al., 2013). However, for some this is perhaps less a case of wanting to be ‘normal’ and more a case of not wanting to be ‘abnormal’ in a negative sense. Individuals may actually want to stand out and be noticed due to their (ideal) bodies, to be admired and set apart from others (Halse et al., 2007). In this sense, abnormal is desirable if it relates to being extraordinary. However, bodies which are ‘too ideal’ can become negatively abnormal, as evidenced through the literature referring to those overly embodying the thin ideal. This can also be the case with muscular body ideals. For example, although many males express a desire to increase muscle bulk, there comes a point where bodies can be viewed as too muscular and be classed as ‘weird’ or ‘freakish’ and considered representative of those who are vain and body-obsessed (Campbell et al., 2016). Similarly, although athletic ideals are becoming more popular amongst females, there has long been the perception that females should not be overly muscular, making the boundary line of ‘too muscular’ lower for females (Bunsell, 2013). Even within sporting settings, females can become concerned that their bodies are too muscular and masculine, despite such bodies helping them to stand out competitively (Howells and Grogan, 2012). Again, these judgements are very strong as they are coupled with perceptions of character and of how well a person aligns to social norms and ideals. Bodily appearances can therefore become symbolic of an array of socially constructed ideas relating to, for example, gender, social class, race and ability.

When an individual is viewed as ‘abnormal’ or ‘tainted’ due to their body, they can feel ashamed and socially withdraw. For example, Papathomas and Lavallee (2010) demonstrate the feelings of isolation that anorexia sufferers face as they withdraw from social contexts and try to face their situations alone. Such individuals may find it difficult to ask for help (Rich and Evans, 2005). For example, participants in Papathomas and Lavellee’s (2010) study considered themselves a burden to others and resultantly felt they could not socially ‘offload’ their emotions. This made them feel confused and uncertain as they struggled to find a reference frame to comprehend how other people felt about food, exercise and the body. Like participants in Rich’s (2006) research, they also detailed attempts to conceal their bodies and their anorexic practices. In similar ways, those who perceive themselves as being too fat, may endeavour to hide or disguise their body and avoid situations such as partaking in physical activity where the body may be more visible (Fisette, 2011).

### 2.2.3 The body symbolic of the (un)healthy self.

Fascinations with body size and shape may partially stem from perceptions that certain bodies are particularly at risk from injury, illness or death. Within contemporary societies, advances in technology and weaponry, an unstable economy and changes in culture, religion and living arrangements all contribute towards rapidly changing, unpredictable environments (Beck, 1992; Evans and Davies, 2004). Here, scientific developments continually highlight new threats to health and the body (Giddens, 1999). This can lead to great anxiety and unease amongst societal members, particularly since many threats from nature, and even from the social world, are considered unavoidable. Avoiding bodily death is impossible. However, prospects of extending and preserving life can help to defer morbid thoughts (Shilling, 2012). Such hopes for longevity are often placed in medicine and modern science and those perceived as knowledgeable become crucial foci of trust so that the ‘truths’ they transmit are heavily relied upon, often becoming common knowledge (Gard, 2004a; Gard and Wright, 2001). Governments, the media and health experts frequently identify risks within such a context for which they advocate solutions and interventions (Giddens, 1999). These threats can include, for example, obesity, cancers and non-communicable diseases, sun exposure, terrorism and natural disasters (Lucas et al., 2006; WHO, 2003; 2007; 2009).

Concerns around obesity, and societal members’ failures to control their bodies have been especially dominant within popular and academic debate. Within the academic literature, a wealth of research claims that the general public are amassing excess adipose tissue and that average body mass, particularly in children, is increasing across the globe (Lobstein et al., 2004; Wang and Lobstein, 2006). The influential World Health Organisation drew upon such research in 2003 to claim that “almost all countries (high income and low income alike) are experiencing an obesity epidemic” (WHO, 2003, p.61). Such claims are often relayed and exaggerated within popular discourse where newspaper headlines referring to an ‘obesity time bomb’ (Borland, 2014) and the ‘war on obesity’ (Shaw, 2012) often convince the public that there is an obesity ‘crisis’ (Evans, Rich and Davies, 2004). These headlines are accompanied by ‘shocking’ television programmes such as the ‘Half Ton Man’ (*Bodyshock*, 2006) and magazine articles and lifestyle shows transmitting diet and exercise advice to the general population so they can ensure they do not encounter a similar fate. Again, such body-related risk discourse often works to demean and ‘other’ certain people, making spectacles of them and classifying them as lesser individuals.

There are, however, now a number of researchers disputing the evidence that founds obesity discourses (Campos et al., 2006; Gard, 2011; Kirk, 2006; Ross, 2005) and forming what could be considered a counter obesity discourse (Pringle and Pringle, 2012). Rises in obesity are often considered to be caused by people consuming readily available and energy dense convenience food coupled with increases in sedentary living due to less manual labour and more leisure pursuits revolving around 'screen time' (Prentice and Jebb, 1995). However, studies reliant on energy in/out correlations have been highlighted as over simplistic and flawed because they do not account for confounding variables such as genetics, underlying health conditions or socio-economic barriers to health (Winkler, 2005). Some researchers also claim that weight categories are weak predictors of mortality, unless extreme, and assert that 'over' weight is actually protective and ideal for longevity, particularly in older populations (Campos et al., 2006; Flegal et al., 2007). Others challenge the common perception that children are now less active than previously and dispute suggestions that increases in childhood physical activity will link linearly to increased activity in adulthood (Gard and Wright, 2005). For example, Gard and Wright (2005) claim there is a lack of longitudinal research around children's physical activity behaviours, little recognition of confounding variables in research studies and an over-reliance on self-reported behaviours. Researchers have also explored how individuals, groups and organisations can be economically invested in maintaining an 'obesity illusion', claiming for example that pharmaceutical companies fund a number of research studies contributing to obesity discourses (Campos et al., 2006). Finally, those forming counter obesity discourses are additionally concerned with how knowledge is recontextualised from primary to secondary fields of production. For example, Gard and Wright (2001) explain how knowledge produced by biomedical research is often presented as established fact within the media and health education without any acknowledgement of its associated ambiguities or intricacies, making it difficult to contest. Of course, whether the aforementioned risks and their extents are real, imagined or disputed, they are often deemed very 'real' in the minds of individuals and influence people's decisions about what they do with their bodies and the ways they live their lives (Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010; Ekberg, 2007). For example, recent international research evidences that the percentage of 'overweight' young people is not increasing but the numbers of young people who think they are overweight and who engage in weight reduction behaviours are rising (Inchley et al., 2016).

In addition to the above arguments, a key criticism of obesity discourse is that health is too simplistically equated with the size, shape and appearance of the body. As such, the furore around risky bodies and any associations between the body and intrinsic worth are



very much strengthened by a culture of healthism. Here health is considered to be achieved “unproblematically through individual effort and discipline, directed mainly at regulating the size and shape of the body” (Kirk and Colquhoun, 1989, p.149). This means the body is positioned as a central indicator of health, adopting a metaphorical function, and health is reduced to being solely a physical construct (Crawford, 1980). Often, the socially constructed ‘ideal’ body is considered to represent the ‘healthy’ body and bodies not meeting this image are considered visible representations of poor health, especially those at either extreme of fat or thin. Research has evidenced both adults and young people internalising the tenets of a healthism discourse by narrowly considering health as an individual responsibility to maintain an appropriate body image/size and to balance energy in and out by eating the ‘good’ food and doing the ‘right’ amount and type of activity (Johnson et al., 2013; Wright et al., 2006). Therefore, when asked to describe health, participants in these studies referred to the size and shape of the body before going on to talk about what (not) to eat and what exercise and physical activity to do in order to maintain a slim and toned physique.

Within a culture of healthism, individuals are regarded almost entirely responsible for their own health and wellbeing and the choices they make. This implies, for example, that overweight people lack the will-power or self-determination to attain a healthy body and that underweight people are also recklessly endangering their health. Here, both very thin and very fat people are considered irresponsible and unreasonable individuals who have failed in their responsibility to balance energy in and out. The propensity for individuals to be regarded responsible for their own health refers not only to the idea that they should choose to be healthy for their own good but that they should also do so for the good of society as whole. The message here is that people ‘should’ be healthy in order to work and contribute towards a strong economy as opposed to becoming a drain on societal resources such as welfare and health care (Horrell et al., 2012). This leads to the formulation of a very strong moral imperative that states it is not only unhealthy but also wrong to deviate far from the ‘ideal’ physique (Lee and Macdonald, 2010; Rich and Evans, 2005). These ideas have possibly been bolstered by the discourses of individualism and personal responsibility that have dominated wider societal and political discourses. For example, the idea that individuals should be considered responsible and personally accountable for their own actions, choices and self-regulation has been strongly championed within the U.K. under successive Conservative and New Labour governments (Bashevkin, 1998; Murray and Holmes, 2009; Watts and Bessant, 2008).

As Rich (2006) notes, both obesity and anorexia are conceived within an accusatory culture where eating disorders are thought to be controlled by the individual who is blamed for their illness and actions. People can therefore find it difficult to fathom why anyone would defiantly ‘choose’ to have an eating disorder (Rich and Evans, 2005), whether that be one where they over or under eat. Since a ‘blame the individual’ culture often surrounds conditions commonly considered ‘self-inflicted’ such as anorexia, depression, obesity and addiction (Crisafulli et al., 2008), people can become unsympathetic and even angry towards sufferers and consider discrimination towards them to be justified. However, anorexia sufferers explain how they often feel out of control rather than in control, consumed by an illness of complex nature that, frustratingly, others cannot understand is not a ‘choice’ (Williams and Reid, 2010). Paradoxically, an individual being out of control - whether that be in relation to how disciplined or undisciplined they are - is still considered a failure on their part as, unlike others, they are perceived to have an inability to remain ‘normal’ (Paechter, 2011). However, although discourses of individual responsibility are very strong, Scottish school pupils in Johnson et al.’s (2013) research all avoided attributing individual blame to people and acknowledged the barriers to health faced by many of their peers and other societal members. Individuals often sympathise with ‘unhealthy-looking’ individuals if they consider them to have an ‘excuse’, for example a medical condition, but can be very unsympathetic to those whose perceived ill-health is considered avoidable (Bromfield, 2009).

Within discourses of individual responsibility there is little acknowledgement that people do not all have access to the social, economic and cultural capital required to attain the ideal and healthy physique (Bourdieu, 1984). Opportunities for health differ according to biological, social and cultural circumstances such as age, genetics, geographical location, economic status and family responsibilities (Katzmarzyk et al., 2008; Lee and Macdonald, 2010; McGannon and Mauws, 2002). Nor are other structural barriers critiqued. For example, young people are taught that they should exercise and avoid being sedentary in order to maintain a healthy weight but are then instructed to sit down at desks for most of the day, detained within what could be described as an obesogenic environment (Bromfield, 2009; McDermott, 2012). Further, what is considered ‘ideal’ and ‘healthy’ is subject to definitional constraints. Therefore, an individual may feel as if they are healthy and consider themselves to act in a healthy way but others around them, whether lay-people, ‘experts’, or policy-makers, may not consider or define them as being so. Instead, Campos et al. (2006) highlight how discourses of individual responsibility often attribute moral blame to disadvantaged and minority groups. This is exemplified in comments where people, such as

members of parliament, claim to be able to tell people's background by evaluating their weight and blame 'poor' people's weight problems on family practices and values (Ross, 2013). Within such discourse, certain groups of people are portrayed as being particularly 'at risk' and as 'problems' including girls, those of low social economic status and those from ethnic minorities (Azzarito and Solomon, 2005). Here, parents and families are also not immune to surveillance and blame (Rich, 2012). It could be argued that such stigmatisation may lead 'unhealthy' people to change their behaviours and become healthier, thereby negating the negative impacts of stigmatisation. For example, some justify the stigmatisation of cigarette smokers within anti-smoking campaigns, claiming it leads less people to become unwell due to the dangerous effects of smoking (Stuber et al., 2008). However, in principle it is the *acts* of smoking, drug taking and excessive alcohol consumption that are stigmatised in many health campaigns. When the same logic is applied to the 'obesity problem', stigma around the size of the body more overtly targets the embodied *person* (Bogart, 2013).

It is important, however, to acknowledge that the tenets of eating and exercising to maintain health, or a visual representation of health, are not always straightforwardly internalised by all individuals. Young research participants have, for example, spoken of their enjoyment of 'bad' foods and of how physical activity can be used to cancel this out – exercising in order to then eat foods they are aware are 'unhealthy' (Windram-Geddes, 2013). These participants framed their own practices as unhealthy and were more apprehensive about staying thin and *looking* healthy than they were about *being* healthy. As Scott-Dixon (2008) notes, there is much less stigma associated with acting in an 'unhealthy' way, eating 'bad' food, avoiding exercise, smoking and drinking, if a person is the 'right' size. As this suggests, a healthy-looking individual may very well engage in typically 'unhealthy' bodily practices. Further, they may not be healthy in a holistic sense, perhaps being socially isolated or suffering from a mental illness or a hidden physical illness. For instance, those appearing outwardly healthy may still contend with daily problems where they view their bodies as unworthy and cannot intrinsically enjoy food or exercise (Rich and Evans, 2005). Rich (2006) evidences an individual with anorexia explaining the frustration she feels when people assume she is 'better' because she has put on weight. Hardin (2003) also highlights how individuals can engage in intense self-surveillance even when their outward actions do not evidence this. When working with anorexic women in recovery, she found that some participants were eating more and looked 'better' but were still struggling with emotions such as guilt and frustration as they continued to scrutinise their bodies. Therefore, with a disproportionate focus on outward appearances for assessing health, misconceptions can easily arise when presuming the health-behaviours an individual

participates in or when assessing how healthy an individual is socially, emotionally, mentally and even physically. However, it must also be acknowledged that not all people desire to embody a healthy appearance. For example, participants in research by Rich and Evans (2005, p.259) did not like being told they looked healthy, considering this to mean they were putting on weight. One participant explicitly stated she did not want to look healthy but wanted to look “skinny”.

People do also draw upon indicators beyond external appearances when assessing physical health. Despite the previous claim that healthy-looking individuals can often ‘get away with’ engaging in unhealthy practices, many individuals also analyse their own and other’s health-related bodily practices. For example, ‘overweight’ children in Wright et al.’s (2012) research were evidenced to scrutinise the eating and exercise practices of thinner pupils, finding it disheartening that their thin peers could eat so much ‘junk’ yet not appear to put on any weight. Monaghan (2008) also illustrates how such feelings led ‘overweight’ males in his study to resist and defy healthism discourses. These men argued that some fat people do lots of physical activity and noted that thin joggers can drop dead as they drew upon anecdotal and experiential evidence to call into question common health beliefs. In a similar way, those classed by others as unhealthy or as having bodies far from the ‘ideal’ sometimes resist fat phobic, healthist discourse by redefining, ‘big’ as ‘strong’ and by asserting they are just as healthy, if not more, than their smaller peers (Sykes and McPhail, 2008). Further, sight is not the only sense people use to assess health, whether that be sight of the body or sight of bodily actions. For example, Windram-Geddes’ (2013) research participants explain how they ‘feel’ fat after being sedentary all day or studying at a desk, irrespective of whether or not they have gained weight. Additionally, whilst many adults and children see health in terms of weight management, some also talk about health in relation to emotions, energy, cleanliness, illness, drugs, growth, strength and the environment. This has especially been found within research conducted with young people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Reeve and Bell, 2009). McDermott (2012) notes that an individual’s socialisation influences how they understand and relate to health messages. Therefore, the social, cultural and material context that people negotiate is crucial to any explanations of how they experience health and the body. However, although there are some trends or patterns to how young people negotiate various ideas around health and the body, different people ultimately interpret and relate to health messages in different ways, even those within very similar social, cultural and material contexts (Wright et al., 2012).

## **2.3 The body, schooling and physical education**

So far, this review of literature has examined societal-wide meanings and power relations around the body and health. The following literature more specifically explores how meanings associated with the body can affect young people's social conduct and relationships with one another within schools and within the physical education environment. This literature considers how young people, and those working with them, negotiate, internalise and (re)produce meanings around the body and use these meanings to make value judgements about themselves and each other. It also examines how power relations around the body form within the school environment and analyses how certain aspects of schooling and education contribute towards this.

### **2.3.1 Bodies within school social networks**

The perception that a visually 'perfect' body represents a virtuous character can impact young people's thoughts about their own and each other's bodies and influence how they interact with and treat one another. One example of this is in ways that young people gain social acceptance based on their embodiment of the aforementioned gendered body ideals (Knowles et al., 2014). In schools, a hierarchy of bodies is often created and the body becomes a currency linked to social status, popularity and attention (Azzarito, 2009). For example, Evans, Rich and Holroyd (2004) demonstrate how young people aim to construct a particular identity in order to be socially accepted into high status groups. Here virtuous qualities such as looking beautiful or handsome, being physically able and high achieving or being outgoing and confident become markers for popularity. Research by Powell and Fitzpatrick (2015), within the context of elementary schooling in New Zealand, also evidences children as young as nine years old recognising how possessing a 'skinny' body affords the chance of being perceived by peers as successful, attractive and popular. Therefore, some young people will spend much time and effort working on their appearance so that they will be socially admired and treated favourably within a school setting (Renold and Allan, 2006). De Pian (2012) also demonstrates how some school pupils can be 'emboldened' and advantaged by bodily discourses, for example those who are happy with the way that their bodies look and who benefit from their placings within the associated social hierarchies.

For girls, popularity and acceptance within school are often perceived to accompany 'feminine' body ideals. Here, embodied femininity is considered capital, something that will be socially rewarded with friendships and positive attention from others (Hills, 2007; Renold and Allan, 2006). The body itself is important but so too is the way in which the body is adorned and dressed. For example, high status girls are often those following the latest fashion trends in relation to clothing, hairstyling and make-up (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002). Cockburn and Clarke's (2002) research also demonstrates that concerns around bodily actions supplement those around bodily appearance and adornment. For example, their participants voiced their dislike for appearing aggressive or 'manly' when playing sport as this did not connect to the 'girly' identities that gained them popularity and symbolised their attractiveness. However, Jeanes (2011) concludes that how the body looks is of more consequence for a girl's social status. Girls in her research were more likely to 'get away with' playing football and engaging in 'masculine' activities if they looked and acted 'feminine' in other contexts and still embodied the slim 'ideal'. Having the 'correct' body gave these girls more scope in relation to the array of actions considered socially acceptable for them. It was the physical size and shape of the body that was not negotiable for these girls, much more so than what they did with their bodies or even how they dressed and decorated their bodies.

The literature dominantly focuses on female concerns but Azzarito (2009) reveals how boys also aim to regulate their bodies according to muscular, strong, skilful and athletic masculine norms within a school setting. Here adolescent males are expected to look and be physically competent, particularly within a sporting contexts (Wellard, 2006; 2009). Boys living up to hyper-masculine body 'ideals', for example those who are 'early developers' often become the high status and socially powerful pupils within a school (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012). Further, since hyper-masculine 'ideals' are readily accepted, the social dominance of those embodying such ideals and the subordination of those not is often perceived as the norm (ibid). For example, male school pupils in Johnson et al.'s (2013) research were less aware than female participants of how discourses around the body are constructed and were resultantly less critical of their own and other's conformity towards a muscular and masculine physique. However, Azzarito (2009) demonstrates that a broader range of ideal body types and images are considered socially acceptable for males than for females within schools and adolescent peer groups. She therefore suggests that males can gain additional social kudos and acceptance from areas unrelated to their appearance. This could include, for example, their physical skills in a variety of domains, their intelligence, confidence and sense of humour. Further Campbell et al. (2016), drawing upon McCormack

and Anderson (2010), work to evidence how perceptions of masculinity, including perceptions of the masculine body, may be becoming more 'inclusive' within contemporary schooling.

Just as embodying the 'ideal' appearance can gain a young person popularity, not doing so can have the opposite effect. Therefore, young people's actions can also be influenced by attempts to avoid negative social outcomes. Some young people, or groups of young people, may feel they have little social status within a school, are not valued by others and have little say or influence in what happens socially due to the way that they look (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Paechter, 2013). As Kehler (2010) exemplifies, they can be automatically excluded and framed as outsiders due to their bodily appearance. Within schools, this social exclusion and discrimination is often cruelly based on who is considered 'fat' and/or 'ugly' (Knowles et al., 2014). Therefore, those who do not conform to healthy, athletic and beautiful body ideals risk being on the social margins (Azzarito, 2009). For example, Bromfield (2009) notes that there is a strong association between being classed obese and being bullied, socially excluded, teased and unpopular. Here there can also be a 'spread of stigmatisation' where friends of overweight children fear being marginalised and placed lower on the social hierarchy due to their association with an overweight friend. Atkinson and Kehler (2012) also evidence how boys classed 'too thin', 'too fat' or 'too ugly' are mocked, harassed and excluded for the way that their bodies look and for what their bodies cannot do. Their research demonstrates how such discrimination can even become physical, for example involving pushing and hitting, with much of this occurring within informal social spaces such as physical education changing rooms. Wright et al. (2012) also provide insight into how upsetting and destructive name-calling, negative judgements and social exclusion relating to the body can be for young people, regardless of whether these social implications are actually occurring or are just perceived and anticipated. They evidence young people being genuinely sad and anxious about their bodies, to the extent that one participant reported having nightmares about becoming obese. As Ortner (2002) suggests, schools can be places of unkindness and injustice. Her ethnographic study, tracking participants who left school in the 1950s, gives insight into the enduring and intense nature of school memories and related emotions. Here, participants' positive or negative retrospective feelings towards their school experiences were very closely linked with where they were located within the school social hierarchy. Ortner (2002) suggests that because schooling is such a big part of our lives and at such crucial stages, school memories are very vivid and are often used by people as they define themselves and others later in life.

Schools can be very competitive social environments where individuals are encouraged to compare and contrast themselves with others and categorise themselves as worthy or unworthy. The body is often central to processes whereby individuals compare and contrast themselves with others as they work to form their identities (Festinger, 1954; Knowles et al., 2014). For example, Rich and Evans (2009) show how young people can engage in subtle competition, judging and comparing their bodies to those of their peers. To add to this, the pursuit of corporeal excellence can also be considered alongside individuals' desires for success, admiration and high achievement. For example, Oliver and Lalik (2001) evidence female school pupils who consider slenderness to be of prime importance when describing the 'ideal' feminine body, linking this to being beautiful, sexy, popular, happy and *high achieving*. Research with anorexic girls in a school environment extends this concept (Rich and Evans, 2009). Here, participants voiced a desire to be noticed as a certain type of person – skinny, stunning, beautiful and *successful*. As Renold and Allen (2006) suggest, there is often a perception that excellence and success should be embodied. They evidence children as young as primary school age feeling under pressure to achieve academically while concurrently striving to be perceived as beautiful and further solidify their identity as successful. Halse et al. (2007) also illustrate how young people can incorporate their longing to be known as high achievers into their desires to be recognised as attractive and healthy. Further, Kehler (2010) evidences how the visually 'ideal' body can be linked to notions of sporting excellence, particularly in boys who long to look strong and muscular as well as achieving highly in team games.

There is a dominant culture within schools where young people are encouraged to be the best they can be and to compete against one another (Evans, Rich and Holroyd 2004; Halse et al., 2007; Paechter, 2013). For example, they are often ranked against classmates through examination results, prizes and celebrations of achievement. This can lead to young people feeling anxious about their successes and failures. For example, there is evidence that 80% of girls and 59% of boys aged 15 in Scotland feel under pressure in relation to their school work (Inchley et al., 2016). Hunter (2004) illustrates how this can also be played out in relation to the body, particularly within subjects such as physical education where 'good' students are defined, both by teachers and other pupils, as those who look healthy and physically competent. Creating a culture where excellence and success are valued may positively impact on pupil wellbeing and self-esteem. However, Rich and Evans (2009) voice concerns over those pupils who constantly strive for perfection. They investigate how pressures to be holistically 'perfect' link with eating disorders and destructive and compulsive exercise approaches. Within discourses advocating perfection, the concept of



being 'too disciplined' is rarely circulated and some young people set standards of excellence and perfection so high that they cannot be met, meaning these individuals never feel 'good enough' (Halse et al., 2007). Researchers working in this area therefore critique the taken-for-granted notion that striving for excellence, perfection and success is something unquestionably good that should always be encouraged and celebrated within schools.

The issues presented thus far can mean that bodies are under intense scrutiny within the school social environment and young people are often aware of this in relation to their own bodies. For example, Fisette's (2011) research, conducted with girls in a physical education environment, evidences how some young people feel that the main thing they are socially judged by is their body size. This means that the size and shape of their body becomes very important to them, defining them as a person. To illustrate this further, research reveals how school pupils analyse each other's bodies and are also aware of being 'gazed upon' by their peers (Johnson et al., 2013; Oliver and Lalik, 2001). As well as looking at others and feeling looked at in return, individuals also scrutinise and evaluate themselves so that surveillance becomes internal as well as external. Hardin (2003) suggests that most, if not all, individuals engage in 'self-policing' where they actively scrutinise and try to regulate their appearance and actions in accordance with socially constructed norms and ideals. Resultantly, individuals may make value-judgements about themselves based on how they look on the 'outside' as opposed to how they feel on the 'inside', devaluing their bodies for their appearances and not valuing their inherent capacities. Here bodies are judged as 'good' or 'bad' regardless of whether they feel, for example, strong, weak, painful, tired or refreshed. Therefore, a young person's understanding of how they are perceived by, and appear to, others can influence how they value their own bodies and their own character (Fisette, 2011; Kehler, 2010).

With so many social pressures to conform to body ideals and achieve excellence, young people can become unsympathetic not only towards other people but towards their own perceived shortcomings, becoming unaccepting of and dissatisfied with their own bodies (Fisette, 2011; Knowles et al., 2014; Paechter, 2013). Both Wright et al. (2012) and Knowles et al. (2014) demonstrate how young people can talk and think negatively about themselves and their bodies, singling out specific parts of their bodies that they hate and long to change. Participants in Evans, Rich and Holroyd's (2004) research, who felt that they had failed to live up to societal expectations of excellence, also considered their self and their body to be of little value. As such, the body becomes more like an object, something which symbolises the self but is not part of the self and something which individuals can become

alienated from (Kirk and Tinning, 1994). Here, people can come to disassociate themselves from their bodies to the extent that they talk about their bodies in the third person (Paechter, 2013; Satina and Hultgren, 2001; Knowles et al., 2014). Further, within a culture where there is much focus on bodily appearances, the routines of bodily self-surveillance, self-scrutiny and body dissatisfaction can become 'normal' practice. For example, as O'Brien et al. (2008) suggest, the feelings of body-anxiety that adolescents experience are often considered so common that they are unquestioned by teachers or the curriculum. As such, it is considered normal practice for young people to be self-conscious of their own bodies and actions and to be pre-occupied with their bodily appearance and to be aware of how they think others will perceive them. Worrying about the body therefore becomes a fact of everyday life, something to endure rather than something to question.

Despite the above claims, it is important to stress that body dissatisfaction and body worries are not ubiquitous amongst all young people. Certain meanings around health and the body can be major organisers of some people's thoughts and practices, yet influence others much less (Wright et al., 2006). For example, some young people are less negatively affected by dominant health and body discourses since they already 'match up' to dominant 'ideals' (De Pian, 2012). Additionally, there are some who do not meet dominant body 'ideals' but who are confident in their appearances and value their bodies positively. For example, when analysing research relating to the experiences of 'overweight' children and suggesting the implications of this for educational psychologists, Bromfield (2009) claims that not all 'overweight' children have low self-esteem or are unhappy with their bodies. Some school aged individuals may even resist and challenge dominant 'truths', norms and ways of being by actively locating themselves in opposition to the 'ideal' (Garrett, 2004). Of course, not all who resist and challenge body and appearance pressures in principal are able to do so in practice. In other words, some individuals state that they wish they could learn not to care or worry about what others think about their bodies but feel that they cannot (Oliver and Lalik, 2004).

### **2.3.2 The body and the physical education environment**

Social meanings and power relations around the body become particularly salient within school environments where there is an overt focus on the body, increased bodily exposure and lots of opportunities for social interaction. Accordingly, physical education is a social space where some young people feel particularly anxious about their bodies. For example,

Knowles et al. (2014) illustrate how anxiety over bodily appearances and competence can discourage some young people from participating in or engaging fully with physical education, particularly when bodies are considered to be on display. Sykes and MacPhail (2008) also show how some young people can ‘hate’ situations such as batting in softball due to the exposure they feel their bodies are under. Illustrating this further, research has highlighted swimming to be a particular concern amongst young people due to their bodies being visible and vulnerable to judgement and scrutiny (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Niven et al., 2014). As such, some pupils will try to ‘hide’ their bodies within physical education, for example by wearing layered clothing or shying away from public bodily displays, and would prefer to have more control over situations where others can view their bodies, for example desiring cubicles for changing and showering (Fisette, 2011). At the same time, others may use physical education as an opportunity to ‘show off’ their ‘good’ bodies. For example, Kehler’s (2010) research with adolescent boys evidences how physical education can become a place where some can showcase their muscular bodies and re-affirm their physical dominance. For male pupils like these, physical education and sporting environments can be very influential to how their identities are constructed within schools (Campbell et al., 2016).

Bodies can be considered to be exposed when being watched by others but even more so when anything which hides or embellishes the body is removed (Goffman, 1959). This could occur when having to wear clothing such as swimwear, gym skirts or tight fitting t-shirts that accentuate the shape and form of the body or when having to remove bodily adornments which are usually used to enhance appearances. For example, Cockburn and Clarke (2002) evidence how some girls dislike taking part in physical education when made to remove make up, jewellery and alter hairstyles that they have invested time and energy in crafting. However, these worries are not solely related to removing items that cover the body or about an individual’s natural appearance being exposed. Individuals can also be concerned that their ‘look’ is being damaged. For example, participants in Cockburn and Clarke’s (2002) research additionally did not like wearing ‘baggy’ or shapeless clothing, despite that being clothing which would hide their bodies more. Therefore, individuals may wish to wear clothing which symbolises a certain style, fashion or brand or simply clothing which they consider to be ‘better’ (Niven et al., 2014).

The bodily exposure and scrutiny that young people experience and engage with within physical education can lead some to be treated poorly by others in and around physical education lessons and further beyond. As Fisette (2011) asserts, unequal social power relations are more pronounced in environments where bodies are very publically

visible. For example, Atkinson and Kehler (2012) conducted research with boys who had been bullied or discriminated against within physical education, many because of their bodies. They discovered that these boys had been subject to taunting, violence and ridicule, especially within informal physical education spaces such as changing rooms. This bullying was often unseen or even ignored by their teachers. Such pupils developed strategies to avoid revealing their bodies, for example by leaving their t-shirts on under their shirts instead of changing fully after lessons. This could cause hygiene issues, leading them to smell sweaty and put them at risk of further bullying, teasing and social shunning. Research like this shows that boys are not immune to feeling self-conscious of bodies in physical education environments, even though most research explores the experiences of female pupils. Physical education can therefore be a place that amplifies the exposure and ridicule that certain people must negotiate due to the size of their body both formally and informally (Paechter, 2013). Further, informal social interactions in and around physical education can impact greatly upon pupils' learning within, and engagement with, the formal curriculum. Participants in Atkinson and Kehler's research (2012) detailed the distracting fear and anxiety they experience when attending physical education classes, with some even feeling nauseous when coming to the department. This led a number of them to avoid the subject, for example by 'forgetting' their kit or dropping the subject as soon as it was not compulsory. For some pupils, physical education can become associated with physical, social and emotional harm, a place of sadness and anxiety that can impact negatively on opportunities to learn. To add to this, Sykes and McPhail (2008) illustrate how some people retrospectively make sense of their past physical education experiences, evidencing the strength and durability of negative emotions associated with the physical education environment. Their overweight participants detailed how physical education was a subject they would dread, a place where they felt humiliated, vulnerable and incompetent due to their body size. One participant explained how physical education was never a place where her body seemed acceptable, making participation in physical education socially and emotionally difficult.

Interestingly, some young people may be reluctant to engage with physical activity within the physical education environment but will engage positively with sport and physical activity out with the school setting. For example, participants in Sykes and McPhail's research (2008) enjoyed being physically active and felt more comfortable exercising upon leaving the school environment. This could be due to a number of factors, such as being able to exercise within groups of like-minded and supportive people or having more choice in what they do and how and when they do it. Research does show that being able to exercise in an environment with less surveillance is helpful. For example, Azzarito and Hill (2013)

illustrate how young people, in their case girls, felt very safe and comfortable exercising in the privacy of their own homes. However, these girls were also happy to engage with physical activity in different settings such as public parks. The attraction of exercising at home may partly be that it provides a private and enclosed space but the deeper issue may be that it is free from the perceived judgement of others. These young people wanted to be physically active in a space where they did not feel judged and where they were not pre-occupied with the social ‘risks’ of being active, for example the risk of embarrassing themselves. ‘Public’ spaces can provide such an environment and, under the right conditions, physical education can also be a socially ‘safe’ place for young people to learn. Azzarito and Hill’s (2013) research points the importance of creating a non-judgemental social space within physical education where all pupils, not just those who are popular and talented, feel comfortable and accepted by both teachers and peers. Therefore, the task of addressing body issues may not lie so much in the content taught within physical education, the activities children partake in, whether classes are mixed sex or mixed ability, how many people are within classes or how exposed the body is. Rather, it may lie in: the way that physical education is taught and how learning takes place; the purpose of the activities; the ethos created within classes; the relationships that pupils develop with one another and with their teacher; and the shared understandings constructed around the body (Walseth et al., 2015).

### 2.3.3 Physical education and health

Clearly, physical education is very influential in shaping young people’s stances towards their bodies (Satina and Hultgren, 2001). The above research exemplifies how this happens through the informal social relations that pupils have with one another within and around the physical education environment. However, physical education also influences more formally how young people form and negotiate bodily meanings and social relationships. One way this occurs is through the strong links made between physical education and health. Green and Thurston’s (2002) qualitative research demonstrates that the relationship between physical education and health is readily accepted and often central to physical education professionals’ teaching philosophies. In some cases, physical education’s links to health are the main reasons the subject is valued by teachers and parents (De Pian, 2012). Such associations have been long-standing. For example, physical education has always been, and continues to be, shaped by a variety of interest groups, particularly by those groups with a vested interest in societal health and wellbeing (Green, 2008). Kirk (2012) explains how

physical education (and hygiene) was initially incorporated into British state education in the early 1900s for medical reasons, in order to remediate inherited and acquired body defects such as poor posture, flat feet, rounded shoulders and respiratory diseases. As groups such as the armed forces, merchants and factory owners were also voicing concerns over health issues stemming from working class living conditions during the period of industrialisation, physical education or 'drill' was also considered to have the role of providing a healthy and productive workforce and military reserve (Holt, 1989; Kirk, 2012; Penn, 1999). Further, the role of 'sport' and 'recreation' in enhancing public health also became increasingly recognised towards the mid-1900s so that opportunities for more games based physical training and physical recreation were being incorporated into state schools (Mason, 1989). However, from the 1950s onwards, a focus on physical fitness began to dominate within physical education, alongside the development of disciplines such as biomechanics and exercise physiology (Kirk, 2012; Tinning and Glasby, 2002). With this, a tradition developed where the body, health and fitness were considered objectively as entities to be measured, analysed and controlled in relation to technical skills and performance (Turner, 1984). From the 1980s, pressing health concerns relating to obesity and overweight became more dominant and research indicates that discourses emphasising an individual responsibility to look after one's own health and the body in relation to weight and shape began to take precedence within physical education (Gard and Wright, 2001).

Schools are places where compulsory health promotion can reach all societal members (Johns, 2005). As McDermott (2012) suggests, schools are considered to play a key role in shaping who people are and how they conduct their lives and they are considered places where good habits can be formed. Therefore, in order to protect national economies, schools are being considered crucial sites for health promotion with subjects such as physical education being particularly implicated due to their perceived potential to address and prevent obesity problems (Johns, 2005). Here, politicians and others often advocate physical education as a tool to counter 'fatness' and inactivity (Douglas, 2013). Some could consider this to be a positive thing, perhaps enhancing and maintaining the status of physical education, a traditionally marginalised subject (Horrell et al., 2012; Marshall and Hardman, 2000).

Since physical education is a place where young people are encouraged to learn about bodily health and where they form meanings around health and the body, how health is defined within physical education may be important to how young people perceive and value their bodies. There is some concern that both obesity and healthism discourses may now

dominate within physical education environments. For example, research has explored how influential adults, including teachers, can take on and relay messages about the risks and dangers of obesity to children (Leahy and Harrison, 2004; Thomas et al., 2014; Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010). Gard and Wright (2001) claim that although scientific certainty is lacking in relation to the causes, extent, implications and effective treatment of overweight and obesity, physical educators work as if this science was certain. Accordingly, teachers can internalise authoritative bio-medical knowledge, convincing themselves that their pupils are at risk from poor diets and lack of fitness and also considering it their job to manage their pupils' bodies in relation to threats from obesity (Leahy and Harrison, 2004; Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010). As such, the tenets of risk discourses can remain unquestioned and can dominate teachers' beliefs and practices with many adopting an ideology of keeping children healthy, active and slim due to the perceived threats posed by obesity and physical inactivity (Gard and Wright, 2001; Rich et al., 2004). As Windram-Geddes (2013) illustrates, some teachers may also use threats of fatness to motivate pupils to participate fully in physical activities and physical education. Here children can be exposed to 'scare tactics' where they are warned about all the negative implications of becoming fat rather than being given positive messages around what it means to be healthy (Thomas et al., 2014). Building on this, Powell and Fitzpatrick (2015) illustrate how pupils can internalise the idea that they are at risk of obesity and can worry accordingly. There is therefore some apprehension over how health promotion is being approached within schools and within physical education (Evans, Davies and Rich, 2008a; Johns, 2005).

The equation of health and fitness with a slim body and the belief that health benefits are gained mainly through vigorous sport and exercise can lead to a narrow conception of health-enhancing practices in children. This can include the introduction of new fitness and weight maintenance initiatives either into physical education or in place of physical education (MacLean et al., 2015; Powell and Fitzpatrick, 2015). Such sessions focus on increasing the time children are engaged in vigorous physical activity. However, after monitoring the heart rates and activity levels of children within physical education lessons, Fairclough and Scratton (2005) suggest that children do not and cannot do enough physical activity within physical education lessons to make a difference to long term health and weight goals. McDermott (2012) also argues that once physical activity is solely seen as a tool for working on fitness and promoting weight loss, then other benefits associated with physical activity are overlooked. Therefore, pupils can begin to think an activity is only beneficial if it involves vigorous running or exercise on fitness machines, meaning they discern what 'counts' as valuable activity very narrowly. Pupils in McDermott's (2012)

study also claimed that they were being made to engage in boring and repetitive activities in the name of fitness and health, leading to decreased enjoyment and motivation to learn. Of course, research evidences that physical education has more to contribute to young people's development than simply being an exercise or weight loss class (Bailey et al., 2009). As such, Thorburn et al. (2011) urge that quality physical education programmes be justified in relation to their educational contributions as opposed to their contribution to physical activity levels. Gard (2011) also argues that those working within physical education should confidently stand up for their subject rather than have it shaped by the whims, agendas and viewpoints of those external to it. He questions:

Why does knowledge about the biological bodies of children and their health appear to flow in (only in) one direction, from the outside of physical education inwards, rather than the reverse? What exactly is the role of physical educators in debates about obesity and public health? (Gard, 2011, p.142)

Physical education teachers are professionals who form real relationships with pupils, who work with these young people every day and understand their needs and their development. Automatically shaping physical education programmes according to imposed health rationales, whether that be to enhance the status of the subject or because of perceived duty, may not benefit the children they are working with. Constructing a similar argument, McDermott (2012) questions the extent to which health 'experts' and researchers really know what physical education is all about and all that it involves. He asks whether it is possible that some interpretations of what physical education is and what it can be are over-simplistic.

Of course, this is not to argue that physical education professionals' views are not their own. There will be teachers who draw upon their own experiences and immersion within sports and exercise cultures to make up their own minds about what health is and how they and their pupils should regulate their bodies. It is important to recognise here that many physical education teachers come from competitive sporting backgrounds and engage with wider fitness and exercise cultures (Armour and Jones, 1998). Healthism is strong within such cultures where fatness can be feared due to its association with an inability to maintain fitness and athletic body ideals (Garrett and Wrench, 2012). As such, a slim = fit = healthy triplex prevails where body weight and shape are associated with sporting success and athleticism and in turn correlated with perceptions of health (Papathomas and Lavalley, 2010). This is to the extent that pressures to lose weight for performance gains may contribute towards the development of eating disorders amongst athletes and sports participants, particularly within aesthetic activities and endurance sports (Smolak et al.,



2000). Interestingly, Yager and O’Dea (2009) have demonstrated that physical education university students may be more likely to exercise excessively and suffer from eating disorders than those studying other subject areas.

When teachers associate visual appearances with health and strongly believe that individuals should regulate and maintain their bodies in relation to socially constructed ideals, they do not only relay explicit messages to young people through the formal curriculum but also do so more implicitly. As one example of this, some suggest that children’s weights and shapes are too intensely scrutinised within physical education (Pringle and Pringle, 2012). This scrutiny can be formal – for example through initiatives where children are weighed and measured (Evans, Rich, Davies and Allwood, 2008) but can also be informal. Within this context, there are currently concerns that there is a ‘fat bias’ and discrimination against overweight individuals amongst some physical education teachers who are traditionally part of a culture where pre-judgements and expectations are made based on pupils’ appearances and body weights (Garrett and Wrench, 2012; Lynagh et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Tinning, 1985). Some teachers do still discern pupils’ competences and attitudes from their appearances. Windram-Geddes (2013) provides an example of this where a teacher morally judges an overweight pupil who is sitting out of a physical education lesson as a lazy excuse-maker deserving of reprimand but then shows little concern over the non-participation of slimmer pupils. Such practice can result in a (re)production of stereotypical assumptions amongst pupils themselves, many of whom trust and admire their teachers’ judgements and beliefs (Tinning and Glasby, 2002). This does not only influence how pupils perceive and treat one another but also how they view themselves. For example, school pupils in Rich and Evan’s (2005) study wished to lose weight in order to please their physical education teachers and sports coaches who they thought would equate a slim physique with health and fitness. Lee and Macdonald (2010) also evidence young people considering their bodies inadequate, falling short of those advocated within physical education. As Garrett and Wrench (2012) argue, teachers can become oblivious to the strong influence that their own beliefs and practices around their own bodies can have on their pupils.

Many teachers are aware that pupils can attempt to emulate their beliefs and lifestyles and therefore feel like they must portray health through their own bodies in order to be positive role models (De Pian, 2012; Macdonald and Kirk, 1996; Schee and Gard, 2013; Webb et al., 2008). Alsup (2006) explains how teachers, across a number of specialisms, can feel as if they must embody a teacher identity in line with cultural expectations. For example,

they may worry about looking like a professional or good teacher and endeavour to change their appearance accordingly. Her research also evidences how external identity indicators such as skin colour, dress, bodily size and shape can affect the ways pupils identify with, respect and relate to a teacher. Of course, bodily appearance is only one influence amongst many in shaping social relationships and individuals can be respected, liked and valued for other things such as warmth of character, integrity, helpfulness and a sense of humour (Owens and Ennis, 2005). Nevertheless, with the idea that health can be ascertained through bodily shape and size, many teachers feel they must surveil their pupils' bodies whilst they are also under surveillance themselves (Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010). The pressures teachers put themselves under to embody a healthy appearance can also cause them difficulties when educating young people about health and the body, even in those who wish to reject such views. For example, Cliff and Wright (2010) demonstrate the tensions that an educator endures as she discourages children from obsessing about food and exercise when simultaneously having a personal investment in maintaining a slim body and negotiating her own problematic relationship with eating and exercising.

As Cliff and Wright's (2010) study shows, teachers do not always straightforwardly accept and reproduce the views purported through obesity and healthism discourses. Despite the dominance of these discourses within physical education, they interpret and negotiate discourses around health and the body in diverse ways. For example, teachers in a study by De Pian (2012) perceived the obesity 'crisis' as a societal problem but considered it a problem that did not affect their school or their pupils whom they thought to come from wealthy, well-educated families. Teachers can also negotiate discourses differently within just one school, with some teachers reproducing healthism and obesity discourses and others challenging them (Burrows and McCormack, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013). As such, there are teachers who are very aware of the negative implications of certain discourses and are empathetic of pupils' body-related concerns, feelings and difficulties within the physical education environment. Further, as well as 'saving' pupils from obesity, some physical education teachers are also attempting to limit the risks associated with being underweight and eating disorders such as anorexia. Therefore, there has recently been greater consideration of the tensions that both physical educational professionals and pupils endure as they attempt to negotiate competing discourses around health and the body and address worries about the negative implications of those focussing on bodily appearance, size and shape (Humberstone and Stan, 2011; Pringle and Pringle, 2012; Welch and Wright, 2011). As McDermott (2012) notes, there is complexity to what teachers do or do not do, to how they choose to think about and interpret the messages they receive and to the ways in which

they negotiate, comply with and resist these. Teachers' thoughts and actions can also be influenced by very real constraining factors and practicalities, including financial influences and time demands, meaning some teachers may teach content they are uncomfortable with or teach in a way they do not desire (ibid).

### 2.3.5 The Scottish context

As the present research study is conducted within a Scottish secondary school, it is important to also explore the physical education context in Scotland. Although most of the preceding research has been conducted outside of Scotland, it has been posited that healthism discourses have much salience within Scottish education where health promotion objectives are prominent within educational policy (Johnson et al., 2013; Windram-Geddes, 2013; Horrell et al., 2012). Within Scotland, there have been concerns around the physical health of the nation, particularly in relation to declining physical activity participation and rising obesity. Horrell et al. (2012) suggests that governments must be seen to be addressing pressing health concerns, particularly when they are considered to impact a country's success within the competitive global economy. As such, governmental policies and pledges have been developed aiming to tackle the Scottish obesity 'crisis' (Scottish Executive, 2003; Scottish Government, 2008; 2010a). It has been suggested that these physical health concerns, aligning with globalised health discourses, have been influential on Scottish educational policy (Gray et al., 2012; Horrell et al., 2012; Thorburn et al., 2011).

Many changes have recently taken place within Scottish education due to the implementation of a new national curriculum, 'a Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE). Within the CfE there are three core curriculum areas with 'experiences and outcomes' to be applied across all learning. These areas are literacy, numeracy and a new area: health and wellbeing (Scottish Executive, 2006). Therefore, health and wellbeing aims and objectives are the responsibility of all teachers, regardless of their subject specialisation. This somewhat reflects educational policy elsewhere within the United Kingdom and beyond where whole school approaches to health and wellbeing are being implemented and where health and wellbeing are now considered not just the concern of physical education, home economic and personal and social education teachers (ACARA, 2012; Welsh Government, 2015). However, within Scotland, specific subject areas have also been singled out to have central roles in relation to health and wellbeing. This means physical education is no longer classed

as an ‘expressive art’ within the Scottish curriculum (SOED, 1992) but instead sits alongside physical activity and sport under the new health and wellbeing curricular banner.

Health and Wellbeing is a holistic concept within Scottish curricular policy, encompassing social, emotional, mental and physical components (Scottish Government, 2009). However, experiences and outcomes listed specifically for physical education do focus very much on improving skilled physical performance with some reference to “developing and sustaining my levels of fitness” (p.5). There are also experiences and outcomes under ‘physical activity and health’ so that:

Learners develop an understanding of their physical health and the contribution made by participation in physical education, physical activity and sport to keeping them healthy and preparing them for life beyond school. They investigate the relationship between diet and physical activity and their role in the prevention of obesity (p.9).

These experiences and outcomes include, for example, explaining “the links between the energy I use while being physically active, the food I eat and my health and wellbeing” (p.9). However, other experiences and outcomes focus more on social, emotional and mental wellbeing. For instance, within physical education, under ‘cooperation and competition’, learners are to be “aware of my own and others’ needs and feelings;” achieve “personal goals;” develop leadership qualities; and “contribute to a supportive and inclusive environment” (p.6). Pupils are also to learn that physical activity and sport “contribute to and promote my learning; develop my fitness and physical and mental wellbeing; develop my social skills, positive attitudes and values; [and] make an important contribution to living a healthy lifestyle” (p.7). However, there are still concerns that there is and will be an overbearing emphasis on the physical component within physical education in practice. For example, Gray et al. (2012) researched how those involved in developing the ‘experiences and outcomes’ for physical education understood and explained the subject within health and wellbeing. Of the 12 participants interviewed, over half made reference to national obesity concerns in relation to curricular aims. Other participants were concerned that teachers may narrowly focus on increasing physical activity, fitness and physical health when interpreting the curriculum.

Priestley and Humes (2010) explain that the CfE sought to combine top down and bottom up approaches to curriculum development. Resultantly, the curriculum is designed to give teachers more agency as they implement curricular guidance. Therefore, curricular ‘experiences and outcomes’ are inexplicit and can be interpreted in various ways (Priestley, 2010). Participants in Gray et al.’s (2012) research reflect this by suggesting that the success

of the CfE will be linked to teachers' own readings and understandings of the curriculum and associated experiences and outcomes. Gray et al. (2012) go on to suggest that a lack of clarity in curricular aims may lead physical education teachers to draw on their own personal knowledge which they have gained from wider societal health discourses to interpret health and wellbeing aims. These interpretations may relate to improving physical fitness and activity levels and may perhaps neglect social emotional and mental dimensions. Thorburn et al. (2011) therefore warn that a narrow, instrumental version of physical education, focussing mainly on physical activity and fitness goals and neglecting educational goals may be realised in Scotland. Research has explored how physical education teachers interpret and enact physical education according to Scottish curricular aims (MacLean et al., 2013). This research highlights the complex relationship between policy, policy interpretation and enactment and it evidences that some teachers feel unclear about the aims and intentions of the CfE. Here, a high percentage of participants interpreted policy changes and the placing of physical education within health and wellbeing as being related to concerns about obesity and low rates of physical activity participation. They therefore considered the new role of physical education to be primarily geared towards improving children's physical fitness. They also detailed changes which they had implemented within their schools and departments, including the introduction of 'health based fitness courses' and more focus on physical activity for fitness and recreation. However, some teachers, sharing policy makers' concerns, explained that they were worried the focus of physical education could become too narrow. Maclean et al. (2013) conclude that the sheer number of possible interpretations of policy text is causing confusion amongst teachers. Further, they claim that due to insufficient communication, there are discrepancies between policy makers' intentions for the purpose of physical education and physical education teachers' interpretations of the curriculum. Horrell et al (2012) suggests that future research studies in Scotland needs to investigate how teachers interpret the curriculum and make decisions as they design and implement their pedagogies but also how pupils experience physical education within health and wellbeing. The aforementioned discourses around health and the body may potentially impact negatively on young people's social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing (Rich et al., 2004). It is not yet clear how this may be happening in Scotland and how physical education pedagogies and practices may contribute to this. Nor, more positively, is it clear how pedagogies can be developed within Scottish physical education that counter this and impact positively on young people's social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. It is therefore of timely significance to conduct such research within a Scottish context.

## **2.4 Young people and online social spaces**

When considering the above literature, it is important to acknowledge that bodily discourse is not confined to schools. Young people exist within a wider social, cultural and political landscape that influences their knowledge, their practice and how they receive and negotiate body-related messages (Burrows and McCormack, 2012). As Rich (2012) explains, young people engage with many pedagogical sites where they learn about the body including avenues such as the family, peers, the media, advertising, and entertainment. Exploring how young people negotiate meanings and practices around the body within school social learning environments is important for understanding the centrality of the body within young people's lives and the impact this may have on their learning. However, it is also essential to acknowledge that school boundaries are 'porous' (Scott, 2010). Therefore, forming an understanding of the wider sociocultural context that infiltrates and is infiltrated by school life is also important for educators, who can benefit from research around other social institutions such as the family, the economy and the media.

The popular media can be a very powerful influence for young people to learn about the body and often infiltrates into schools and homes (Azzarito and Hill, 2013). For many years, the media has been theorised and evidenced as a key sociocultural influence on people's bodies, defining how the body 'should' look and outlining what is acceptable and desirable in relation to bodily practices (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Grabe et al., 2008; Harper and Tiggeman, 2008; Leit et al., 2002). For example, through consuming information and visual images from magazines, television shows, newspapers, and music videos, individuals internalise body ideals and use these as a benchmark to make value judgements about themselves and each other. The media is also an avenue through which people receive specific information and advice about how to look after and improve the health of their bodies, providing direction for action. As Rich and Miah (2009) claim, health promotion is increasingly transcending medical contexts to permeate popular culture. However, though much research has explored the influence of traditional media on bodily culture, less has investigated the influence of online social media and, more specifically, the influence that engagements with online social spaces can have on social perceptions of the body and associated bodily actions and body self-regulation within a school culture. As Perloff (2014) informs, online media is now surpassing traditional media in popularity, particularly amongst young people. Within the United Kingdom, children spend an average of 17.2 hours per week online, with 71% of children aged 12-15 who use the internet having a social media profile and engaging in online social networking (Ofcom, 2014). In addition, the increasing

use of ‘smartphones’ and tablets mean that access to the internet can be wireless – online social spaces are accessible at any time and any place (Perloff, 2014; Ofcom, 2014). As growing numbers of young people engage with online social spaces, this becomes a naturalised part of their lives and is something that the current generation of teenagers have grown up with (Meier and Gray, 2014). Inchley et al. (2016) suggest that the increasing extension of young people’s social interaction to online realms may have important implications for their health and wellbeing and for their socialisation and learning. Therefore, it is important to explore how digital mediums become avenues for learning, self-recognition and cultural production amongst the current generation of young people (Rich and Miah, 2014).

#### 2.4.1 Online social interaction and the body

Online social spaces such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter allow people, groups or organisations to create their own ‘profile’ pages which are visible to other users. These profiles are very self-orientated. For example, they are spaces where people share and reveal information about themselves through the presentation of text, photographs and videos; engage in self-promotion and self-broadcasting; and post self-images (or ‘selfies’). Fardouly et al. (2015) suggest all of this can encourage people to become more self-absorbed. The process of explicitly constructing a self-image by way of a profile page also enables and encourages individuals to perceive their constructed image as other people see it, seeing themselves from an onlooker’s position (Manago et al., 2015; Meier and Gray, 2014). Individuals can also ‘connect’ and interact with other users both publically and privately, and communicate by ‘sharing’ information of interest such as their own thoughts, pictures, quotes, stories or links to online resources. This often leads (even mundane) information about people’s lives, and their social interactions, to become very public and readily consumed by others (Rich and Miah, 2014). Such interaction is also immediate. ‘Normal’ individuals therefore become collaborative producers of media as well as consumers either by creating and ‘posting’ content, by perusing content posted by others or by reinforcing such content through re-posting, ‘liking’, ‘favouring’ and commenting (Berriman and Thomson, 2015). Online social spaces are resultantly very *social*, used for talking to and finding out information about others and responding to the things they have to share.

Social networking and social media sites are also very *visual*, with some based almost entirely on sharing and viewing images. As many pictures are shared and exchanged

within online social spaces, users can be exposed to a wealth of images of bodily ‘perfection’, which they may seek to emulate (Perloff, 2014). These can come in the form of advertisements, step-by-step guides for diet and exercise, motivational images and quotes, as well as straightforward images of others. Photographs and images can also incite ‘appearance conversations’ as people comment and discuss, for example, how ‘good’ others look (Meier and Gray, 2014). Significantly, it is not only the body that is important here. Whilst there have been online trends for posting ‘headless’ torso selfies or images where the face is obscured by a mobile phone (Manago et al., 2015), many self-portraits within online social spaces also include close up images of the face so that individuals also make comparisons in relation to facial features, skin and hair (Fardouly et al., 2015). In all, outward appearances can become central signifiers of the self within online social spaces (Berriman and Thomson, 2015; Mabe et al., 2014). For example, the common practice of posting self-images online alludes to a tendency to associate outward appearances with ‘who a person is’ and to be markers of self-worth (Tiggeman and Slater, 2013; Manago et al., 2015). Exemplifying how the above may influence people’s body perceptions, Tiggeman and Slater (2013) evidence Facebook users being more worried about their body image than those not using the site. They conclude that although internet use is associated with increased body concerns, internet sites based around social interaction are especially implicated in this. However, research signals that it is not only time spent on such sites that impacts upon people’s negative feelings towards their bodies but more specifically time apportioned to photo-related activity (Meier and Gray, 2014). In all, it is suggested that online social spaces bring together two previously detected key influences on the body – an image driven media and peers – therefore intensifying the strength of these influences (Mabe et al., 2014).

Researchers have specifically studied how people compare and contrast themselves to others within online social spaces, with many of these comparisons being associated with appearance (Fardouly et al., 2015; Manago et al., 2015; Tiggeman and Slater, 2013). These comparisons can be high in number due to the sheer quantity of people that individuals are exposed to. For example, people are exposed to and provided access to many others online, including those they are close to such as family and peers and also those who they have never met such as celebrities and sport stars. This means that people may engage with and pay attention to those who they would not be able to or would not be inclined to during ‘normal’ social interaction and those who would not usually be ‘on their radar’ (Fardouly et al., 2015). The researchers above, draw upon social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), to explain how individuals compare themselves to others to ascertain and evaluate their own social standing, life achievements and successes. This predominantly involves making



‘upward’ social comparisons. That is, comparing themselves to those they perceive to be better, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. However, it can also involve ‘downward’ social comparisons, comparing themselves to those they perceive to be worse than themselves in the area of comparison, making them feel better about themselves. Traditional media provides people with opportunities to compare themselves with ‘unreachable’ celebrities who have access to more money, time and resources. However, online social spaces provide people with countless opportunities to also make comparisons with peers of similar social standing, that is against people ‘like us’ (Manago et al., 2015). Therefore, where the marker for comparison is perceived to be close, individuals’ feelings about themselves can be powerfully influenced. For example, Perloff (2014) suggests ‘upward comparisons’ are especially detrimental when made against peers and ‘real life’ people with whom the one making the comparison is in direct competition and who are perceived to have the same opportunities and resources. Further, many may be drawn towards making such comparisons as they allow them to gauge their place and maintain distinction from others within a social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984).

When considering body-related comparisons, it is also important to note that because online images are still, or in the case of videos re-playable, they can be viewed repeatedly and over an extended period of time. Therefore, they are relatively eternal and not just committed to memory. Because of this, they provide opportunity for deeper scrutiny than possible during face-to-face social interaction. Additionally, whilst comparisons can be made implicitly and intuitively there are also opportunities for more explicit or crudely made comparisons through, for example, assessing quantities of ‘likes’ for photos, numbers of ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ and positive comments written by others. Such monitoring and scrutiny of social approval can then become compulsive as individuals seek to gain validation as they also see other people being ‘rewarded’ or reassured in this way (Manago et al., 2015). However, as Manago et al. (2015) further indicate, individuals may overlook or underestimate the fact that their peers may intentionally make visible or enhance the ‘good’ and ‘flattering’ parts of their lives and bodies, hiding or neglecting to reveal the less savoury or mundane aspects of their existence. Therefore, individuals may assume they do not ‘match up’ to others based on only glimpses of their lives. For example, pictures appearing online, particularly when posted by individuals themselves, can be carefully chosen (Mabe et al., 2014). Fardouly et al. (2015) suggest that many wish to avoid becoming the focus of downward comparisons and therefore make efforts to ‘untag’ photos that are uncomplimentary or delete unflattering content. Peer images can also be just as ‘unrealistic’ as celebrity images, especially when ‘normal’ individuals make use of apps, filters, lighting,

angles and ‘photo-shopping’ programmes to alter and edit their own images (Meier and Gray, 2014; Perloff, 2014). Therefore, people can appear to have met difficult to reach beauty ideals when they have not done so in ‘in the flesh’ (Mabe et al., 2014). As Harrison and Hefner (2014) suggest, individuals are often well-informed that images within the traditional media have been digitally altered but are not often skilled at noticing since much photo-altering is subtle. Further, individuals may invest effort into ensuring their image altering is not obvious or detectable, striving to appear ‘unnaturally natural’.

Online social spaces do provide individuals with gratification - feeling connected with friends, being part of social happenings and receiving affirmation from others - otherwise few would be drawn towards them (Boyd, 2014). Some who are highly visible on such sites may also attain a form of ‘celebrity status’ online which transfers to their daily life. However, as Berriman and Thomson (2015) demonstrate, risks are inherent with putting the self ‘out there’ for the judgement of others. For example, with increased visibility comes an increased risk of receiving negative comments. Some will also be aware of the attention and affirmation that others receive on such sites and become frustrated or envious and disappointed with themselves as they don’t seem to be able to attain positive attention on such as scale (Fardouly et al., 2015; Perloff, 2014). Further, as with any social interaction, there is potential for identities to be ‘spoiled’ and this may be magnified online where there is a historicity to social interaction. People can look back on conversations that occurred months or even years ago and be provided with reminders of episodes that may usually be forgotten. There is also potential for individuals to become infamous as online content and pictures can ‘spread’ very quickly, being distributed to many people including those well known to the individual and those who they do not know at all (Berriman and Thomson, 2015). This can lead to further potential for body objectification if bodily images are viewed and circulated by many people as the body is considered an ‘object’ valued for entertainment (Manago et al., 2015). There is also some research examining cyber-bullying on social networking sites where appearance related bullying, often in relation to body size or shape, is most common (Berne et al., 2014; Cassidy et al., 2009; Mishna et al., 2010). This can include negative remarks directed at those classed by others as having deviant characteristics such as being ‘too fat’, ‘too skinny’, ‘too spotty’, or ‘too ugly’. Such remarks can be made more easily from behind a computer screen as people are both anonymous and do not empathise in terms of the hurt they may be causing others which they cannot directly see (Berne et al., 2014). Marwick and Boyd (2014) also claim that these remarks and retorts are often branded ‘drama’ by young people as opposed to bullying which, making the process seem more acceptable but no less hurtful.

### 2.4.2 Thinspiration and Fitspiration

As well as considering the social processes underlying people's engagements with online bodily culture, it is important to acknowledge the content of the body-related messages and images appearing online. Some such content does provide cause for concern. For example, research has explored the online prevalence of 'pro-ana'<sup>5</sup> websites, blogs and social media accounts (Borzekowski et al., 2010; Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015; Juarascio et al., 2010). These sites provide food restriction advice, pictures of very thin bodies, motivational messages and slogans and forums where people can talk to one another about anorexia and their experiences (figure 1). Here, anorexia is often distanced from medical definitions and remediation discourses but is instead promoted and celebrated as a lifestyle (Miah and Rich, 2008). Pro-ana content is also very visual, with pictures of emaciated bodies circulated as exemplars for others to aspire to, often accompanied by 'inspirational' slogans such as 'your stomach isn't grumbling, it's applauding,' 'nothing tastes as good as skinny feels,' or 'let your bones define the beauty of your body.' Such images and messages are often referred to as 'thinspiration' or 'thinspo' (thin inspiration) and were initially confined to pro-ana websites. However, as Thomas and Schaefer (2013) point out, they are now prominent on more mainstream sites, and social media in particular. Individuals can therefore follow or access social media accounts which relay advice on how to 'be' anorexic, share links to pro-ana websites and post pictures of skinny bodies and body parts, often searchable by 'hashtags' (figure 2). Hashtags, posted by those in the pro-ana community, can also intersect with everyday hashtags so that anyone searching for pictures of 'beauty' or other such terms may inadvertently unearth pro-ana messages (Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> Pro-ana is an abbreviation for pro-anorexia. The term 'Ana' also personifies anorexia so that 'Ana' is seen as a friend, a supporter or perhaps an enemy. 'She' is often paired with 'Mia', a personification of Bulimia, with a number of websites being both 'pro-ana' and 'pro-mia' in nature.

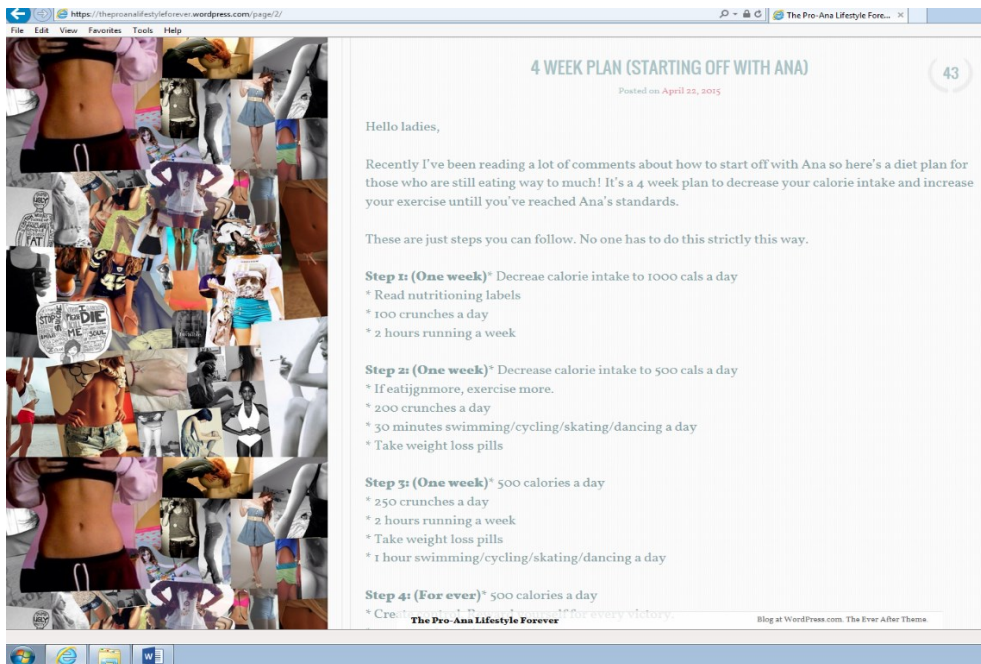


Figure 1. Example of a 'pro-ana' blog (L., 2015).

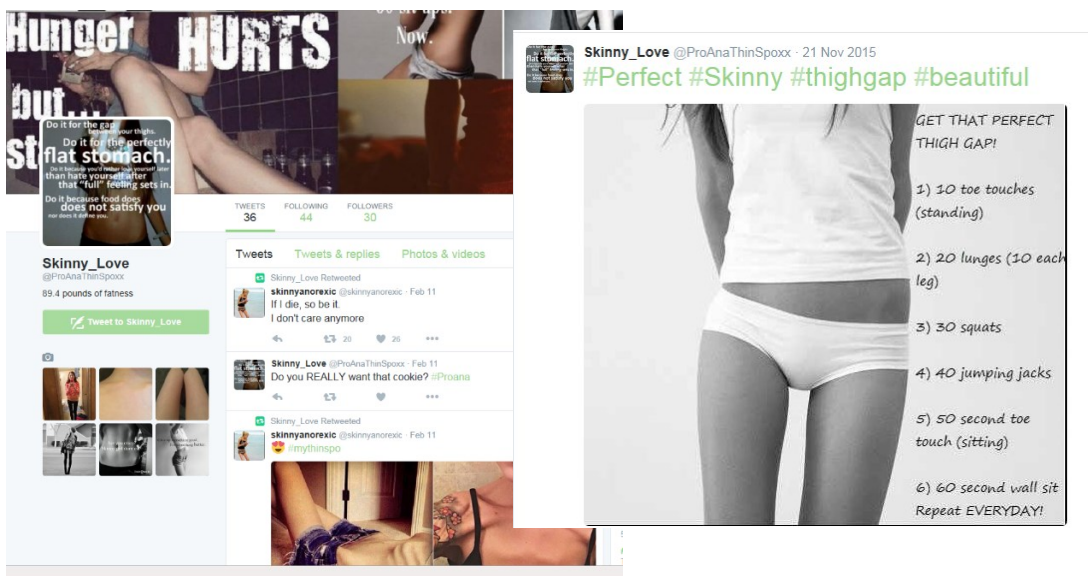


Figure 2. Examples of 'thinspirational' messages being shared via a pro-ana Twitter account (ProAnaThinSpoox, 2015).

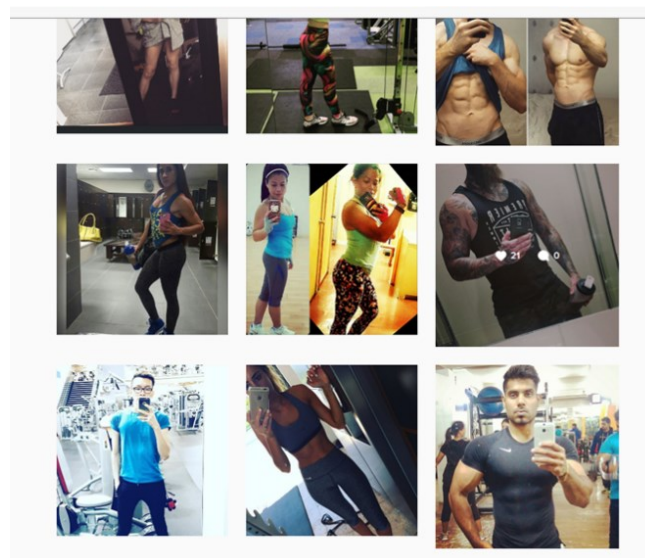
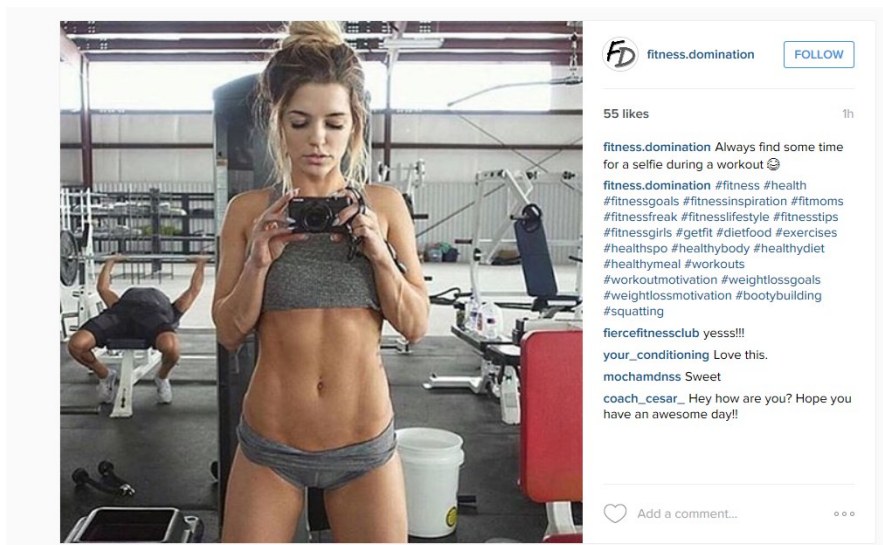
It should be noted that some research has explored the positive impacts of pro-ana sites, especially where users are provided with opportunities to seek social support from others going through similar difficulties to themselves (Juarascio et al., 2010). Those with

eating disorders often feel socially isolated, leading some to engage with online communities in order to receive support and empathy and avoid the stigmatisation associated with confiding in people known to them (Rich, 2006). Therefore, pro-ana sites can become places where people can talk more freely and openly about the issues they wish to discuss, within a community where they are listened to rather than silenced (Miah and Rich, 2008). Online forums can become part of a person's recovery and, as Miah and Rich (2008) warn, it is important not to simply label these sites, and the people engaging with them, as unreasonable or foolish. However, Miah and Rich (2008) concurrently warn that a relativistic stance should not be taken in relation to pro-ana communities and discourses – these discourses can be very harmful for young people's emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

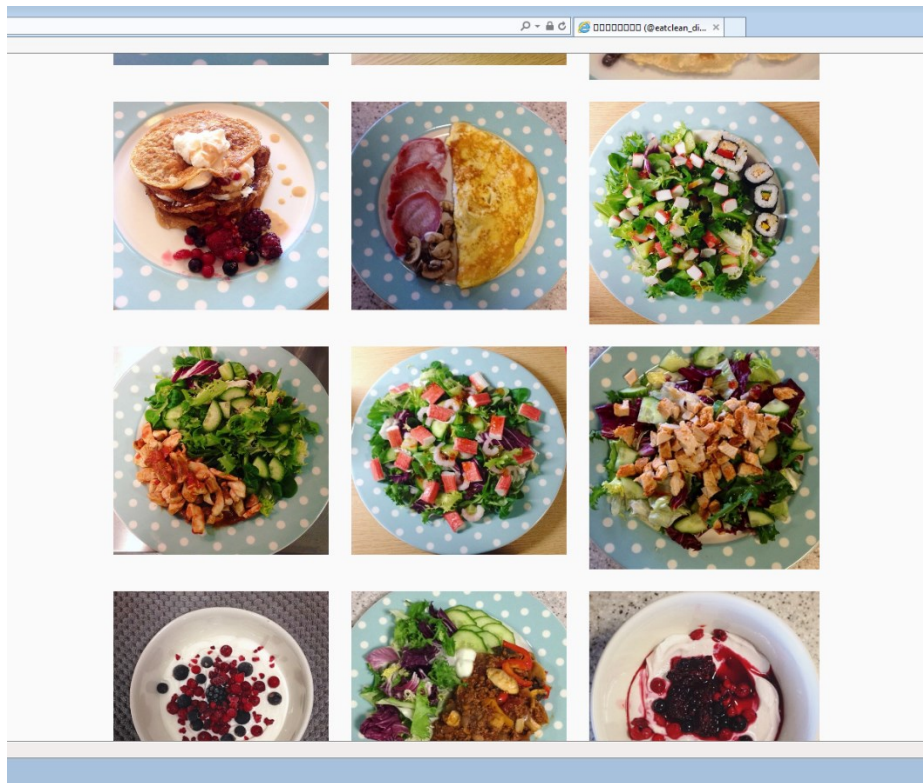
Thinspiration trends are also now being challenged by 'fitspirational' messages and images ('fitspo' or 'fit inspiration'), especially within online social spaces. For example, Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) discovered over 3.3 million images when searching for #fitspiration on Instagram. Fitspiration frames 'perfection' with images of 'fit', 'healthy' and 'strong' bodies, implied to be virtuous, empowered and attained through hard work and 'clean living'. This is often intended to inspire others to adopt honourable diet and exercise practices so that they can aspire to attain the same image for themselves but can also (be intended to) incite admiration and envy (Hodler and Lucas-Carr, 2015). Fitspiration content often adopts a tone of moral superiority so that images of virtuous bodies are posted alongside, for example, 'clean' vegan meals, nutritious smoothies, 'gym selfies' and pictures of early morning alarm clocks (Figures 3 and 4). Again, inspirational and motivational messages often accompany such images, further enhancing the moralistic tone (Figure 5). Therefore, whilst 'thinspo' is commonly regarded as dangerous, meaning there have been some efforts to ban such content online (Hasan, 2012), 'fitspo' is perceived by most as virtuous, positive and socially acceptable and therefore is spread widely and endorsed by many (Boepple and Thompson, 2016).

Within a 'fitspirational' culture, individuals often post pictures of their own bodies and bodily practices online. Rich and Miah (2014, p.301) suggest that within digital cultures, engagements with health [and fitness] are becoming "public facing, social experiences." Here people compliantly subject themselves to the gaze of others through disclosure and sharing whilst also monitoring and scrutinising themselves. Reinforcing this, self-tracking apps, devices and wearable technologies can provide further mechanisms for such surveillance since these can be used to log and analyse diet and exercise practices and personal metrics that can be compared with external norms and targets (Rich and Miah,

2014). For example, Depper and Howe (2016) exemplify how ‘sporty’, female adolescents considered it their everyday duty to use self-tracking apps to monitor and ‘improve’ themselves. These personal tracking apps were often linked to their Facebook accounts so they could share their progress and compete against, motivate and ‘inspire’ one another within more mainstream online avenues.



**Figure 3.** Gym selfies on Instagram. Top image: Fitness Domination (2016). Bottom images: Instagram Search (2016).

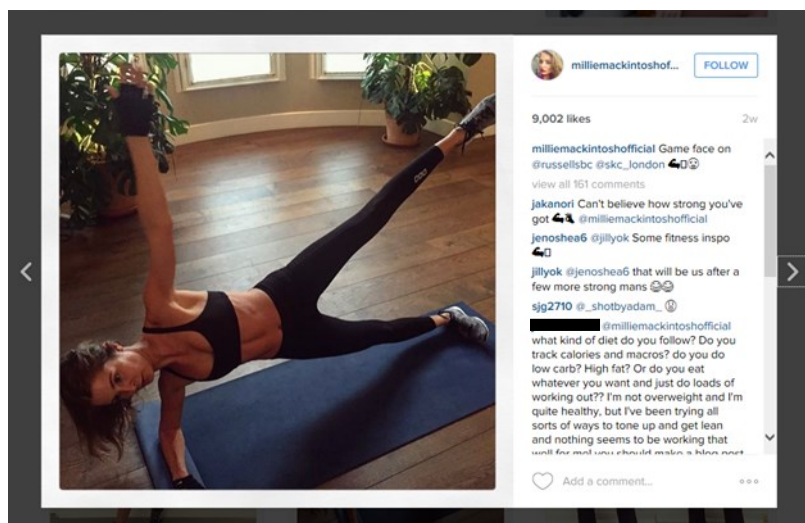


**Figure 4.** An Instagram account dedicated to sharing images of healthy meals (eatclean\_diary, 2016).



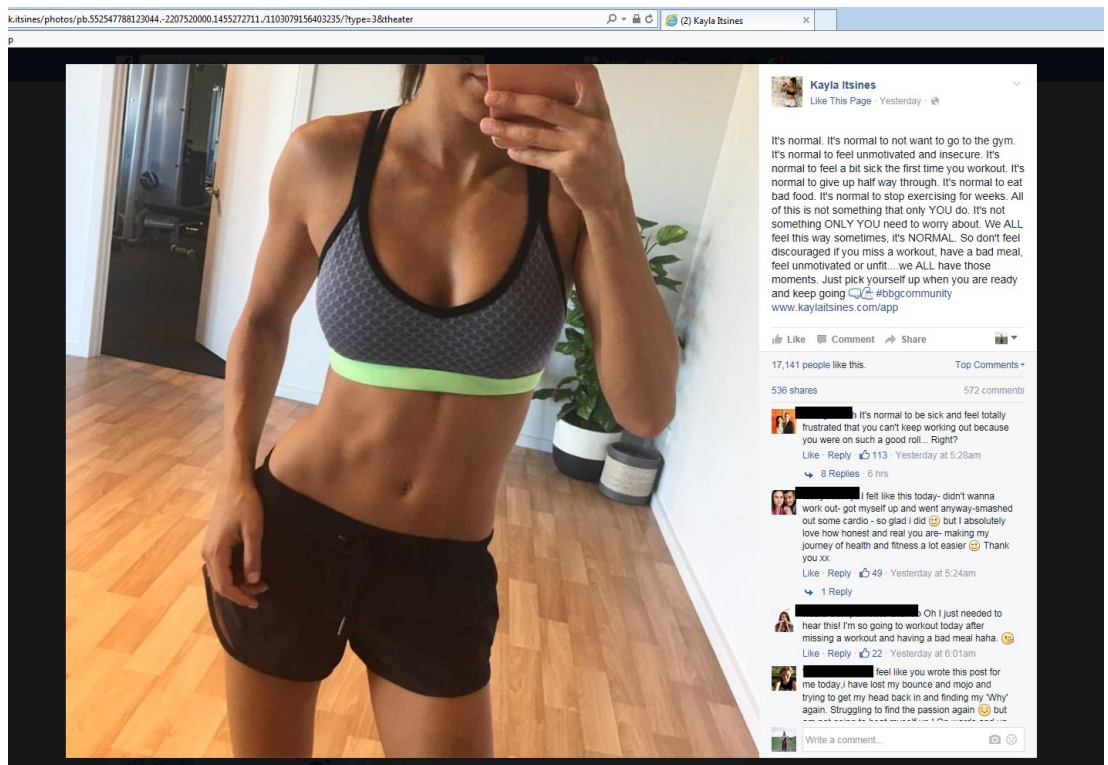
**Figure 5.** Pictures of fit-looking bodies accompanied by 'inspiring' text. Image on left accessed via Facebook (Carvell, 2015). Image on right accessed via Pinterest, see Fitness Cheerleader (2012).

As well as sharing their own information, some people will share images of others whose bodies and bodily practices they admire, such as sports stars or celebrities. Celebrities too post pictures of themselves in gym attire or working out for their millions of followers to see (figure 6). As such, ‘fit’ is currently trendy, as even demonstrated by the rise in popularity of fashionable ‘activewear’ (Horton et al., 2016). There has also been a rise in self-made fitness celebrities, exercise and diet gurus who post details and images of their own healthy lifestyles and bodies whilst providing advice to those who follow them (figure 7). Much of these messages are underlined by a ‘love yourself, take care of yourself’ discourse, emphasising the importance of self-confidence and inner happiness but are still mostly accompanied by pictures of ‘amazing’ or ‘bettered’ bodies.



**Figure 6.** ‘Celebrity fitspirations’, Millie Mackintosh (Mackintosh, 2016) and Ellie Goulding (Goulding, 2016).





**Figure 7.** Posts by self-made fitness advisor, Kayla Itsines, both shared on Facebook (Itsines, 2016).

It is therefore possible to argue that the ‘fitspo’ trend does not differ greatly from ‘thinspo’ in that it still carries with it a number of dangers to the holistic wellbeing of those engaging with it. For example, the ‘fit’ body often becomes a sexually objectified body as the phrase ‘strong is the new *sexy*’ implies. Pictures are circulated of topless male torsos and female bodies clothed in skimpy crop tops and tight leggings and the visual focus is still on the external appearance of the body, the body that looks healthy rather than the body that feels healthy (Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015). Halliwell et al. (2011) evidence how images of ‘empowered’ and sexually ‘emboldened’ individuals, who actively present themselves as objects of desire, can be just as damaging to those viewing them as images of those who are framed as being passively under the gaze of others. Further, advocated ‘fitspo’ ideals are still unattainable for many. Therefore, as individuals use such images to guide their scrutiny of themselves, feelings of guilt and pressures to continually self-monitor can manifest and this self-regulation is insidiously framed as aspirational, healthy and fun (Stover, 2014). Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) found Australian university students (female) experienced body dissatisfaction when making upward comparisons between their bodies which they perceived to be inferior and the fit-looking bodies they were viewing which they perceived superior. The authors suggest that future research should consider how adolescents, as prolific users of online social spaces, engage with such imagery. Palmer (2015) also found that some young men claimed not to scrutinise others’ bodies or make social comparisons offline but felt that this was only something they did within online social spaces, especially when viewing fitspirational content. Fitspirational discourse can also be exclusionary, reinforcing division amongst people into those who are dedicated, those who are lazy, those who have a right to be proud of their bodies and those who have not yet earned that right<sup>6</sup>. The discourse becomes love yourself with a disclaimer: only if you look like this. However, as fitspiration is framed as inherently good and is so widely endorsed, it undergoes less criticism than thinspiration does and can be harder for individuals to oppose (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This review of literature has provided a context for the present study by exploring the symbolic importance of the body within social life. The body is often considered to represent

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<sup>6</sup> As evidenced in quotes such as ‘obsessed is just the word the lazy use to describe the dedicated’ and ‘don’t stop until you are proud.’

the self. Here certain bodies and ‘selves’ are considered to be ‘ideal’, socially worthy and privileged whilst others are considered ‘tainted’, unworthy, marginalised and in need of improvement. Such imperatives can be strengthened when the body is also considered representative of health and an individual’s ability to care for themselves and responsibly contribute to society. Schooling is a large part of young people’s lives and the judgements that individuals make of each other and the ways they treat one another can impact upon young people’s experiences of the school environment. School social networks, imbued with power relations, can be difficult for some pupils to negotiate, with many feeling anxious about their bodies. The physical education environment may be particularly implicated within this, being a space where bodies are central and where health messages are strongly conveyed. However, schools are not the only social spaces that young people engage with, interact within, form meanings and scrutinise and judge one another. Online social spaces provide another influential arena of interaction where young people learn about health and the body. The literature within the final section of this chapter, 2.4, refers predominantly to people’s engagements with online social spaces and online messages relating to health, fitness and the body in general. Some of this research has focussed on adolescents but none of these studies or articles have considered the impact that young people’s engagements with online social spaces may have for their interactions within their everyday school social networks. Even more specifically, the potential implications of this for physical education have not been explored. It is clear that physical education is influential in shaping young people’s social relationships and perceptions around the body (Satina and Hultgren, 2001). It would seem that young people’s engagements with online social spaces may also be extremely influential to how they interact, live their lives and form meaning. Therefore, this research attempts to bridge a gap within the research by considering how online social spaces are affecting young people’s perceptions of the body and their body-related social actions within a school environment and within school social networks. Building upon this, this study also explores how all of this may influence their experiences of, and engagement with, physical education. Such a project provides a unique and very timely contribution to knowledge within an important field of study.

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical explanations**

### **3.1 Introduction**

An analysis of theoretical literature may help to explain more fully the research findings referenced within the previous chapter and will be important when discussing the findings of the present study. Macdonald et al. (2002) describe theories as integrated, cohesive and systematic explanations that can help us make sense of a diverse range of observable phenomena. Within this chapter, theoretical explanations constructed by Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu are analysed and their capacity to support inquiries within the social sciences relating to the body, health and physical education is evaluated. Shilling (2012) asserts that these theoretical works may be particularly useful in explaining how and why individuals regulate the self, the body and health and the effects that result. For example, Goffman's theorisations around the presentation of the self, identity and spoiled identities highlight how people consciously act to present themselves favourably to others, manage impressions and avoid stigmatisation (Goffman, 1959; 1963). Foucault's work around discourse, knowledge/power, technologies of power and technologies of the self illuminates the roles that relations of power play in shaping knowledge, the self and social actions (Foucault, 1977; 1980b; 1997). Finally, Bourdieu's work around social practice (habitus, capital and field) alerts us to the subconscious internalisation of wider social structures and individuals' conscious efforts to accumulate capital and gain distinction within various social fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Within this chapter, each of these theorists and their key conceptual ideas are introduced in turn. A theoretical framework for explaining research findings within a contemporary social context is later developed within chapter seven.

### **3.2 Erving Goffman**

Erving Goffman's main works were published between the mid-1950s and the early 1980s, at a time when there was an upsurge in interpretive approaches within sociology (Molnar and Kelly, 2013). Rather than analysing society on a macro level, Goffman concentrated on individuals and the micro detail of face-to-face interaction (Smith, 2006). His resulting work on the presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959) and stigma (Goffman, 1963) can be used to explain how the body functions as a symbolic generator of meaning within social interaction

and to analyse how individuals consciously work to create personal and social identities in order to be received positively by others.

### 3.2.1 Identity and presentation of the self

The concept of identity may provide a useful starting point for analysis. From a sociological perspective, identity refers to how individuals see and know themselves and one another (Jenkins, 1996; Giddens, 2009; Woodward, 1997). Goffman (1963) theorises that individuals possess a *social identity*, a *personal identity* and an *ego identity*. *Social identities* categorise people and their attributes in relation to others (Clarke, 2008). For example, particular profiles are often considered normal and permissible for certain individuals depending on social classifications such as gender, age, occupation, social class, and nationality. Because of this, it may be considered ‘normal’ for a female to have a petite body frame which is not overly muscular (Azzarito, 2009). Here, people may wish to identify themselves with others from certain social categories, concurrently dis-identifying themselves from those in different categories – for example, identifying as female and distancing themselves from anything that would identify them as masculine. Individuals possess both a virtual social identity, referring to what they and others think they ought to be, and an actual social identity, what they are. Goffman (1963) suggests that there will always be minor, and sometimes major, discrepancies between virtual and actual social identities. For example, a physical education teacher may be expected to be physically fit, outgoing and competitive so others may be surprised if their occupation is revealed and they do not fit this description (Spittle et al., 2012). Whilst social identities relate individuals to social categories, *personal identities* include the biography of social facts attached to a person which distinguish them as an individual. These can consist of a person’s name, fingerprint, information about where they were born and things they have done. Importantly, personal identities are not considered innate or to reside within people. As Goffman (1963, p.106) argues, personal identities can be attributed to a person before they are born and many years after they have died, even when they “have no feelings at all, let alone feelings of identity.” Goffman (1963) finally describes the *ego identity*, mostly to notify us that this is not what he refers to when discussing social and personal identities. The ego identity is “a subjective, reflexive matter that necessarily must be felt by the individual” (Goffman, 1963, p.106). Individuals can construct this ‘felt’ and experienced identity out of the same materials used to construct their social and personal identities but with much more liberty over what is fashioned (Goffman, 1963, p.129). As such, the ego identity is at the core of an individual’s being, making an

individual “different through and through, not merely identifiably different, from those who are like him [sic]” (Goffman, 1963, p.56).

Goffman (1963) focusses on the active role people play in identity construction. As such, identity is not entirely fixed nor given and people have choices when deciding how they want to be perceived. For example, when moving from one community to another, individuals have the capacity to adopt a completely different persona (Goffman, 1963). Similarly, some young people may seek opportunities to consciously ‘re-invent’ themselves when moving schools or transitioning between different stages in schooling (Warin and Muldoon, 2009). This active self-identity construction can be magnified within online social spaces where individuals often invest time and deliberation into projecting flattering representations of themselves – for example displaying carefully selected photographs and biographical information, taking time to ‘speak’ and interact in certain ways (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). However, Goffman’s (1959) work also evidences that identity construction is a process of joint negotiation occurring between an individual and others. In one sense, this implies a lack of agency and signals that identities can be imposed upon people to a certain extent. Individuals cannot completely control how others see them, talk about them and categorise them. Therefore, it is possible for people to feel out of control in relation to how others perceive and judge them and to feel ‘stuck’ with identities they do not want nor feel they deserve. However, in another sense, this stresses that individuals do play an active role in constructing other people’s identities as well as their own.

To clarify *how* identities are established and created, Goffman (1959) explains that people acquire information about others through sign-vehicles. Therefore, aspects of a person’s appearance and their body can be considered generators of meaning from which people can “glean clues” to inform their judgements about who that person is, what they are like and how worthy they are (Goffman, 1959, p.1). For example, the clothing, jewellery and make-up people wear; the size and shape of their bodies; the ways they move; and the gestures and expressions they utilise can all be associated with particular meanings that influence how they are socially categorised and labelled (Shilling, 2012). Such connotations are often consensual within society but are not necessarily fixed (Denzin, 1969). Therefore, Goffman (1963) highlights that symbols conveying social information can mean different things within different contexts and to different groups of people. For example, in some situations an anorexic body is considered a negative sign alluding to an emotionally unstable and irrational individual but in others it may be considered a ‘badge of honour’, signifying strong-willed beauty (Rich, 2006; Whitehead and Kurz, 2008). Goffman (1963) also

highlights that sign-vehicles are not always reliable. Therefore, a large physique, interpreted within a culture of healthism, may come to signify a gluttonous and lazy individual even when the person eats little and exercises regularly.

People can consciously manage and manipulate signs, symbols and their own activities when engaging in social interaction (Denzin, 1969; Goffman, 1959). In this sense, identities are performed. Goffman (1959) uses a dramaturgical analogy to explain that within the 'theatre' of life, individuals are continually aware of the presence of others, their 'audience', as they present themselves socially. Therefore, individuals play out numerous 'roles' and wear various 'masks' as they project the self that they would like to be and would like others to think that they are. For example, someone attempting to portray a healthy character may dress in fitness clothing, emphasising their toned body. They may also use 'props', perhaps carrying a green smoothie whilst they ensure to talk about their exercise activities. All of this becomes part of an individual's personal 'front' which consists of, for example, their physical appearance, their clothes, their biological sex, their size, shape and posture and the manner they adopt (Goffman, 1959). People can alter their front or aspects of their front from one performance to the next and, through doing this, have the opportunity to manipulate how their audience perceive them. When doing this they can build 'face', that is positive social value that they can claim for themselves based on their own and others' definitions of the situation (Goffman, 1967). Facework can be accompanied by positive emotional responses when an individual feels they had made a good showing for themselves, whether that be through their own perception of success or through their evaluation of other people's responses to them. Therefore, feelings of self-worth, self-satisfaction and self-acceptance are often extrinsically regulated as individuals monitor how others perceive and treat them. However, all of these efforts can be hazardous as it is important for individuals to convince others that they really are who they appear to be (Clarke, 2008). Since people also transmit meaning subconsciously and do not have complete control over their audiences' interpretations, social interaction is inherently risky – especially when an individual attempts to manage their self-presentation in front of many different audiences and across multiple contexts (Marwick and Boyd, 2011).

Despite the malleability implied above, people do not necessarily have complete freedom in relation to how they present themselves. Some aspects of a person's front can be relatively fixed and difficult to change. Further, 'fronts' are often previously established for people according to the roles they choose to play. For example, people can work to alter their body shape but this is not always easily, quickly or straightforwardly done. The body

influences the meaning an audience takes from a performance and the authenticity of the performance. Therefore, to genuinely play the part of a healthy, successful and responsible individual, a performer could be expected to possess a body aligning with a particular ideal (Wright et al., 2006). It may be harder for someone overweight to convince others that they look after their body than it would be for someone who conforms to being a 'normal' weight. Similarly to 'play' at being, for example, beautiful and popular, a teenage girl may have to wear her hair, make-up and clothes in a particular way and adopt a confident, outgoing and happy manner to conform to a pre-established social script. Goffman's work implies that individuals often purposefully aim to project an idealised impression to observers which is "close to the sacred centre of the common values in society" (Goffman, 1959, p.36). As this implies, people often aim to be viewed favourably by others through conforming to social and cultural norms (Clarke, 2008). Therefore, they are constrained to an extent by wider societal forces. Although Goffman's accounts focus on the minute details of social interaction, his theories also illustrate how wider social forces, norms and values influence the ways individuals monitor, manage and regulate their bodies (Molnar and Kelly, 2013).

### 3.2.2 Stigma and spoiled identities

Goffman's (1963) work around stigma can also be useful when exploring how various meanings around health and the body may tangibly affect individuals. People can become stigmatised when their actual and virtual identities are discrepant, when they are considered not to be as they 'should'. This can work to justify unfair, disrespectful and discriminatory treatment towards people, at times even rationalising their exclusion from social interaction. Therefore, a stigma is an attribute of a "less desirable kind," a "failing," "shortcoming," or "handicap" which in the extreme, can lead people to be considered "thoroughly bad, dangerous or weak" (Goffman, 1963, p.3). Goffman (1963) details three types of stigma: "abominations of the body," "blemishes of individual character," and "tribal stigmas." For example, by possessing an 'abnormal' body shape and by being 'too fat' or 'too thin', a person is doubly stigmatised with an apparent abomination of the body and blemish of character. Not only are they considered physically 'inept', they are also considered weak willed and uncontrolled or obsessive, needy and irrational (Rich, 2006; Wright et al., 2006). As Farrell (2011) states, being overweight usually spoils an individual's social identity, leading them to be discounted and viewed as tainted or as less of a human being. She also goes as far as to suggest that fatness can even be considered a tribal stigma in countries considered at the centre of the 'obesity epidemic' such as the United States. As Goffman



(1963) claims, a tribal stigma can be associated with a whole race, nation or religion so that all who are identified as being part of that grouping may be perceived in derogatory ways.

When discussing stigma, Goffman (1963) refers to 'normals', that is those who do not depart negatively from others' expectations. Most people in a position to 'pass' as normal will attempt to do so due to the "great rewards" this brings (Goffman, 1963, p.75). However, some will not be in a position to do so. Of those people, Goffman (1963) distinguishes between the discredited – those whose stigma is known or immediately evident - and the discreditable – those whose stigma is hidden from others. Goffman (1963, p.48) states that if a person's stigma is visible they are immediately discredited as "it is through our sense of sight that stigma of others most frequently becomes evident." For example, some extremely fat and thin people may be quickly discredited within social interaction as they cannot easily hide their stigma, except sometimes through the clothing they wear (Farrell, 2011). This visibility impacts on their identity at all times and may have an effect, albeit even a small consequence, on every social encounter they make so that they are not always easily received in social situations. Further, although certain attributes are discrediting in only some situations, there are others which are almost universally discrediting (Goffman, 1963). Being classed obese or extremely underweight may be two such stigmas that are discrediting, however subtly, in the majority of situations. As Shilling (2012) notes, great importance is placed on the body within cultures where beauty and health are largely emphasised. Here people can be potentially classed as failed societal members according to their appearance and corporeal management, meaning those who do not embody a satisfactory appearance must work harder for acceptance. Their appearance can also work to counteract the claim that their more positively received attributes have and can cause a wide range of associated imperfections to be imputed on them (Goffman, 1963). For example, negative perceptions towards a fat physical education teacher may overshadow their genuine ability to inspire and nurture their pupils as others may not consider them to be responsible enough to look after their own body and therefore incapable of aiding pupils to do so, regardless of their teaching skills (Webb et al., 2008).

Whilst the discredited manage tension within social interaction, the discreditable must manage information to limit people finding out about their stigma. Such information could lead to undesirable social consequences and reactions if revealed. At times, individuals may use 'disidentifiers' to conceal their stigma (Goffman, 1963). For example, someone suffering from anorexia may order a dish commonly perceived to be high-calorie when out for dinner to express a 'healthy' relationship with food or so that people do not scrutinise

their eating habits. Such an individual may be both discredited, due to their bodily appearance, and discreditable, based on the eating and exercise practices they hide from others (Byrant, 2011). Individuals can also hide stigma symbols that draw attention to their discrepant identity. For example, they may attempt to wear certain clothes to shape their physique or create a particular front using cosmetics. They may then feel exposed or uncomfortable when forced to wear unflattering and revealing clothing or when the front they have created with make-up or hair styling is spoiled (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002).

Goffman (1963) claims that although some people unrepentantly bear their stigma and are relatively untouched by their perceived 'failure', many stigmatised individuals are aware of not being fully accepted socially, even when told otherwise. Such individuals may internalise others' thoughts about them, shamefully agreeing that they fall short of what they should be whilst feeling they warrant disrespectful treatment. They may also self-isolate and withdraw from social relationships due to the pressure of being a discredited person in an unaccepting world. This can lead them to attempt to change themselves. For example, an overweight individual may feel that they must correct their 'failing' by embarking on a diet, exercising strenuously or having surgery to convert their body back to an unblemished state. Despair can therefore lead a stigmatised individual to become vulnerable (Goffman, 1963), for example, being at the mercy of diet companies and plastic surgeons who promise cures for their troubles. However, some can continue to be discredited even when they no longer possess the stigmatising attribute and may still carry their stigma with them to an extent – for example, being known as the person who used to be fat and did once lose control of their body (Goffman, 1963). More positively, discredited individuals can stave off negative social judgements by strategically mastering an area of activity ordinarily considered closed to them (Goffman, 1963). For example, an overweight individual may attempt to complete a marathon in order to stave off prejudice against them whilst a student who is physically competent and skilled at an activity within physical education may have their 'fatness' overlooked (Sykes and McPhail, 2008). However, such individuals may also feel obliged to remain aware of areas of conduct that other people do not need to consider since even "minor failings," usually ignored in others, can be considered a "direct expression of their stigmatised differentness" (Goffman, 1963, p.15). For example, an overweight person may not want to be seen eating a packet of crisps in public whereas 'normal weight' individuals may not think twice about doing this and their character may not be judged by it.

Despite the above, it is important to acknowledge Goffman's (1963) claim that individuals cannot just be separated into 'the normals' and 'the stigmatised'. When using

such terms, he does not refer to persons but points rather to perspectives or roles. For example, someone playing the role of the stigmatised in some situations may adopt the role of stigmatiser in others and people can even play both roles at once. Goffman (1963) suggests that everyone plays each role at some point in their lives or in some situations, although some do so to a greater extent and more often than others. This is because norms and expectations around social identities “constitute standards that almost everyone falls short at some stage in their life” (Goffman, 1963, p.128). With so many socially constructed ideals – relating to age, gender, race, ethnicity, appearance, occupation and many more – people can fail to meet expectations in many ways and therefore view themselves and others as inferior and unworthy across numerous aspects. Therefore, all individuals must manage both tension and information within social interaction as they appear before others and engage in impression management. Goffman (1959; 1963; 1967) provides detailed accounts as to how individuals do this and his theories are useful in explaining how pupils’ behaviours within schools may result from their attempts to create and maintain certain images of themselves. However, beyond stating that individuals want to be viewed and treated favourably, he does not give an extensive analysis of what people’s intentions and motivations are or where they have arisen from (Clarke, 2008). Alluding to an explanation of this, Byrant (2011) states that stigma arises from cultural standards that are usually linked to power within society. Therefore, turning to the theories of French philosopher Michael Foucault may offer the potential for an analytical consideration of how the self is regulated through power relations.

### **3.3 Michel Foucault**

Michel Foucault’s work centres upon the concepts of knowledge, power and discourse. Foucault argues that what counts as knowledge and truth are not fixed, nor are the means towards pursuing them. For example, his early work historically analyses how ‘madness’ has been differently defined throughout time – for instance as lunacy or more recently as a mental illness (Foucault, 1964). He also demonstrates how various explanations of madness have worked to exclude and even confine certain individuals, thereby illustrating the variable nature of knowledge and its associated consequences (Foucault, 1973). Foucault (1970) develops these ideas by exemplifying how largely unconscious systems of understanding, have changed significantly throughout history and in turn influenced how knowledge, truth and what can be conceivably said or done have been established. For instance, fortune telling which was considered a viable way of knowing in the renaissance era would not have been

regarded as ‘proper’ knowledge within the modern era where knowledge was to be acquired through rationality and reason (Gutting, 1989). Building upon this, Foucault (1972) explains how knowledge and power are intimately related. He analyses power, and its associated technologies or means of being exerted, by theorising how discipline and punishment have evolved from being overt and brutal to now being exercised more elusively through surveillance and self-regulation (Foucault, 1977). However, in his later work there is more of an emphasis on how individuals actively and reflexively construct the self, according to their own desires and their pursuits of happy and ethical lives (Foucault, 1985; 1986).

### 3.3.1 Power, knowledge and discourse

Foucault (1978) considers power to be ‘net-like’ or capillary-like, woven into and circulating in all relationships and at all societal levels - an omnipresent, dense web that is not localised at any specific point. As Foucault (1978) does not consider power to be something that can be possessed or acquired, he does not so much explore its origins but is more concerned with how it is utilised within relationships (Parker, 2003). He therefore, analyses power in terms of relationships that occur at both the macro and the micro levels of society. Here, individuals or groups can attempt to govern and manipulate others but these relations are not necessarily uni-directional and power can be generative as well as oppressive (Foucault, 1978). As Markula and Pringle (2006) note, this is different to a binary view of power or hegemonic theories around dominant and subordinate groups. For example, within a school power does not just function hierarchically. Teachers may influence pupils’ actions and thoughts to an extent but pupils will also be able to exert influence over their teachers. Power will be exercised within relationships between groups of pupils, teachers and pupils, teachers and senior management, the school and the state and so on. However, this does not mean that these power relations are necessarily equal. For example, a pupil who is being bullied may be able to exert some form of power over his or her bullies. In a sense, the bullies are the stronger players within this power relationship but they must respond to their victim and to the weaker player’s moves (Elias, 1978). There are countless ways in which individuals can respond to and negotiate the workings of power and there can come a time when the shift in power changes. As such, the aims of those exercising power within a relationship are not always realised (McDermott, 2012).

As well as exemplifying the complexity of power relations, Foucault (1980b) conceives power relations to invoke certain forms of knowledge, scientific understanding

and ‘truth’. As such, power and knowledge are intensely linked and this is exemplified within the concept of discourse. Discourses are sets of ‘truths’, inherently coupled with the networks of power embedded within society (Foucault, 1973). Markula and Pringle (2006) explain this metaphorically by stating that ‘truths’ or statements are the atoms and building blocks of discourse. These statements then merge together within particular social contexts and circulate through certain social relations, thereby imparting ways of knowing, speaking and acting (Atencio, 2006; Garrett and Wrench, 2012). For example, statements such as: ‘you can tell if a person is healthy by looking at them;’ ‘to be healthy, you must be slim;’ and ‘someone with a slim body is a responsible citizen’ could be considered some of the ‘atoms’ which comprise a healthism discourse. Knowing that ‘good people are healthy and healthy people are slim’ can affect how an individual views themselves and others, how they treat one another, how they act and interact and negotiate their positioning within the social world. Further, within networks of power, certain ‘truths’, are accepted more readily than others such as those perceived to have come from ‘experts’ or people in positions of authority. For example, knowledge around the body is often circulated by medical and science professionals or by ‘official’ means. Foucault (1978) uses the concept of ‘biopower’ to explain how specific discourses can be generated and applied to govern and regulate the conduct of people’s bodies across whole states or populations (Danaher et al. 2000). When biopower is exercised, it can be difficult for people to publically oppose dominant understandings, particularly when their own views may be classed as subjugated knowledge – that is naïve, uninformed and inferior (Foucault, 1980b). Discourses are therefore not simply reducible to language but are instead collections of practices, principles and meanings that underline and establish everything that can be seen, thought, understood and said and that shape perceptions of reality and guide social practice (Foucault, 1972; Markula and Pringle, 2006; Shilling, 2012).

### 3.3.2 Technologies of power

Foucault’s (1977) earlier work on disciplinary technologies of power helps to highlight how teachers and pupils can be governed by socially constructed knowledge around health and the body as it is produced and exercised within power relations. Technologies of power are methods or ‘techniques’ that are used to determine, control and manipulate the thoughts and actions of individuals and direct them towards a particular way of living (Danaher et al., 2000). Foucault (1977, p.25) theorises that technologies of power have an intimate grasp on

the body and are able to “invest it; mark it; train it; torture it; force it to carry out tasks; to perform ceremonies; to emit signs.” In other words, through these technologies, people and their bodies can be governed and punished. However, although this appears an extreme concept, technologies of power are often fairly subtle and invisible and are not often sustained by external force within contemporary society (Foucault, 1977; Markula and Pringle, 2006).

Technologies of power can include *classification, normalisation, surveillance* and *regulation* (Gore, 1998; Webb and Macdonald, 2007). Through *classification*, dominant discourses categorise and label individuals, therefore distinguishing between them (Halse et al., 2007). As such, people perceive themselves and others through the lens of scientific, expert and dominant knowledge which places them into certain groups - for example the obese, the depressed, the ugly, and the beautiful (Markula and Pringle, 2006). These classifications are contextual and can constrain or coerce people but can also be advantageous for others. For example, within a school setting a pupil defined as beautiful and popular may be afforded certain social privileges such as choosing who they want to have in their peer group, having influence over group decisions or deciding what clothes and fashions are acceptable. However, if they were to move school and enter new relations of power, their external image may not correspond to classifications of beautiful and popular within that context and they may lose some of those privileges. Classification can also result in dichotomies such as: the bad and the good, the sick and the healthy, the fat and the thin, the normal and the strange. These are often used to rationalise the ways in which people, who are considered to belong to certain groups, are controlled, disciplined, socially confined and secluded (Webb and Macdonald, 2007). There is some resemblance here to Goffman’s (1963) work around stigma. However, within Foucault’s work there is more of an explicit focus on how such categories and social practices emerge from and construct power relations. This encourages us to move beyond description and ask questions such as who is able to define such things, how is this done and under what circumstances.

There are further similarities between some of Goffman and Foucault’s ideas. For example, Foucault also argues that the potential for being classed ‘abnormal’ can be a particularly powerful regulator of people’s actions. Foucault (1977) highlights *normalisation* as a significant ‘instrument’ of power whereby certain beliefs, actions and ways of thinking are constructed as normal and acceptable within a system of gratification and punishment. For example, individuals may strive towards attaining the social and material rewards associated with looking or acting acceptably. These can include, for example, being able to

build strong social networks, attaining financial incentives and being emotionally satisfied. By avoiding ‘abnormality’ individuals may also avoid things such as humiliation, bullying and loss of earnings. Markula and Pringle (2006) indicate that this system encourages people to at least yearn to be normal. Normalisation can be a very strong technology of power in relation to the body. For example, within dominant body discourse, slim bodies become the socially constructed norm – the ‘average’ body which is medically, scientifically and socially approved. ‘Over’ and ‘under’ weight bodies are classed outside of this category therefore being considered abnormal or deviant (Webb et al., 2008). This abnormality is then punished through the potential for embarrassment, humiliation and shame which can arise even when people depart only slightly from how they ‘should’ be (Foucault, 1977). Within contemporary societies, some will avoid using these terms such as ‘fat’ in fear of causing hurt or offence and will consider ‘overweight’ a kinder, politer term. However, this could be problematic if it implies a person is abnormal. As Rothblum (2009) argues, the adjective ‘tall’ is often used to describe people but the term ‘over-tall’ is never used. Some also claim that making ‘fat’ a derogatory word re-affirms that fatness is ‘bad’ (McMichael, 2013). However, reclaiming such words as neutral descriptors is difficult due to the long history of prejudice and discrimination associated with them (Farrell, 2011).

Foucault (1977) theorises how normalisation is strengthened by *surveillance* and the ‘normalising gaze’. Again, there could be some similarity here between Goffman’s idea of the ‘audience’. However, Foucault’s work focuses more on how people are manipulated and controlled by such an audience and therefore focusses less on their own agency. To explain how this occurs, Foucault (1977; 1980a) uses the analogy of a panopticon prison design<sup>7</sup> and compares surveillance within this context to surveillance within wider society. A panopticon prison is designed so that prison guards are centred in position where they can constantly see inmates. However, inmates are unable to ascertain whether or not they are actually being watched. The premise is that the constant threat of being observed leads prisoners to regulate their own behaviour. Such surveillance is often used within contemporary societies. For example, closed circuit television (CCTV) is frequently used to deter criminal behaviour. Therefore, whilst behaviour *regulation* can be external, for example through physical punishment such as beating or flogging, as was more the case historically, these examples show that regulation is often more internalised and self-directed (Foucault, 1977). Systems of punishment and gratification can also be internalised. For example, in relation to the body,

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<sup>7</sup> The panopticon was a prison design originally envisaged by Jeremy Bentham and plans for this design were drawn up by commissioned architect Willey Reveley. For more information relating to Jeremy Bentham and these plans, see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/Bentham-Project/who/panopticon>.

individuals who are aware of their bodies being scrutinised by others often feel they must diet and exercise. However, they are not directly sanctioned, imprisoned or fined for being overweight. Instead they often ‘punish’ and ‘reward’ themselves for their own body work – going to the gym after a gluttonous weekend or treating themselves with a cake after a gruelling workout. As such, they discipline their own behaviours and this can be even more constraining as punishment is often most influential when self-generated (Shildrick, 1997).

Since people are aware of the rewards and punishments they may face if others see them being a certain way, surveillance becomes a form of discipline that keeps individuals aligned to social norms and ideals. As Foucault (1977) states, those who judge normality are present, or could be present, everywhere within society – everyone judges and observes one another. Foucault (1980a) acknowledges this when critiquing the panopticon prison analogy where only a few people in a position of power (i.e. the prison guards) observe the many whilst also being immune to surveillance themselves. People can be scrutinised from numerous angles: from peers, family, teachers, law enforcers, the government, big corporations and many more but not just from those they would consider to be ‘above’ them. Likewise, those in traditionally dominant positions of power are not unsusceptible to scrutiny and judgement, particularly in contemporary, media driven societies. However, they do perhaps have more control over censorship. Further, surveillance does not necessarily have to come from outside sources. Like regulation, surveillance can also become internalised as people observe and monitor their own behaviours and appearances to the extent that a person becomes their own “overseer... exerting this surveillance over, and against, himself [sic]” (Foucault, 1980a, p.155).

All of the above, does encourage us to think more critically about how people’s thoughts and actions may be manipulated and controlled, more so than Goffman’s work encourages us to do. It reads as if laced with scepticism and conspiracy. However, when asking questions such as who is exercising power, who is defining knowledge and who is doing the surveilling, it is important to remember that power can be exercised and discourses can be constructed even with no intention behind them. More specifically, they will rarely be traced back to a single source. Instead, various discourses and their associated social practices may be formed and shaped via a range of intentions and from a multitude of angles, gradually building, evolving and changing over time, authorless and not under the direct control of individuals. Of course, that is not to say that some individuals do not have more control over how these form than others do.



### 3.3.3 Technologies of the self

Markula (2003) criticises researchers who use Foucault's work without considering how power and governance might be resisted, particularly when acknowledging that power relations are multi-faceted and bi-directional. Individuals should not be viewed as powerless (Evans and Davies, 2004). For example, Foucault (1980a, p.163-164) explains that power is not always victorious since there are multiple forces at work and "possibilities of resistance and counter attack on either [every] side." Multiple 'knots' of resistance are located within all power relations (Foucault, 1978; Markula and Pringle, 2006). For instance, some individuals may be greatly governed by dominant healthism and ideal body discourse but others are not and will resist or attempt to resist the knowledge and power relations which comprise them (Johnson et al., 2013).

Wright et al. (2006) use Foucault's (1997) theorisations around 'technologies of the self' to explain why individuals actively negotiate and internalise discourses around health and the body and form the self in different ways. Technologies of the self are the practices individuals engage with to reach their desired state of being. For example, by using technologies of the self, individuals:

effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988, p.18).

According to this theory, individuals actively construct their own self using the discursive resources available to them (Garrett and Wrench, 2012). Here, the self is an effect of language, discourse and cultural sets of meanings which are negotiated within power relations. However, this does not imply passivity. Individuals adopt 'subject positions' within discourse and in doing so make decisions about which discourses to accept, how they are to be negotiated and which to reject (Baker, 2000). Some researchers suggest that resistance to dominant discourses and power relations is made possible through the exposure to multiple discourses and ways of being (Azzarito, 2009; Pringle and Pringle, 2012; Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010). Therefore, in order to free people from oppressive power relations and forms of knowledge, educators do not tell others what they must or should do but instead present them with a variety of forms of knowledge, particularly but not more so, that which is marginalised (Pringle, 2007).

### **3.4 Pierre Bourdieu**

The work of Pierre Bourdieu can add further dimensions to the theoretical contributions explained above. Like Goffman and Foucault, Bourdieu considered how various social forces impact on the self and the body, how people surrender to the judgement of others and how the body can be instrumental in the maintenance of social inequality (Shilling, 2012). Although Goffman and Foucault focussed on individuals' desires to be perceived 'normal', Bourdieu's work principally centred on the ideas of 'recognition' and 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 2008). Therefore, his work suggests that rather than wanting to 'blend in', individuals often strive to 'stand out' and distinguish themselves from others within social space and within hierarchical, yet multi-axial, social relations.

Bourdieu (1984, p.101) was interested in understanding social practice and to aid him in this task, he outlined the following equation:  $(\text{habitus} \times \text{capital}) + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ . Bourdieu (1984) asserts that social space can be metaphorically represented as a multi-dimensional geographical map where people are positioned and located according to the worth of their accumulated resources (capital). Therefore, people's social positions are mapped relative to others and social life is assumed to involve elements of competition. What capital is and how much value it is attributed will often depend on the social context and network of social relations that an individual operates in (field). As such, he considered people's actions to emerge from their negotiations of established social relationships and their attempts to acquire capital in order to be positioned more favourably within social space. However, individuals do this in different ways depending on their 'habitus', which consists of their own personal, yet socially learnt, dispositions. Since these dispositions are socially learnt, the habitus is also influenced by, and influences, the field. The equation, and particularly the concept of habitus, works to bridge a dichotomy of objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu, 1990; Kemp, 2010). Social thought and action can be conscious, deliberate and wilful, yet also constrained, and can involve unreflexive elements. The following section outlines in more depth the inter-related 'thinking tools' of habitus, capital and field.

#### **3.4.1 Habitus, capital and field**

Bourdieu (1984) claims that social practice partially stems from a person's habitus. The habitus is a durable "system of dispositions" that guides how an individual perceives, thinks and acts (Bourdieu, 2005, p.43). It therefore encompasses a person's tastes, beliefs, values,

character and nature – all of which shape the person they become and how they see the world. Bourdieu (1990a, p.63) also explains that the habitus is “the social game embodied.” It is not solely a mental construct but reveals itself externally in the way that people walk, talk, carry themselves and the physical practices that they engage in (Reay, 1995). Bourdieu terms the embodied aspects of a person’s habitus their ‘bodily hexis’ (Bourdieu, 1977; Jenkins, 1992). These everyday ways of being, perceiving and behaving are familiarised and taken-for-granted, often operating apart from conscious reflection as opposed to emerging from deliberate attempts to be a certain way. Nevertheless, these dispositions are not natural or inborn. They are acquired and socially learnt, a product of history and life experiences (Bourdieu, 2005). As Hay and Penney (2013) explain, the habitus is instilled in individuals through their social relationships and interactions with other people, groups and institutions. This means people’s actions, to an extent, reflect their socialisation and the wider social structures in their lives. Those who have followed similar paths in life or who have been brought up in the same social conditions, may have a unique yet common habitus and may think, act, move and see things in similar ways (Bourdieu, 2005). For example, a child brought up within a particular community may consciously and subconsciously learn certain ways of walking, speaking and viewing the world, which later become automatic and unreflexive. Their accent, how they phrase things, the ways that they move, their beliefs and opinions may remain with them for the rest of their lives and may have been very different had they been adopted and brought up in a different community. Similarly, a person’s social context may shape their approach to health practices. Their habitus will influence the types of food that they choose to eat and enjoy, the ways that they engage in physical activity, their attitude towards health professionals and their modes of leisure and relaxation. However, even people with very similar upbringings, for example siblings, can develop different tastes, perceptions and beliefs. Social life is very complex and no two people’s experiences and surroundings will ever be identical.

As well as being influenced by the socialised habitus, social practice is also shaped by conscious attempts to achieve distinction from others. Individuals can gain distinction and a more favourable position within social space by accumulating various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu (1986) defines capital as valued resources, which are instrumental due to their exchange value, and which can be manifested in various ways. He outlines several types of capital - economic, social and cultural. *Economic capital* includes financial resources such as monetary wealth and property; this can be both material and symbolic. *Social capital* relates to the number and value of social relationships that an individual establishes and the social groups that they are part of. Finally, *Cultural capital*

refers to things such as the education a person has, their knowledge, the way they speak and dress and the types of activities that they partake in - all of which can either increase or decrease their social status. It is also possible to acquire *physical capital* whereby corporeal practices and attributes assume symbolic and instrumental value. As such, the body can be paramount in positioning people within social fields, especially when people subtly compete against one another and frequently compare and contrast their own and each other's bodies (Hay and Penney, 2013; Hunter, 2004). Williams (2003) also asserts that the apparent health of the body can be considered a form of physical capital, whether that be in the potential that a healthy body has for accumulating economic capital through employment or whether that be the symbolic capital and prestige associated with having a healthy body. As Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates, capital is not only financial – symbolic capital can be converted into economic forms but can also exist apart from economic capital.

The exchange value of capital is important. For example, within schools, clothing, appearance and certain practices around the body are influential means by which a young person can either gain or lose distinction (Sandford and Rich, 2006). Here, symbolic physical and cultural capital can be converted to social capital. Therefore, a school pupil conforming to valued standards of beauty may gain status and prestige within social groupings, perhaps even being renowned or well known. They may also become popular and be readily accepted into friendship groups. The same pupil may be aware of the financial rewards that their 'ideal' appearance may reap, for example with regards to future employment and finances. However, they may require economic capital to convert to physical capital – needing money to buy fashionable clothing, cosmetics and so on. Again, as with Foucault, there is the implication here that certain ways of being lead to gratification and reward. However, Bourdieu's work adds a material dimension to explanations of social life that other theories perhaps lack. For example, Goffman (1959) stresses the active construction of identity. However, it is clear that people do not always have access to the resources to be just anyone they want to be. Further, Bourdieu (1984) evidences how even people's wants and desires and their modes of appreciating value can be influenced by their social surroundings, both past and present.

Individuals and groups are socially positioned and gain distinction according to how capital is defined, attributed value and distributed within a 'field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The field is a structured and bounded network of social positions and power relations, an arena of social interaction, practices and divisions (Jenkins, 1992; Hay and Penney, 2013). As this implies, the field is a site of constant struggles and social competition. People

move within and between the many fields throughout their lives. These can include fields of sport, fashion, politics, education and so on. For example, a teacher negotiates certain social relationships and may be positioned at a particular point within the field of education, which is structured in a specific way and within which particular ways of being are valued. In their spare time, they may play lead guitar in a rock band and will need to negotiate relationships and accumulate capital in a very different way in order to gain distinction according to the values and power structures within the fields of music and the arts. As another example, a slim, fit and beautiful body may be valued very highly within the field of fashion. Those with this body may make contacts with agents, be regarded highly by the public and earn money from modelling contracts. Designers may also know that if their clothes are seen on particular models their brand may be considered more sophisticated. However, within the field of medicine, an attractive body decorated with the latest fashions may be considered to symbolise someone who is not serious or who disproportionately asserts effort on their appearance rather than their job. To occupy a higher position in this particular field (medicine), the university or school a person attended or their skilled reputation and social capital may be more important than their perceived beauty. Such fields are structured by people over long periods of time and their historicity is important (Thomson, 2012). Therefore, definitions of capital and the social positioning of people can be somewhat established. Nevertheless, as individuals engage with a field they continually influence and change, however subtly, the field itself.

As well as being entwined with capital, the concept of field is also inseparable from the concept of habitus. As an individual is immersed within a field, their habitus continues to develop and they continue to be socialised by their social and cultural surroundings. Further, an individual's habitus influences how people engage with, and choose to immerse themselves within, various fields and sub-fields. For example, individuals may engage with different genres of music or sporting activities contingent with the tastes they have developed throughout their lives. They may also understand that being part of a specific field enables them to appear more 'cultured' but their habitus can enable or constrain them in gaining capital within, or access to, certain social arenas. Therefore, a person's habitus can also be considered a form of capital within and across fields. Some people gain distinction through the ways they habitually carry themselves, speak and move their bodies, through the beliefs and perceptions they hold, whilst others may be looked down upon and socially relegated for the same reasons. For example, within the arts, a person's accent, values and poise may lead them to be respected as they engage with classical music but mocked when attempting to immerse themselves within a rap and hip-hop setting and vice versa. Therefore, an individual

can appear out of place, like a ‘pretender’, within certain fields. An obvious example of this would be the ‘parvenu’ who has acquired ‘new money’ and therefore has the economic capital, but not the social or cultural capital needed to be respected within the fields that the bourgeoisie move in (Bourdieu, 1984). Since everything is mediated by the habitus, an individual’s habitus also influences how they perceive the workings of a field and influences how they appraise capital within it. For example, a group of school pupils may all engage with the same activities within the same physical education setting but each pupil will perceive and value such activities in sometimes slightly, and sometimes very, different ways.

Within social fields, various power struggles and tensions continually arise over social positions and value definitions – who occupies powerful positions, who controls definitions of capital and what these definitions of capital are. Physical capital often has a high exchange value within physical education and the informal social networks of schools. For example, a healthy looking body, a body which can move skilfully and a physically fit body may help a pupil to achieve higher assessment grades, more respect from their teachers, and acceptance from their peers (Hay and Penney, 2013). However, there is more to this than physical capital being valued per se. What counts as physical capital and what types of physical capital are desirable also needs defined and people may not necessarily be in agreement around what makes a healthy body or a skilled body or which is more important. However, there are certain groups and individuals who have a degree of control over various fields associated with the body including ‘body experts’ such as doctors, those occupying high positions within the media and fashion, and physical educators (Shilling, 2012). Each play a part in labelling particular ways of managing, regulating and presenting the body as acceptable and valuable. Bourdieu (1990b, p.66) uses the term “illusio” to explain how those in a favourable social position often wish to maintain the structure of the field and keep the definitions of capital as they are. They therefore would wish to maintain the “doxa,” that is the taken-for-granted beliefs and presuppositions within a field. However, this does not only occur through formal or institutional means. Hunter (2004) exemplifies this empirically by illustrating how ‘good’ students are defined within a physical education class and evidencing how ‘good’ students themselves strive to ensure this definition of good is maintained. Therefore, if a powerful peer group maintain their distinction within a school through their sporting ability, they may endeavour to ensure that certain sports remain high status activities. Part of this may involve ridiculing those who contest their dominance such as those who achieve within different sporting activities or other avenues such as music and art.

Power struggles within social fields can be high stakes contests. This is because the accumulation of valued capital can afford people with opportunities to create situations that are favourable for them. However, people may be more likely to engage in power struggles with those who they perceive to be within their own ‘class fraction’ - those who they consider to be like them and to be within their own league. Individuals attempt to distance themselves from such competitors since the people who are the closest to them represent “the greatest threat” (Bourdieu, 1984, p.479). These may also be the battles that such individuals have more chance of winning and have more chance of making gains, rather than losses, in distinction. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) claim, participants within a field:

Constantly work to differentiate themselves from their *closest rivals* in order to *reduce competition* and to establish *a monopoly over a particular subsector* of the field (p.100) [emphasis added].

Therefore, individuals may not bother competing against those they consider to be far ‘above’ them, for example professional sport stars, or those far ‘beneath’ them, that is those who do not threaten their dominance. A person who has a “sense of one’s place” may also understand that it is not ‘their place’ to challenge the more socially dominant (Bourdieu, 1984, p.466). Further, they may understand that challenging the less dominant may not provide them with gains that are worth their effort. However, an individual may still ruthlessly ridicule and compete against those they consider far ‘beneath’ them if they think doing so will make themselves look good and elevate their own social status. Bourdieu’s (1984) work implies that individuals can become aware of how they are socially classified in relation to one another. However, his work also shows that social classification does not only emerge through explicit means or through language but that it becomes tacitly evident through practical knowledge of the social ‘game’.

Engagements in power struggles can be subtle. Like Foucault, Bourdieu (1991) claimed that power is not always exerted explicitly or through brute force. Further, like Goffman, Bourdieu (1991) focussed on the symbolic nature of social life, asserting that power is often exerted via symbolic means. This means that the exercise of power can have an air of invisibility about it as it often rests on foundations of shared belief and therefore is “endowed with a kind of legitimacy that it would not otherwise have” (Thompson, 1991, p.23). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explain how people can often be subject to ‘symbolic violence’ without it being recognised as such. For example, someone can post an unflattering picture of a friend on a social networking site, captioned with a complementary comment, despite knowing that the picture is unflattering. Cruelty here can be intended but hidden

under an apparent gesture of kindness. Even those exercising such power may not wish to realise what it is they are doing, preferring to tell themselves that their practices are sincere (Bourdieu, 1991). Those at the receiving end of symbolic violence, who do recognise that they are being treated poorly, can find it difficult to protest without appearing over-sensitive or irrational. However, in most cases they are complicit in agreeing in the legitimacy of such practice in that they accept the world as it is, often unconsciously (Bourdieu, 2001). This can even be evident in their deep wants and desires, their dispositions and tastes. For example, an individual with an ‘undesirable’ body shape may wish to change their body to receive social approval or avoid negative social outcomes. However, through years of socialisation, they may also feel genuinely repulsed by their own body, a body which does not align with their acquired tastes. As such, they do not value their own body within the “schemes of perception and appreciation” which comprise their habitus (Bourdieu, 2001, p.37).

Bourdieu (1990b, p.60-61) theorises that the habitus often reproduces social structures as it:

tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change ... by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information.

For example, a male individual socialised into favouring and embodying typically masculine traits may find it difficult to accept anyone telling him that men should behave differently. The habitus and field influence one another cyclically so that one often reproduces the others. Since individuals often adopt the values of the fields they are situated within and see the world through the schemes of perceptions and appreciation they have developed according to such values, they do not often question the dominant order of things. As such, the habitus could be interpreted as being fairly deterministic and relatively fixed. However, Bourdieu (2005, p.45) also states that “dispositions are long lasting... but they are not eternal.” Despite being difficult to change, the habitus can be altered through the processes of “awareness” and “pedagogic effort.” People can consciously reflect upon their own dispositions and social situations. For example, someone brought up surrounded by media messages encouraging them to view health as a physical construct, may in later life be exposed to messages which contradict that view. They may then consciously try to teach themselves new ways of engaging with their eating and physical activity habits, for example focussing on exercising for enjoyment and intrinsic pleasure rather than for calorie burning. Thorpe (2009) suggests that individuals become more conscious of their habitus and are able to self-reflect when moving across new and unfamiliar situations or where there is misalignment and tension between the habitus and the context a person is operating in. For



example, someone who has long linked the ideal body to notions of happiness and success, may find that this outlook is called into question when they begin working in a school for pupils with severe physical impairments. As such, meanings associated with the body and established ways of thinking about the self can be disrupted (Shilling, 2012). Lee and Macdonald (2010) suggest that because the habitus is a 'structuring structure', young people who are aided to change the ways that they view and relate to the body, can pass on to future generations more positive ways of perceiving the body that do not rely on it being a metaphor for health. However, Bourdieu (2001, p.41-42) also explains how awareness and reflection alone will always be insufficient here since real transformation of social life "cannot be reduced to a simple conversation of consciousness and wills." There is more to social transformation than becoming "enlightened" to injustice, and radical change will only occur when wider social structures and conditions are also transformed. That is those social conditions that influence people's dispositions and desires - the conditions that have very real consequences for people who negotiate them as they live their everyday lives.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced theoretical literature, which may help to explain some findings of the present study. The theoretical works of Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have been explored, compared and contrasted and contextualised within a study aiming to explain young people's thoughts and social practices around the body. These works may prove very useful when attempting to ascertain why young people act and relate to one another in certain ways and within certain situations and when explaining how young people come to understand and learn about health and the body. However, whilst these theoretical contributions are insightful, they are speculative assertions based on the theorists' own observations or experiences of the social world. When considering their claims, we may ask: are these theoretical contributions valid? Can we ever know if they are? Are these explanations able to say anything with certainty? Can these explanations be applied to unique situations within the social world? And importantly, what is the purpose of attempting to explain and theorise social life? With these questions in mind, the following chapter argues that such theoretical contributions can be strengthened and made more useful when interpreted alongside a critical realist philosophical perspective.

## **Chapter Four: Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Research inquiries and methods of inquiry are always informed by ontological and epistemological assumptions (Cohen et al., 2011). Ontological assumptions concern the nature of reality. All researchers conduct research with a conviction of what reality is and with beliefs around the essence of what they study. These convictions inform their principles around how that reality can be known and feasibly investigated and influence their beliefs regarding the purpose of research (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Accordingly, assumptions around the nature of reality and knowledge also inform general methodological considerations, in turn informing what researchers specifically do when conducting their investigations (Cohen et al., 2011).

Certain ontological and epistemological approaches have long prevailed within the social sciences and been associated with particular research methodologies. The very study of social life began to formally emerge during the period of the enlightenment, within a context where rationality, reason and objectivity were perceived to take precedence (Swingewood, 2000). Here, those such as Aguste Comte (sometimes considered one of the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology) argued that social life was “subject to natural invariable laws, the discovery of which is the object of investigation” (cited in Goldthorpe, 1985, p.31). Within a positivist vision, social phenomena were perceived similarly to natural phenomena and social reality was considered an external ‘thing’ that acted upon people so that they responded deterministically. Therefore, social reality was to be examined objectively, limiting any confounding variables or researcher attachment, in order to uncover general laws and causal relationships (Cuff et al., 1979; Durkheim 1897/1951). Within an approach like this, quantitative methods, used to generate statistical or numerical analyses, would often be favoured. In contrast, others considered reality to be created within, and from, people’s minds (Schutz, 1932/1967; Simmel, 1892/1977; Weber 1920/1947). Building upon this perspective, it is argued that the object of study itself within the social sciences (social life) cannot be separated from those who create it, comprise it and are influenced by it (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Swingewood, 2000). This encompasses the claim that reality can only be known subjectively and the assertion that the construction and interpretation of meaning is key to any study of social life. Those working within this interpretative vision would often

rely upon qualitative methods of investigation. However, Bryman (2010, p.47) reminds us that:

The connections between [a certain] epistemology and [a certain] ontology, on the one hand, and [a certain] research method, on the other, are best thought of as tendencies rather than as definitive connections.

This chapter explores the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this present thesis and that have informed all phases of this study. Whilst the study has evolved and changed over time, the following ontological and epistemological assumptions have remained constant. The chapter proposes that critical realism is an appropriate philosophical perspective through which to view the social world. Critical realism is a philosophical approach to both the natural and social sciences (Bhaskar, 1975; 1979). From a critical realist perspective, an external reality is considered to exist but knowledge of that reality is regarded as socially constructed. Rational judgement between knowledge claims is presumed possible. Therefore, the perspective centres around three main tenets: ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality. Critical realism also holds to the assertion that *both* the natural and social worlds are driven by causal processes (Elder-Vass, 2012). Each of these features of critical realism will now be considered alongside an outline of what critical realism can add to studies around health, the body and physical education.

## **4.2 Ontological realism**

Realist philosophy generally asserts that an objective reality exists independently of human perception. However, within critical realism, reality is considered to be stratified, composing of three domains: the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar, 1975). The empirical aspect of reality refers to the realm of perception and experience. This encompasses people's experiences of events or entities within the natural and social worlds, through their senses and thought processes. For example, it is possible *to see* what the body looks like, *to feel* pain, *to engage* in a conversation, *to experience* being bullied or being loved, *to read, interpret and analyse* curriculum documentation and so on. How people experience and take meaning from such things will always be subjective and socially influenced as alluded to in the previous chapter through Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus. However, just because an experience is subjective, it is not any less real. Therefore, whilst our experiences are relative, they are still given ontological status within a critical realist philosophy. This assertion is useful when addressing issues around the body. For instance, it makes it possible

to state that there is real emotional distress and pain associated with, for example, social exclusion and stigmatisation. As Wright (2011) asserts, it is implausible to reduce the experiences of human suffering, such as the emotions a child feels when they are being bullied for their bodily appearance, as being abstract social constructions.

Each of the subjective experiences exemplified above are of something. Therefore, the actual domain of reality encompasses all that *can be* experienced (Sayer, 2000). This includes all entities, events and happenings that occur within the natural and social worlds - such as the birth of a child, signals being transmitted to the brain via the nervous system, a social interaction, an individual crying and the creation of a religious building. Therefore, the actual domain of reality can include that which is material and immaterial. For example, although it may seem obvious that the human body is real in its material form, we could also assert that representations of the human body in cyberspace and the virtual world are just as real and should not be ontologically relegated (Rich and Miah, 2009). The actual domain can only be accessed indirectly through the empirical domain or through theorisation and is not necessarily confined to all that *is* experienced. Humans are often oblivious to, or unable to access, much of which the actual domain of reality incorporates. However, all such happenings, processes and entities are given ontological status even though people may not see, feel or have knowledge of them (Wright, 2016). As Danermark et al. (2002) state, it is an error to limit our explanations of reality only to what we can see, hear or feel - there is more to reality than that. For example, in the natural world cancer cells can grow and develop within a person's body without being felt or detected. These cancer cells are very real despite not being known. In the social world, a researcher may miss the subtleties of a social interaction but that does not mean these subtleties did not occur or were not important. To add to the claim that some things exist and occur whether or not we are aware of them, these things can also exist independently of how we define or understand them. For example, how a cancer is named, categorised, theorised and explained by humans may not entirely reflect what is happening within a person's body yet a process is still occurring regardless. Additionally, although scientific categories such as 'obese', and 'over', and 'under' weight are created by humans, this does not mean that larger or smaller bodies do not exist outside of language (Patterson and Johnston, 2012). Likewise, within the social world, people may interact with each other and there may be many competing ways of describing, explaining and interpreting that interaction. An interaction could be theorised as a fight, as people messing about, as an attempt to acquire social capital or as someone acting unfairly. These explanations can, but do not *necessarily*, change that actual interaction itself. However, these explanations may influence how people reflect upon the interaction or how that

interaction is interpreted at the time, which in turn influence future interaction. As Maxwell (2012) explains, there are numerous ways in which the world can be interpreted and understood so one interaction can simultaneously mean a number of different things to different people. However, regardless of how the interaction is perceived, people are still interpreting the same occurrence, albeit in their own subjective ways.

To build upon the above, critical realism proposes a ‘deep’ ontology, suggesting there is more to reality than what is known or perceived but also that there is more to reality than what happens or what is tangible (Bhaskar, 1975, p13). Therefore, there is a third domain of reality, the real, which encompasses all that exists. This includes everything that has the *potential* to cause events to happen within the actual domain of reality (Clark, 2008). This means that there are aspects of reality that can never be accessed directly and which must always be theorised, working backwards from the empirical domain of reality. An example of this from the natural world is seen in the concept of gravity – human beings cannot see or touch gravity, they can only experience its effects and the events it causes (Archer, 2004). Likewise, in the social world, concepts such as patriarchy, class, stigma and power cannot be directly seen but their effects are experienced within social interaction and social organisation (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2010). For example, an educational researcher may notice that some pupils are using better equipment than others, that a teacher is spending more time talking to a certain group, that the building is designed so that there are few places to hide or that a pupil is laughing at another's demonstration. They may *theorise* that underlying these actual events are structures of class, healthism, hegemony or struggles to acquire capital. It is not these concepts in themselves that the researcher or the participants are witnessing but the events that have emerged from these structures and processes.

The previous chapter outlined the somewhat different interpretations that Goffman, Foucault and Bourdieu could provide to explain how and why humans regulate their bodies within social situations. However, their theories can each be used to refer to the same events, happenings and underlying processes all of which are real, which exist and which occur regardless of how they are explained. Since we can only access the empirical domain of reality, much of our knowledge is gained through theorisation. Habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), stigma (Goffman, 1963) and technologies of power (Foucault, 1977) are socially constructed concepts – they cannot be touched or directly seen. They are abstract ideas based on meaning and interpretation. However, their resulting events can be perceived. We can assert that the habitus, stigma and technologies of power are *real* in the sense that they cause certain events and social occurrences which we experience. Clearly, theorisations of what they are may not

be completely, or at all, correct but there is still *something* happening, and *something* underlying what we are trying to explain.

### **4.3 Epistemological relativism**

The stratification of reality implies that there is more to reality than what humans directly experience. As such, critical realism also centres upon the tenet of epistemological relativism (Bhaskar, 1975). Here knowledge is considered fallible, meaning that it does not necessarily emulate that which it is about. The perspective, therefore, contrasts with naïve versions of realism where an unproblematic and direct mirroring is assumed between knowledge and reality and where epistemology (what is known) is equated with ontology (what is real) (Bhaskar, 1975). A review of literature detailed some ways in which the remnants of naïve realism are still evident in current debates around health and the body, particularly those relating to obesity (Campos et al., 2006; Gard, 2011; Patterson and Johnston, 2012). For example, Gard and Wright (2005) argue that governments and the media often present scientific findings as ‘facts’, true and correct knowledge that cannot be questioned. However, such ‘facts’ can be constantly revised, changed and even disproven as new findings and theorisations are developed. Further, whilst knowledge can distort perceptions of reality due to human error, the production of knowledge is very much subject to power relations within society (Foucault, 1980b). Knowledge can be constructed to both intentionally and unintentionally manipulate and control others. However, this does not necessarily mean that all knowledge construction should be considered sinister. As Maxwell (2012) explains, knowledge does not necessarily *reflect* reality but it does often *refer* to it. Whilst knowledge is inherently linked to power, there can be sincere, or relatively sincere, attempts to construct knowledge. Within such attempts, reality will also enable and constrain the knowledge that is produced. Patterson and Johnston (2012) argue that knowledge is socially constructed but not exclusively so. It is often constructed in relation to prompts, which humans notice and respond to. For example, knowledge around the concept of gravity would be different if unsupported objects did not fall to the earth at a particular speed. Likewise, Goffman’s (1959) theory of impression management would not exist as it does if he had not witnessed humans altering their behaviour around different people and in different places.

The idea that reality can only be accessed via the empirical domain also implies that humans come to know through subjective and inter-subjective experience. Human thought processes are mediated by language. Therefore, human experiences are often interpreted and

communicated through socially constructed frames of reference. However, working from a critical realist perspective also encourages us to move beyond a mind/body dualism and take our embodied natures into account (Bury, 1986; Williams, 2003). As New (2005) suggests, within a critical realist perspective, the body *does* exist. It is both active and causally powerful and can enable and constrain us. For example, acknowledging this allows for claims that the physical and psychological pain and suffering accompanying individuals' bodily experiences are important to how people experience and know the world (Williams, 1999). Whilst an individual may wish to lose weight to avoid stigmatisation, to accumulate social capital or because they feel coerced into doing so through surveillance, that individual may also be experiencing tangible discomfort associated with being overweight, which may influence their decision. As such, there are processes that occur within our fleshy bodies that we may be unaware of, or that we feel and perceive, and these can influence how we think and what we do just as our engagement with the social world can too (Satina and Hultgren, 2001; Windram-Geddes, 2013). Similarly, from this perspective, embodied or practical knowledge can be valued in the same ways in which verbalised knowledge is. For example, an individual can construct knowledge through the way that their body feels and through their intuitive senses as well as through discourse and language. In fact, from a critical realist perspective, all knowledge and thought processes could be considered to emerge from the body. For example, emerging from, but very importantly not being reducible to, physical, chemical and biological matter (Sayer, 2000).

#### **4.4 Judgemental rationality**

Relativistic approaches to knowledge are very prominent within the social sciences and this has led some to argue that quests for true knowledge have been somewhat abandoned (Williams, 2003). There is danger that such approaches could result in an 'abyss of relativism' where no points of view can be considered more good, bad, right or wrong than any other – where 'anything goes' (Bury, 1986; Williams, 1999). However, whilst critical realism embraces epistemological relativism, the perspective also argues for judgemental rationality. Working from a critical realist perspective, Sayer (2000) argues that humans can use reason and logic to make judgements as to what knowledge most closely resembles the reality they are experiencing. Therefore, although all knowledge claims are fallible, they do not need to be accepted as equally reliable. For example, when engaging in research from a critical realist perspective, a researcher needs to be aware that there is a reality to which the knowledge constructed within the research process refers. Therefore, *attempts* must be made

to construct knowledge, explanations and theorisations that are close to that reality. Although such knowledge will be partial, prone to error, influenced by bias and will never reflect reality entirely, the researcher should not adopt a completely relativist stance and abandon the aim of constructing knowledge which is as true and accurate as possible.

Critical realism also asserts that the principle of judgemental rationality can be applied to ethical and axiological claims (Walsh and Evans, 2014). For example, if all judgments were considered relative then the claims made that the health and wellbeing of children is important would be no more valid than a statement saying that social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing is insignificant and inconsequential. There is also, therefore, a value base to critical realism where research is underpinned by a goal to emancipate people from oppression. The principle of judgemental rationality is especially important in relation to teaching and learning, which are very value-laden practices (Shipway, 2011). In one sense, teachers can attempt to expose young people to as many competing discourses around the body as possible, without any being promoted as better or worse than others (Azzarito, 2009; Webb and Quennerstedt, 2010; Pringle and Pringle, 2012). However, even here some schools of thought will be marginalised through their omission. Further, we could debate whether or not it would be ethical to teach a child that self-starvation or smoking countless cigarettes may be no less damaging to physical wellbeing than eating vegetables or that offering a classmate help to learn a skill is no better than hitting them in anger. Shipway (2011) suggests that we can encourage pupils to explore and question the social construction of knowledge but that we should also foster their ability and desire to discern between different sets of truth, their worth and their validity. Therefore, the goal of an educator becomes to help people negotiate a multiplicity of complex knowledge claims, opinions and beliefs whilst fostering a commitment to attaining the most accurate representation of reality as possible (Emami and Riordan, 1998; Shipway, 2011). Students are taught that although there are many different points of view to choose from or create, not all are equally good (Shipway, 2011).

#### **4.5 Causation and emergence within an open system**

As well as being based around ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality, the concept of cause and effect is fundamental to critical realism. Within a critical realist account of reality, *both* the natural and social worlds are considered to be driven by causal processes. Therefore, much research within the perspective works to



trace causality between the empirical, actual and real domains of reality (Clark, 2008; Elder-Vass, 2012). Within the social sciences, there has been dissatisfaction with attempts to use causal laws to explain the complexity and unpredictability of social life (Owens, 2011). However, simplistic, regular and deterministic relations between cause and effect are not advocated within critical realism. Instead, all happenings are considered to emerge from numerous and contingent causes (Sayer, 2000; Williams, 2003). A causal power can result in countless different outcomes depending on the complementary or contradictory influences of other acting causal powers. This is even more the case within the social world which, unlike the natural world, is an 'open system' (Bhaskar, 1979). Here causation is extremely intricate and multifaceted and variables cannot be artificially isolated (Houston, 2001). Therefore, causation within an open system will never be linear nor will peoples' actions be pre-determined (Sayer, 2000). It is possible to discover *tendencies* but not strict regularities between cause and effect.

Although a critical realist analysis of causality does not look for cause-effect regularities, taking a critical realist perspective in a study like this one does however make it possible to understand discourses as causal forces which can in turn have real effects. This means that knowledge entwined with power can instigate and prevent change and does influence what happens in the social world (Elder-Vass, 2012; Fairclough et al., 2002). As Parker (2003, p.70) argues, "language matters," the ways that we talk about, construe and analyse 'health' and 'the body' do have genuine consequences. If this were not the case, there would be little need to study these constructions and the ways that meanings around health and the body are interpreted. Therefore, it is possible to argue from a critical realist perspective that a healthism discourse, for example, can influence young people to think or act in certain ways in relation to their bodies. Of course, some research has already suggested that young people can be negatively impacted by how health is framed in relation to body ideals within schools (Rich and Evans, 2005). However, it cannot be argued that such discourse deterministically shapes thought or behaviour (Evans and Davies, 2011). For example, the effects of different discourses will depend on other contingent factors, which can be both discursive and non-discursive, meaning that the issue is much more complex (Sims-Shouten et al, 2007). These contingent factors can include, for example, the influence of other discourses and norms, biological influences on people's emotions and people's concrete surroundings (Elder Vass, 2012). Therefore, it is also accepted that young people can respond in numerous ways to health messages (Johnson et al., 2013). They may be influenced by things such as their socialisation and upbringing or the family members and peers they are surrounded by or by the financial and material resources they can access. For

example, a child living in a comfortable home environment may internalise healthism and ideal body discourses differently from the child who is hungry every day and who spends their time caring for their younger brothers and sisters. Other events both big and small can also shape their understandings of health and their associated actions. For example, joining a fitness club, receiving a complimentary comment from a friend, reading an article about celebrity weight loss, noticing a particular fashion advert on the street and witnessing a family member becoming terminally ill may all work together to shape their perceptions. Further, whether or not young people then engage with harmful thoughts and behaviours in relation to their bodies may also depend upon biological factors (Crisafulli et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2013). Therefore, whilst research from a sociological perspective can be very insightful, this does not mean that sociocultural explanations are all encompassing or that insights from other perspectives should be dismissed (Scrambler, 2006). People's relationships with their bodies and bodily practices are highly complex and can be debated in various ways and approached from diverse epistemological stances across disciplines such as psychiatry, medicine, psychology, biology and sociology (Rich and Evans, 2005).

Finally, it is important to note that individuals can also react differently within a social setting depending on their own reflections and interpretations. Whilst natural and material influences as well as socially constructed influences can structure people's beliefs, actions and identities, critical realism does acknowledge the causal influence of human agency (Houston, 2001). Resultantly, the argument presented is that individuals make choices; that actions and beliefs often stem from conscious deliberation; and that people's reasons for doing and thinking can be considered causal (Sayer, 2000). Archer (2007) asserts that individuals consciously consider their actions, feelings and thoughts in relation to their context through 'inner conversations' and that no *social* action is completely unreflexive. She uses this idea to present a critique of Bourdieu's notion of the habitus and routine unconscious action. However, other researchers argue that practice can emerge from and be shaped both unconsciously by the habitus and consciously through reflexivity (Elder-Vass, 2007; Kemp, 2010; Sayer, 2005; Wright, 2011). Regardless, all of these authors argue, along with Archer, that the relationship between structure and agency must be central to any sociological explanation. As Scrambler (2006) notes a person's agency and ability to reflect and make choices is a force for change and this means that the explanatory potential of a sociological analysis which does not take this into account will be limited. However, an analysis focussing solely on participant's agency and not accounting for structural influences will also be limited (Scrambler, 2005).

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This short chapter proposed that critical realism provides an appropriate philosophical grounding for research within the social sciences. As stated at the outset of this chapter, continual reference is made to convictions around the nature of knowledge and reality when selecting and utilising research methods (Danermark et al., 2002). Much debate within critical realism centres on philosophical rather than methodological concerns, meaning few guidelines are available for practically conducting research. This may account for the limited practical application of critical realist principles (Bergene, 2007; Yeung, 1997). However, ambiguities over *how* to do critical realist research need not be considered constraining as researchers are free to use their judgement to utilise methods they deem appropriate in relation to their situation and research questions (Danermark et al., 2002). The following chapter outlines how the methodological considerations of the present study were informed by the tenets of ontological realism, epistemological relativism, judgemental rationality and the assertion that causation and emergence occurs within an open system.

## **Chapter Five: Methodological approach**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Methodological decisions must always be shaped by the nature of the research questions posed (Scott, 2010). This chapter provides an outline of the decisions made and steps taken whilst formulating and investigating the following lines of inquiry:

- 1. How are young people within a Scottish secondary school engaging with online social spaces, particularly in relation to their bodies and bodily appearances?**
- 2. How are these engagements with online social spaces influencing young people's perceptions of the body and their body-related social actions within a school context?**
- 3. What impact might online bodily culture have on young people's experiences of, and engagements with, physical education?**

The resulting research design was both intensive and flexible in nature. Data was generated by drawing upon key ethnographic principles. Here, I engaged in participant observation and assumed the role of a physical education 'learning assistant' within a Scottish secondary school, 2-3 days per week for one academic year. Much of this time was spent getting to know the young people attending the school through informal conversation. Extensive field notes and a reflexive research diary were kept throughout the year. As the research progressed, and the research questions of the study became more focussed, I also spoke to pupils in more formal interview settings. These interviews were conducted with both male and female pupils aged between 12 and 17. This chapter includes justifications for, and more details about, this approach to data collection and also outlines the process of data analysis undertaken. As ethnographic research is highly contextual, the school within which the research took place is also introduced. Towards the end of the chapter, the steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process are explained, as are the ethical principles underpinning the research process as a whole.

### **5.2 A flexible and intensive ethnographic research design**

The research questions of this study ask how young people negotiate meaning and social practices within their everyday lives. Such everyday life is complex, open, 'messy' and chaotic and cannot be controlled by a researcher (Robson, 2011). Therefore, a flexible research design was required, a design that would evolve and develop in response to the

social situations at hand (Shipway, 2011). Additionally, since multiple factors interact to shape people's beliefs, thoughts and actions, it was also important to create an in-depth, detailed and holistic account (Olsen, 2010; Sayer, 2000). This was done by using an intensive research design. To facilitate a flexible and intensive research design, key principles of ethnographic research were drawn upon.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) explain that ethnography is an umbrella term covering a diverse range of research methods. Therefore, ethnographic research can be conducted in numerous ways and can be aligned with a variety of ontological and epistemological underpinnings. However, there are key features common to most ethnographic approaches. Stemming from anthropological roots, most ethnographic studies aim to discover and explain the shared meanings, perspectives and behaviours of particular groups of people studied within their own social setting (Punch, 2009). This involves studying outward social actions and ascertaining how these are intricately linked to attitudes, beliefs, values, social rules and shared understandings – all of which are nested within a local and wider social context (Gratton and Jones, 2010; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). To do this, ethnographers often engage in participant observation. Participant observation is a key ethnographic tool which allows the researcher to 'get close' to participants and their everyday situations (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Here, the researcher engages in observation for an extended time period whilst also becoming involved in the social environment in attempt to assemble an insider's perspective (Robson, 2011). Robson (2011) explains that ethnographic data is predominantly collected within participants' natural environments because the context within which individuals live, learn and negotiate social relationships and meanings greatly influences what they say, do and think. Therefore, an authentic understanding of a social situation is unlikely to arise from artificial means such as a controlled laboratory experiment or from isolated observations and interviews that only provide 'snapshots' of people's lives (Maxwell, 2012; Sayer, 2000). By being in the field for an extended period of time, trust can be built with participants. The researcher ultimately aims to establish a role for herself or himself and become accepted as a member of the group and culture being studied (Hammersley, 2006). A temporal dimension can also be added to analysis. For example, when researching in a school, a group of S1 pupils may act and perceive things in a certain way at the start of the academic year but may do so quite differently at the end of the academic year.

Gratton and Jones (2010) state that engaging in ethnography encourages the researcher to take a holistic perspective when gathering and analysing data, allowing them to

examine complicated webs of interdependencies rather than isolated glimpses of participants' lives. Ethnographers aim to generate 'rich' data and 'thick' description when addressing research questions (Geertz, 1993). Therefore, within ethnographic studies, multiple means of data collection are often creatively drawn upon. Analysing data from numerous sources of information is advantageous when facilitating an intensive research design. Here, issues can be scrutinised from a variety of angles and this can lead to more authentic explanations of the processes under investigation (Shipway, 2011). Oliver (2011) also argues that any research methodology based upon the principle of epistemic relativism should be open to the idea that there are multiple ways of knowing and that numerous approaches to data collection and analysis are possible within the one study. As ethnographic research is principally concerned with meaning and interpretation, data is often qualitative and stems from research methods that can access participants' own perspectives and account for their views and explanations (Porter and Ryan, 1996). Therefore, other methods such as informal questioning and semi-structured interviews are often used to support participant observation (Robson, 2011).

It is rare for an ethnographic researcher to begin their research with a fixed plan for generating data. Methodological decisions are often made in response to the unpredictable nature of 'real life' and researchers will judge which methods of data collection are most suitable and effective at the time. As LeCompte and Schensul (1999) suggest, ethnographers must be primed to collect data at any time and to take advantage of any unanticipated opportunities arising within open social systems. Most ethnographers will not enter the field with rigid ideas over who to watch, what to look for, who to speak to, when to ask questions and so on. The study, and perhaps even specific research questions, will change and develop with time but will become more ordered towards completion and data analysis will be ongoing throughout the study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Many ethnographers, therefore, go in to a research context with broad research aims that evolve and narrow as the research progresses and as the researcher begins to understand what is important to those within their field. In the initial stages of this research, I was interested in finding out how young people constructed and negotiated meanings and social practices around health and the body. I also wanted to explore the impact this had on their experiences of, and engagement with the physical education environment. These were very broad research aims as opposed to being narrow focussed research questions as such. However, my intention was to let my study naturally develop whilst also taking heed of LeCompte and Schensul's (1999) warning: a flexible and evolving research design does not imply research is carried out in an unsystematic manner, even in the initial stages.

### **5.3 The research setting**

The study took place within one school and was designed to amass a depth of rich data. Locating the research within one school allowed for a thorough analysis of how individuals' understandings and social practices were influenced by the social, cultural and physical environments within which they were located. Maxwell (2004) explains that when a research study aims to explain causal processes, causality can be traced and detected even in a single case regardless of whether there are other cases for control or comparison. This study did not aim to uncover fixed causal laws which could be statistically generalized to a population. Therefore, decisions over where to conduct the research and how to select participants were not based around selecting a large sample of schools and participants representative of Scottish society as a whole.

Purposive sampling was used throughout the research process. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to make decisions about where to conduct a study, who to include and what to look at based on what is likely to provide the most valuable data in relation to research aims (Denscombe, 2010). A number of considerations were taken into account when selecting the school within which to collect data. For example, the research design required that I became immersed within the research setting for a prolonged period of time. Therefore, a school was chosen that would be within travelling distance from the University of Edinburgh where I was employed as an Education Fellow. A readily accessible research site meant that more time could be spent collecting data and forming relationships and developing rapport with participants. Again, this would have been difficult to achieve had the research been split across numerous locations.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) warn that negotiating access for ethnographic research can be difficult; especially within formal settings such as schools. Here access must be negotiated with a number of gatekeepers such as the head teacher, curriculum leaders, individual teachers and parents. Further, gaining access extends beyond simply 'getting in' to a research site (Pole and Morrison, 2003). The researcher needs to be accepted into the research context by participants too. The relationships a researcher builds with both gatekeepers and participants has significant implications for the course that the research will take, what the researcher is able to observe, who they can speak to, how they can do this and how credible their data is likely to be (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). An ethnographic researcher must therefore attempt to integrate inconspicuously into the social setting they

research without being a hindrance to participants or causing them to be wary, sceptical or guarded (Gratton and Jones, 2010). With this in mind, the decision was taken to conduct the research within the school where I had previously worked as a physical education teacher (Benview High School<sup>8</sup>). Conducting research within Benview would allow me to immerse myself more quickly and more easily into the research context than would conducting research within a school where I was a complete outsider. Being already known to, and potentially trusted by, the majority of staff and pupils could also make my presence less threatening and enable me to quickly establish a role for myself within the school. Once this decision had been made, both the head teacher and the curriculum leader for health and wellbeing at Benview High School were approached with information about the study (appendix A). The health and wellbeing curriculum leader, Mairi<sup>9</sup>, became the key gatekeeper to the research site and was extremely helpful and enthusiastic in relation to the proposed research.

Benview High School is a six-year, state-funded, comprehensive secondary school located within Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh. On the whole, Edinburgh is a fairly affluent city. For example, the average gross income is £24,240 and property prices are amongst the highest in Scotland (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015). Life expectancy for both males and females is also slightly higher than the Scottish national average (National Records of Scotland, 2015). Further, Edinburgh is a relatively small city (population of 487,500) and is home to numerous parks and green spaces often used by residents and tourists for recreation (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015). However, alongside wealthy areas, there are also a number of 'deprived' areas within the region (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2012). Benview High School is located in the outskirts of the city, within a suburban area. Pupils attend the school from a wide geographical catchment area and the school handbook resultantly states that the school does not associate itself with one single community. Participant observation also indicated that the student population was socially diverse.

Approximately 1120 pupils attend the school alongside over 120 staff members, 80 of which are teachers. School attainment levels are above both the Scottish and Edinburgh averages and over 50% of pupils go on to higher education. 7.7% of pupils receive free school meals and this is lower than the average proportion of pupils on free school meals in both Scotland and Edinburgh. It should be noted that there are also a number of independent

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<sup>8</sup> The name of the school has been changed

<sup>9</sup> Participants names have also been changed



fee-paying schools in the City of Edinburgh (attended by 25% of secondary pupils), this is a much higher figure than anywhere else in the country (Scottish Council of Independent Schools, 2012). As a result, a number of children from the more affluent areas within the school catchment may not have attended Benview.

The school itself is located within a residential area. Whilst the school campus is compact due to its city location, the main school building is somewhat imposing, situated on a hill and visible above the surrounding houses. The school campus houses a main building, a separate physical education block, astro-turf pitches, outdoor social areas and path networks. There is also one grass playing field a 5-minute walk away - not visible from the secondary school but visible to the public. The school building has a main entrance leading into a bright and spacious foyer and reception. Beyond this is a long, wide social concourse area with benches and lockers. Pupils socialise here at break times, particularly when the weather is poor, and the area can become quite congested. However, at other times it becomes a big, empty space. Various corridors stem from the foyer and concourse areas, leading to classrooms. Again, these corridors can become congested, particularly in between classes. Despite systems being in place, such as keeping left, there can be lots of jostling of bodies and a claustrophobic atmosphere within corridors. Teachers are encouraged to have a 'presence' here, particularly during busy times and often make their presence known by instructing pupils how to use their bodies appropriately (no pushing, shoving and barging; no blocking the corridor; and no running). This is also a space where comments are made about pupils' dress (for example: "take off that hoodie;" "black shoes tomorrow;" or, "where is your tie?"). The corridor walls are mostly bare, with pictures and posters displayed on designated notice boards only so that the plastering and paintwork on walls are not damaged. Therefore, the entrance area of the school is adorned with things such as pictures of pupils in year groups; recognition of pupil achievement and trophies; topical wall displays; and notices of information but the rest of the school has a fairly clinical feel to it.

The majority of formal learning takes place within the main school building, except for physical education lessons. The physical education department is situated lower down the hill, below the main school building, accessed via multiple flights of steps. A number of classrooms from the main school look out onto the physical education block and outdoor astro-turf areas. There is some awareness of this visibility amongst both pupils and teachers. For example, one teacher explained how he liked to take his class down to the far-away end of the astro-pitches, "to get away from prying eyes." Pupils also made comments during lessons such as, "they're watching us from music, my friend just texted and told me!" Due to

availability of physical education facilities, outdoor teaching spaces are used almost every period by at least one physical education class.

The physical education building is entranced through secure glass doors, which lead to a foyer area. Some notice boards display pictures of pupils taking part in various physical education and sporting activities. Others house posters advertising after-school clubs and detail the vast array of activities on offer. The hockey and football clubs are particularly popular with female and male pupils respectively. As well as sporting activities, there are also a number of fitness classes, available both at lunchtimes and after school. Pupils can also use the fitness suite for their own personal use at select times. The department itself is split over two levels. There is a games hall, small gymnasium and changing rooms on the ground floor and a classroom, changing rooms, fitness suite, dance studio and staffroom on the first floor. These teaching spaces each have a different 'feel' to them. For example, the main games hall, which is used for badminton, basketball and volleyball, is bright and airy – cold in the winter and warm in the summer. This space is private with no viewing gallery nor any windows at eye level. The small gymnasium is a similar space but feels more claustrophobic, particularly with large classes. It is the size of one badminton court. Upstairs, teaching spaces are more specialised. For example, the fitness suite is mainly used for fitness or 'health and wellbeing' lessons. This relatively large room has exercise equipment located around the perimeter such as 'spin' bikes, elliptical trainers, rowing machines and a treadmill. There are also some weights machines and free weights along one wall. The empty space in the middle of the room is sometimes used for aerobic activity or body weight exercises. The room is also lined with mirrors and some posters that instruct people how to use equipment or that refer to the anatomy and physiology of the human body. All bodies within these posters meet the mesomorphic ideal (muscular, lean and toned). The dance studio is next door to the fitness suite. Again, it is a mirrored room with a modern feel to it. Despite no windows, the area is bright although the lighting is harsh. The space is mainly used for dance, exercise to music and table tennis. It is also used for high jump during athletics blocks. Boys' and girls' changing rooms are located on both the ground and first floors. Pupils change in front of each other in communal areas lined with benches. These changing rooms are used by lots of pupils at once and can be quite crowded. Each changing room has one small mirror for pupil use. Classes are typically given 5 minutes changing time before and after lessons and are very often hurried out of the changing rooms by their teachers.

Physical education is compulsory for all pupils within Benview. Pupils engage with a number of activity ‘blocks’ including: athletics, badminton, basketball, dance, exercise to music (aerobics, boxercise, step aerobics and Zumba), fitness, football, gymnastics, health and wellbeing, softball, table tennis and volleyball. The majority of classes are mixed sex and in the earlier years pupils partake in physical education in their form classes (approximately 20-25 pupils per class). However, in later years, pupils are given more choice in relation to the activities that they do and the physical education ‘pathways’ that they take. This can result in a variety of class compositions. Pupils can also choose to do additional physical education in the form of certificated classes and can also gain qualifications in sport and recreation and sports leadership. Therefore, whilst most pupils come to the physical education department two periods per week, some pupils are in the department much more than that. The majority of physical education classes are in a practical setting. However, certificated courses include classroom work, as does the health and wellbeing block, which is part of core physical education. Physical education is placed within the Health and Wellbeing faculty within Benview, alongside the subject of personal and social education. Mairi, also a physical education teacher, leads this faculty. Within the physical education department itself there are 6 members of staff in addition to Mairi: Graham, Catherine, Sophie, Matthew, Bill who are all physical education teachers and Rachael, an Active Schools co-ordinator<sup>10</sup>. These members of staff are at various stages in their careers ranging from being newly qualified to those approaching retirement.

#### **5.4 Generating data**

Once access to the school had been granted, data was generated over two phases with data from both phases used to develop and answer the research questions of the study. The first phase, from August until December 2014 (two school terms) consisted of participant observation entirely. This was a broad, exploratory phase of research used to gain an overview of the sociocultural context, to find out what was important to pupils and to piece together some key aspects of their bodily culture. The second phase of research, from January until May 2015 involved a combination of participant observation and formal interviews with pupils. Data was analysed continually throughout the study and by phase two

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<sup>10</sup> Within Scotland, Active Schools coordinators have a remit of developing extra-curricular physical activity and sporting initiatives and opportunities for school pupils. They also forge links between schools, community organisations and sports clubs to enhance young people’s physical activity and sport participation (SportScotland, 2012).

the research focus had narrowed considerably yet gradually. I was granted a sabbatical from my university job from January until June and was able to increase the time I spent within the school during these months. For details of ethical considerations in relation to the procedures described below, see section 5.7 (ethical considerations).

#### 5.4.1 Participant observation

To engage in participant observation, a researcher must work to establish a role for herself or himself within the group they are studying. Therefore, before entering the school, I met with Mairi to discuss what that role might be. We agreed that I would be a physical education learning assistant, 2-3 days per week for the academic year. The study aimed to explain the bodily culture that young people were engaging in, constructing and negotiating. To gain a deep understanding of such culture, I would ideally have gone into the school as a 'pupil'. However, assuming the role of 'pupil' as an adult researcher would have been practically and ethically problematic (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Nevertheless, by being a learning assistant I could unassumingly integrate into daily school life whilst having access to a number of formal and informal settings within the school such as lessons, assemblies, staffrooms, corridors and social spaces. Within formal lessons, the role of learning assistant also afforded me more 'space' to concentrate on observing and socialising with pupils than the role of teacher would have. It also meant that pupils could potentially see me as less of an authority figure than their teacher, perhaps being someone more approachable whom they could chat with about a variety of issues. Myself and Mairi collaboratively developed a timetable of classes that I would assist in and I followed this most days, assisting within 4-5 lessons per day (appendix B). The timetable was designed to provide me access to a range of classes across all year groups, covering a variety of activities with a number of different teachers. This provided me with consistency throughout the academic year and meant that I could build strong relationships with the pupils I was working with. However, the timetable was flexible when needed. Therefore, I also made efforts throughout the year to attend other classes across a variety of academic subject areas in order to see pupils across a range of academic settings. I also assisted in other aspects of wider school life, for example by helping with after school clubs and lunchtime activities and attending extra-curricular events and socials. Therefore, observations took place across a range of settings within the school, including during break times and informal situations but the majority of observation occurred within practical physical education lessons.

Much of my time as a participant observer was spent engaging in informal observation and conversation with pupils as I assisted day to day within the physical education department. My first task whilst doing this was to create a descriptive portrait of what was happening within formal and informal school contexts. This would include creating a description of the material and physical setting, descriptions of events and interactions occurring and descriptions of the people involved. At times, I would also ask subtle questions in order to generate informal accounts from participants about what they were doing and why, thereby probing their interpretations and reasoning in relation to what was occurring (Robson, 2011). Loose observation schedules were created with ‘reminders’ of things to look for (appendix B). These schedules were not carried around with me or filled in meticulously everyday but were schedules that I would check regularly and fill in as working documents over the first phase of the research. Using guidance from Robson (2011), information was collected in relation to:

- **The physical environment of various school contexts** – including social spaces, dinner halls, classrooms, outdoor spaces, the PE department and teaching areas. Detailed field notes recorded the appearance and physical layout of these locations in addition to sensory descriptions such as sights, smells and noises.
- **‘Artefacts’** – Field notes described physical objects within the school such as pictures, signs and posters on walls. Documents were collected such as those referring to curriculum planning, minutes of departmental meetings, and kit/uniform policies in addition to information relayed on the school website, newsletters and leaflets distributed to pupils.
- **People** – Descriptions of various teachers, staff members, pupils and social groups were constructed which included who they were, their various roles, their physical appearances and any distinctive characteristics.
- **Relationships between people** – Field notes detailed how pupils, teachers and distinct social groups interacted and related to one another and noted any patterns evident in their behaviour and relationships.
- **Events** – Significant occasions such as ‘health and wellbeing’ assemblies, explicit health promotion sessions, school dances and talent shows, school sports days and competitive sporting activities were recorded. Additionally, more specific occurrences and ‘events within events’, such as a pupil refusing to participate in PE, were also noted.

After an initial period of familiarisation, observations became more specific and detailed. Again applying Robson's (2011) guidelines, a daily research diary was kept which included the following:

- **Concrete descriptions of specific events** – what was happening; what was being said; who was involved; participants' non-verbal behaviours and body movements; participants' spatial behaviours (for example, who was grouped together, pupils' positions in relation to each other and the teacher); participants' extra linguistic behaviours (how loudly they were speaking, their speaking rate and tone of voice), whether they were interrupted or listened to by others.
- **Interpretive ideas** – Including notes analysing the situation or addressing the research question, theoretical ideas and abstractions.
- **Personal impressions and subjective reactions** – My own perceptions of, and feelings about, the situation were recorded to allow for reflexivity when analysing data.
- **Reminders** – Notes of anything to follow up or look for in following observations.

Robson (2011) explains that researchers can participate within the group they are studying to a greater or lesser extent along a spectrum between complete participant and complete observer. Throughout the study, I positioned myself more towards the participant end of the spectrum. I got involved in lessons assisting the teacher, helping and working with various pupils, joining in conversations, participating alongside pupils and sometimes just making up the numbers when the teacher required a certain number of pupils for activities. This meant that field notes were recorded retrospectively. Barron (2013) details the tensions that researchers can undergo when making decisions about when to write field notes. For example, writing notes during observation, or even filming participants, often disrupts the natural context. However, inevitably there is the potential for field notes written retrospectively to be more partial, less detailed and perhaps even inaccurate due to issues of recall and researcher bias. With this in mind, field notes were written up as soon as possible following observation. For example, my timetable was arranged so that I would have a 'free period' in the middle of the day to write notes based on my morning observation. I also made use of an audio recorder so that I could record voice reminders for myself. However, most of my note taking during the school day consisted of quickly jotting down notes at opportune moments so as not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, as the following extract from my research diary exemplifies:

I quickly slip into the toilets in between lessons to jot down quick reminders rather than writing in the staffroom or corridors. I don't want people to feel wary but they are probably wondering why I visit the bathroom so much! (diary, 24/09/14).

Notes taken during the school day were expanded upon every evening. Here, I included much more retrospective detail based upon memory, creating a research log with extensive entries. Having a role within the social setting and observing as naturally and informally as possible had many merits, most notably in the ways I got to know pupils and could understand as authentically as possible what was important to them. It was the pupils who let me know what they wanted to talk about in relation to their bodies, they opened up to me and took the lead in many conversations. It was through such situations that my research questions began to develop and change. My study moved from looking at generic bodily culture within the school to focussing more on how an engagement with online social spaces was part of that culture and this was not something I had anticipated being part of my study before entering the research site.

#### 5.4.2 Qualitative interviews

Towards the end of the study, semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to support participant observation. The study aimed to explain young people's engagements with bodily culture. Part of this involved understanding their ways of thinking and talking about the body and exploring the beliefs and values they constructed, shared and negotiated (Kahn, 2011). Social phenomena such as discourses, social practices and relationships are inextricably linked to human understandings, ideas and meanings. These ideas and meanings are impossible to measure or quantify numerically as "meanings cannot be measured, only understood" [or only interpreted since meanings can also be misunderstood] (Bhaskar, 1979, p59). It is not possible to explain, for example, how young people understand health and the body without talking to, and hearing from them (Robson, 2011). Throughout the study, I engaged in informal conversation with young people as I conducted participant observation. This helped me to explore and find out what was important to them, particularly when the young people initiated and led such conversation. It also allowed me to probe and question them further around various issues in situations where the young people were talking openly and naturally. However, whilst some of these conversations were lengthy and detailed, many were circumstantial and could be cut short due to prevailing social requirements. To provide one example, conversations during lessons could be halted if a teacher were to stop the class and ask for silence. Further, informal conversations were not always easily recordable,

depending on where and when they occurred within the school day. Setting aside designated time to speak to young people about the body, health and fitness was important to gain a deeper and more specific understanding of their thoughts and perceptions. Therefore, interviewing was considered an effective way to further access their beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, feelings and experiences (Robson, 2011).

A researcher can use interviews to gather information by speaking to people about their perceptions, experiences and understandings and their actions, situations and relationships (Iosophides, 2011). Doing this is important since people's reasoning is integral to any explanation of what occurs socially and plays a part in shaping, although not determining, what they say and how they interact with others (Sayer, 2000; Scott, 2010). Interview data can also indicate structural influences on participants' thoughts and actions and peoples' talk can allude to what structures their behaviour, even when they are unaware of what such things are. For example, an individual may draw on language in certain ways or describe situations and experiences indicative of ideas around the 'ideal' body patterning their behaviour whilst not explicitly citing this as causal. Interview data may also refer to an external reality to which a participant has access to but the researcher does not (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). For example, a participant may indicate that they dislike physical education because they experience pain when engaging in certain activities and another may talk about past life events or things which occur out with the school gates.

A combination of focus group and paired interviews were used to elicit pupil responses instead of one-to-one interviews. Children and adolescents can find one-to-one interviews with an adult researcher both intimidating and awkward, making them reluctant to talk naturally or at length (Peterson-Sweeney, 2005). Although power relations between adults and adolescents are bidirectional, they are not necessarily equal and young people can feel apprehensive talking to an adult researcher, particularly within a school context where pupils are generally encouraged to show their elders respect and to do as they are told (Eder and Fingerson, 2001). Adolescents can also find face-to-face discussion uncomfortable, especially when personal issues are being covered and when sustained eye contact is involved (Barter and Renold, 2000). This can lead to unease, embarrassment and limited responses. However, young people sometimes speak more comfortably as part of a group depending on who is in the group, the group dynamics and the ability of the researcher to facilitate discussion. Pole and Morrison (2003) note that rich data is often generated within focus group interviews because participants' responses often stimulate further responses in others with members of the group building and elaborating on what one another is saying.



Participants may also be challenged by others and through this may further explain and justify their own responses. Of course, young people can also feel intimidated or embarrassed talking about sensitive issues in front of one another but less so when part of a group of friends. In order for participants to feel as comfortable as possible, interviews were conducted later in the study once relationships and rapport had been built between myself and participants. Pupils were also able to choose who they were interviewed with.

In all, 14 interviews were conducted with a total of 22 female and 19 male participants. Participating pupils ranged from S1-S6 (aged between 12 and 17) and were selected for interview via purposive and volunteer sampling. Sampling for interviews was an organic process that stemmed from previous participant observation. Pupils from all classes that I had participated in were informed of the interviews verbally and were asked to register an interest in taking part. Some pupils subsequently volunteered to be interviewed. I approached others informally. For example, in one instance I had been talking casually to a group of pupils about their social media use and then asked them during this conversation if they would be happy to talk some more about these things if I switched on my voice recorder<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, many of the pupils interviewed were those with whom I had built rapport. However, I also consciously tried to interview those whom I did not yet know so well, for example quieter pupils whom I had struggled to engage in informal conversation. As such, previous field notes were also used to identify pupils who I thought would be interesting to talk to further and I was conscious to include a variety of participants. This included: those who were of different age, gender and social class; those from a variety of classes and peer groups; those who had various body types; those who could be classed as, for example, 'sporty', 'disengaged', 'body conscious', 'popular' and so on; and those who seemed constrained by dominant discourses and those who appeared to resist these. Details of groups interviewed and the pupils within these are available in appendix C. All interviews took place with single-sex groups and pupils chose to be interviewed with their friends or those they felt comfortable with. This resulted in groups of different sizes; some were pairings whilst others consisted of up to six pupils. However, most were homogenous groups where pupils appeared to be at ease contributing to discussions amongst one another. Interviews were relaxed in nature and took place in a variety of settings that were free from distractions: unoccupied classrooms, changing rooms and empty corridors.

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<sup>11</sup> I was careful only to use the information gained during such interactions once written consent had been gained from pupils and their parent/guardians and once I was satisfied that these conversations were occurring within a safe social environment.

Planned interview sessions began with informal conversation allowing participants to become comfortable in the environment. 'Ground rules' were also set so that participants would interact respectfully with one another. Interviews were guided by a schedule of questions that I had previously developed based around themes relating to: physical education, exercise and physical activity; school and social life; the body; health; and online social spaces (appendix D). As such, interviews were primarily used to investigate how pupils interpreted and formed meaning around health and the body, how salient the body was to them and how they perceived and engaged in social relationships within the school. Questions were primarily devised during 'brainstorming' sessions where I drew upon my own curiosity to consider what I wanted to ask pupils and what I would be interested in finding out about. This process was, of course, also guided by my reading of previous literature, which was also used to create groups of questions to add to my interview 'bank'. Questions were further formed in relation to themes emerging from participant observation. For example, some questions were designed to probe around specific things that participants themselves had previously mentioned in conversation. The thematic nature of the interview schedule devised afforded opportunities for summarisation and comparison of behaviours and beliefs and guided participants to discuss issues relevant to the research questions of the study (Bowen, 2005). However, whilst an extensive schedule had been prepared in advance, interviews were semi-structured and conversational in nature, lying more towards the 'unstructured' rather than the 'structured' end of the spectrum. Only a selection of questions were actually asked during each interview depending on who was present and the direction that participants' conversations were going in. The interview schedule was used very flexibly in relation to the ordering of themes and questions and these became more like reminders to glance at during discussion. Further, questions were predominantly non-directive and open ended so as not to unduly influence responses (Silverman, 2005). This allowed participants scope to talk about matters not yet considered by or pre-imposed by myself. The semi-structured nature of interaction also allowed me to probe responses and seek for clarification and further explanation (Jupp, 2006). Interview sessions were also designed to engage participants in debate and discussion amongst each other. Therefore, I acted to facilitate discussions by posing questions to the group and encouraging the group to interact with and question one and other. This format differed from a group interview where questions are asked to participants in turn (Wilkinson, 2004). However, there were also times when I did ask questions to specific group members. For example, care was also taken to involve quieter pupils in discussion and to discourage more confident pupils from dominating. This meant

some pupils were directly asked for their opinions on matters whilst their peers were encouraged to give them space to speak.

The questions posed became the main ‘focus’ of interviews. However, ‘photo elicitation’ was also used to generate talk, stimulate debate and focus participants’ interactions (Katzew and Azzarito, 2013). Visual stimuli can be used as ‘catalysts’ for discussion which interest and engage participants, inspire them to talk more freely and move away from monosyllabic responses (Hughes, 2004). As well as triggering ideas, providing a focus for discussion and capturing participants’ interest, using photo elicitation can also help to make an interview environment less threatening as participants can look at the pictures when talking, thereby avoiding any intense eye contact. They can also have more control over the interaction by deciding when they contribute to discussions (Barter and Renold, 2000). Katzew and Azzarito (2013) detail the merits of using visual images when discussing the body with young people. Their findings illustrate that debates around visual images are richer than those related to verbal questioning alone. Images used within this study included ‘snapshots’ of: different bodies; media images and social networking sites; and social interactions within schools and physical education (appendix D).

Interviews lasted around 40 minutes and, following consent, were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. By recording interviews, I was free to take notes on non-verbal interaction such as body language, tone of voice and facial expressions, all of which could be considered later during analysis (Gratton and Jones, 2010). To support this, I also wrote down my own reflections immediately after interviews, recording for example my own interpretations of power dynamics amongst participants and anything else that I thought may have influenced responses. As I knew pupils well by the time interviews were conducted, transcription was straightforward as I was able to recognise individual pupils’ voices when listening back to recorded data. At the end of each session, participants were debriefed. This was important given the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed. For example, participants were reminded that anything said in confidence amongst the group was private and not to be repeated amongst other peers. Participants were also told that they could speak to me again at any time about the issues discussed should they want to.

## **5.5 Analysing data**

Data analysis was continuous throughout the study. Vast quantities of field notes were generated during participant observation. However, analysing data on an ongoing basis made the process manageable. Even more importantly, as with most ethnographic studies, research findings continually informed the focus of the study and decisions around data collection (Robson, 2011). Analysis began by dividing and sorting raw data into smaller ‘chunks’ of words, sentences, phrases and paragraphs to create more manageable units of data. Every weekend, expanded field notes were read through numerous times. Important sections were highlighted and notes were written in the document margins. These notes included key words and phrases, summaries of text and some initial ideas and reflections (appendix E). The same was also done with my reflexive research diary. Every few weeks, I then went back over the annotated field notes and diary entries and sorted the data into categories in a process akin to ‘open coding’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As Gratton and Jones (2010) explain, here the researcher reads through the data and comes up with categories or ‘baskets’ to place different parts of the data into so that portions of data are grouped together by use of labels or codes. Codes were mainly descriptive initially. Descriptive, non-inferential codes are useful for summarising data together in the early stages of data analysis (Punch, 2009). Examples of descriptive codes include labels such as: ‘statements made by males’, ‘examples of pupils defining health’, or ‘references to social media’.

The next stage of division and sorting involved attributing more inferential codes to sets of data. Again, this was done on an ongoing basis. Inferential codes included, for example, ‘desires for affirmation’, ‘healthy as fashionable’, and ‘celebrity culture’. Whilst grouping data in such a way, raw field notes were frequently revisited to ensure that created categories were as authentic as possible and that nothing was being taken out of context. Categories were continually reviewed as this process continued. For example, data was regularly re-read to ascertain whether any additional data could ‘fit’ into the codes created, thereby ensuring important and relevant information would not be overlooked. New categories were also created when relevant data would not fit into pre-existing categories. With time, some categories were collapsed into one another, for example if they were too similar. Codes were also checked to see if there were any patterns or relationships between them. This led to some being grouped together under a variety of over-arching categories thus becoming sub-categories of data.

Throughout the whole process of dividing and sorting, information considered irrelevant was discarded. To an extent, this sifting process began before field notes were even written up. During participant observation, I did not and could not record everything that I saw, heard and experienced. Therefore, with my research aims in mind, I was selective with what was recorded in the first instance. As within data generation, the coding process always involves the researcher making selective judgements around which components of the data set to look at in more depth as it is impossible to study or write about everything (Danermark et al., 2002). Towards the end of the first phase of data collection, and before any interviews commenced, a working document was produced that detailed the emergent data themes from participant observation. This document included supporting excerpts from the data (appendix E). This document was a helpful reference when constructing interview questions, for focussing future observation and for keeping the study on course. For example, when reading through it, questions could be asked such as: ‘what do I want to follow up on?’ or ‘what do I need to find out more about?’

Interview data was analysed similarly to observation data. Again, the process was continuous. Firstly, interviews were transcribed by myself and this helped me to become very familiar with the data. Transcripts were read multiple times following each interview. Again, key sections or portions of talk were highlighted and initial notes were made in transcript margins (appendix F). This was done whilst also considering and inputting any notes that had been taken during the interviews in relation to participants’ non-verbal behaviour. Reflexive interpretations that had been noted down after the interviews, for example in relation to the various power dynamics at work within groups or perceptions of participants’ efforts to engage in impression management, were also acknowledged (Millward, 2012). Summaries of each transcript were constructed, which identified key themes emerging from each interview. Following this, processes of descriptive coding were embarked upon, followed by inferential coding. Therefore, as with observation data, various categories were constructed to organise data. Much of the data was added to categories previously created when analysing observation data but new categories were also created when appropriate. Participant observation was also ongoing at this stage of the study, meaning that both observation and interview data were being analysed concurrently. Eventually, the various categories and sub-categories devised over the process of analysis were transposed onto a spreadsheet and line numbers from interview transcripts were attributed to the various categories (appendix F). This allowed for an overview of who had been saying what, and how often, and the potential strength and significance of each theme. However, it was also acknowledged that something can be important even if said only once

by one participant. Nevertheless, the spreadsheet provided a visual representation of the data and was again a working document that led to the creation of new categories or modification of existing categories. Throughout the process of interview data analysis, I continually moved back and forth between reading data which I had sorted and divided and reading original transcripts holistically. Once more, working documents were created towards the end of data analysis which detailed and explained emergent data themes with supporting data excerpts (appendix F). These were similar to those previously constructed when looking at observation data.

The steps detailed above were all done manually without assistance from a computer programme. Whilst this may have resulted in a lengthy and perhaps even cumbersome process, it was a meticulous process that led me to become very familiar with the data. I had been integral to the process of data collection and would also be central whilst writing up and theorising the data. Therefore, I wanted to be present within all aspects of analysing the data. It could be argued that being entirely present when sorting data could lead to more authentic theorising, reducing the risk of things being taken out of context.

Once observation and interview data had been divided and sorted, abduction was also used to further code and explain the data. Abduction involves reinterpreting or re-describing a specific concrete event or statement as something more general and abstract (Danermark et al., 2002). For example, in observation data, a pupil walking into a games hall tugging down on their t-shirt may in some contextual circumstances be reinterpreted as that pupil attempting to conceal a stigmatised body. Danermark et al. (2002) further explain that theory is not just used here as a metaphor to aid explanation. Instead, it is used to make visible real properties, structures and mechanisms within the sociocultural setting that is being studied. At this stage, a variety of theoretical explanations may be attributed to data and the researcher must critically analyse which explanations are the most credible and plausible. Here the researcher may compare, contrast and integrate various explanations but may also engage in creative abduction where they explain their data by creating a novel frame of reference (ibid).

Abduction was used to then support retroduction, particularly when discussing and explaining the research findings. Again, Danermark et al. (2002) outline how retroduction involves working backwards from the data and considering causal explanations for what was seen or heard. Questions can be asked such as: why did what I observed happen? What caused it to happen? What enabled it to happen? This can also involve an engagement in

counterfactual thinking, for example, considering whether or not things would have been as they were had something else not occurred or been present (Meyer and Lunnay, 2013). Through such analysis, many layers of explanation are constructed to form a picture of how the various identified influences may have interacted, reinforced and contradicted each other. For example, observations may detail a pupil calling another pupil a derogatory name. Interview data may reveal some of their reasons for doing this. Their reasoning may point to wider societal discourse which is structuring their thoughts and actions. Interview data may also reveal that the pupil felt tired, frustrated or angry at the time or that they were unaware that their words were hurtful. Concurrently, the researcher may use abductions from the data to theorise various mechanisms that may have reinforced or negated their actions, such as surveillance from a high status peer group in their class or the regulatory gaze of their teacher. The researcher therefore must piece together this causal configuration based on empirical description and abductive inferences. Some influences may be more easily identified than others, for example those directly experienced by both the participant and the researcher. However, some may be more abstract and immaterial and perhaps only evident via abductive inference. When researching the social world, abduction and retrodution are closely related but it is important to note that the social influences such as discourses, norms, surveillance and stigmatisation also operate contingently to causal influences within the material realm (Danermark et al., 2002). Following these processes, the researcher may compare and contrast causal configurations and data obtained from various individuals and settings and very tentatively suggest tendencies within the data (ibid).

## **5.6 Trustworthiness of the research**

Research studies are often evaluated by their validity and reliability (Cohen et al. 2011). This involves: examining whether the research has measured what it has claimed to measure (internal validity); whether the research findings can be generalised to a population (external validity); whether the research would yield the same results if repeated (reliability); and whether the research has been conducted objectively. However, when researching from a critical realist perspective and drawing upon a qualitative ethnographic methodology, these terms and their associated meanings are not always appropriate. Throughout the present study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles for developing and evaluating a trustworthy research process were adhered to. Therefore, efforts were made to conduct research that was credible, confirmable, dependable and transferable.

### 5.6.1 Credibility and confirmability

If a researcher believes that there is a reality to which knowledge refers, attempts must be made to construct knowledge which is as close to that reality as possible. This knowledge will be partial, prone to error and will never reflect reality entirely. However, the researcher should not adopt a completely relativistic stance. As Maxwell (1992) explains, knowledge constructed during the research process cannot consist of absolute truths but not all research findings, interpretations and explanations are equally credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using the term 'credibility' rather than 'validity' when assessing how closely qualitative research findings match reality in order to avoid the concept of validity being used in the strictest positivistic sense. As such, there may be numerous accounts or credible explanations of reality and it will not necessarily be possible to discern one with certainty, in fact multiple interpretations of reality can be encouraged (Shenton, 2004).

Qualitative research is descriptive, interpretive and theoretical in nature and threats to credibility can occur at any of these three levels (Maxwell, 1992). To maintain credibility at the descriptive level, accounts of participants' actions and words and portrayals of various contexts should be as 'thick', full and accurate as possible (Geertz, 1993). Inevitably, a human researcher will miss things, perhaps important details, due to: their selective attention and memory; not seeing or hearing things; or even not being there at certain times (Lewis, 2009). For example, engaging in participant observation comes with its challenges and frustrations. I was essentially a human research instrument and my ability to read situations and notice things could be volatile:

I really struggled to concentrate this week as a stomach bug has left me feeling tired and miserable. I just cannot focus. I am sure there must be lots happening relative to my research questions that I am missing but I am only human after all ... Some days I just find the school day so long. I 'drift off' during observations, stifling yawns, especially in classes where I am less actively involved. Days when I can't seem to 'see' anything feel like days wasted, like all my time is precious and I need to be constantly collecting rich data. But I must remind myself that this is not wasted time - I am continuing to build relationships with staff and pupils. Hopefully tomorrow will be better! (diary, 18/09/14)

A researcher cannot be everywhere or see everything at once (Maxwell, 1992). They may only be able to observe certain aspects of the school environment, whether due to having permission to be there or due to circumstances and logistics. I did not attend school 5 days per week, nor enter every class and engage with every pupil in the school. I could not experience all aspects of school life and a researcher has to be selective when deciding where to focus their attention (Danermark et al., 2002). However, despite such constraints, I



attempted to immerse myself into the social context as fully as possible by getting involved in as much as I physically could and recording detailed and extensive descriptions of all that I thought was relevant. Davies (2008) states that ethnographic research is often applauded for its focus on multiple means of data collection and a prolonged engagement with the research context. This allows access to more areas and contexts within the research setting and leads to a fuller descriptive picture.

As my research diary excerpt alludes, building rapport and trusting relationships with participants was especially crucial to the credibility of the research. Participants may not always permit a researcher access to all relevant aspects of their lives and may advertently or inadvertently conceal information (Davies, 2008; Gratton and Jones, 2010). This could be due to, for example: their own selective attention or memory when providing details; concerns about how they will be presented within the research; or a lack of trust in the researcher. Since paired and focus group interviews were used within this study, consideration of participants' impression management in front of their peers was crucial when organising and conducting interviews and when analysing data (Goffman, 1959). The identity of the researcher themselves is also highly influential to how comfortable participants feel in eliciting and providing access to information. Even the simple presence of a researcher can lead participants to alter their behaviours and interactions. Therefore, during participant observation I took care not to obviously watch particular individuals or groups, keeping within hearing distance of them but not following them around or visibly taking notes.

Prolonged engagement in the field can eventually limit participants' reactivity towards a researcher's presence but it is essential to continually reflect upon the influence that the researcher is having on the emergent data (Robson, 2011). Qualitative researchers must reflect inter-subjectively by considering how they are positioned in relation to research participants, how participants relate to them and the potential implications of this (Finlay, 2002a; 2002b). A researcher's self-presentation, identity and the things they disclose about themselves each influence what participants do and say and therefore shape research findings (Finlay, 2002b; Robson, 2011). Since data collection is embodied, participants may also respond in relation to the researcher's body and appearance (Coffey, 1999; Ellingson, 2006; Windram-Geddes, 2012). I had to acknowledge the influence that my identity as a young, female, 'sporty' and petite researcher may have had on participants' responses. Some participants may have considered me approachable as I am generally of a quiet and

empathetic nature and I look young in appearance (at the senior Christmas ceilidh<sup>12</sup> I was mistaken for being a pupil by the door staff). Further, I consciously distanced myself from the role of 'teacher'. This did cause some internal dilemma, as the following field note demonstrates, especially when attempting to also gain the trust of staff:

The class are very hyperactive as they arrive in the fitness suite. The teacher has asked me to keep an 'eye' on them. Some boys play wrestle on the floor, pinning each other down as they hit the floor with their fists to signal victory. One or two strut around the room with their arms aloft, pounding their chests in mock celebration. I want to tell them to sit down before the teacher arrives... I definitely would have if they had been my class... I need to ensure they are safe and settled before the lesson begins... but I don't want to intervene in the natural interactions occurring... I can't be seen as the disciplinarian and lose their trust... (field note, 11/12/14)

As a 'learning assistant' I was conscious of my own demeanour when interacting with pupils, attempting to appear 'down to earth' and capitalising on what I perceived as shared interests. This was more easily achieved with some pupils than others. For example, I built relationships with female participants who talked to me like a 'friend' about clothes and make-up but these were conversations I did not have with male participants nor, indeed, all female participants. Many male and female pupils did informally speak to me about their bodies, especially when viewing me as someone from whom they could receive exercise advice. However, some may have taken from my 'sporty' appearance and background that I could not empathise with them or that I would negatively judge their bodies or health-related practice and this may have limited the information they disclosed to me (Windram-Geddes, 2012). I also had to be aware of the how my demeanour, words and actions may have impacted participants' responses to any questions I asked them, both formally and informally. For example, Davies (2008) describes how a researcher can work to avoid leading participants' responses by ensuring that their body language is neutral or avoiding actions such as nodding or frowning. Of course, these are only a few examples of the things I had to consider about my self-presentation. As Finlay (2002b) notes, relationships constantly change and fluctuate throughout the research process as researchers get to 'know' and trust participants and vice versa. Therefore, remaining vigilant of such issues was a continual endeavour.

Qualitative research in the social world places much emphasis on meaning and it is important that interpretations are credible. Both researcher and participants experience and interpret reality subjectively. Therefore, participants have access to aspects of reality – that is

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<sup>12</sup> Ceilidh is a Scottish term meaning a social gathering, often accompanied by music and dancing.

their own unique feelings, experiences, interpretations and perceptions – that the researcher cannot directly access. Sometimes, an individual may struggle to verbalise or communicate what they are feeling or how they understand something. A researcher may also interpret their words and actions differently to how the participants themselves would have. Therefore, elements of participants' empirical realities can be lost in translation. Of course, participants' talk can also contain contradictions, exaggerations and omissions (Davies, 2008). Since understanding and interpretations are often shared and co-constructed with others, social interactions between the researcher and participants become processes whereby both make sense of things and jointly construct meaning (Silverman, 2005). The researcher can endeavour not to influence participants' responses but they will inevitably do so. For example, a young person may say something in an interview but then query their own understanding or reasoning upon subsequent questioning and probing. They continually make sense of and reconstruct their thoughts throughout an interaction. Throughout interviews and conversation with young people, I attempted to check for joint understanding by asking questions such as "are you saying that...?" or "is this what you mean?" and so on. The researcher cannot claim to present participants' thoughts and words exactly as participants intended. However, the researcher's task is still to *try* to know, present and interpret participants' feelings, experiences and understandings as accurately as possible.

Data collection and analysis is inevitably mediated by a researcher's own experiences, beliefs, values and ways of seeing and interpreting the world. As such, it was important to continually reflect upon, and make visible, my own biography, social background, values and positioning towards the research (see chapter one) (Greenbank, 2003; May and Perry, 2011). However, as well as engaging in self-reflection, intersubjective reflection was again essential. A researcher may be 'part of the researched' and therefore be able to identify with participants through common experience but participants will also hold experiences and insights that the researcher is unfamiliar with (Berger, 2015). Many aspects of my life are in common with the young people in my study. I have been a school pupil in a Scottish state school, albeit just over 10 years ago. I am also situated within a macro-sociocultural context where I too negotiate socially constructed meanings and power relations around the body as I construct my own bodily identity. For example, I am fully immersed within a Western Scottish culture, I am exposed to similar media representations of the body and to similar norms and values around (un)desirable bodies and social identities. I also engage with online social spaces and am exposed to similar messages and patterns of interaction around the body in the online environment. I am already an 'insider' in that sense. Further, my own bodily experiences resonate with participants who worry

about their body shape and size in relation to social concerns. I can understand tensions faced by those who try, but find it difficult, to resist worrying and can also notice subtle cues and emotions in some participants having did, said or felt similar things myself. Berger (2015) explains that a researcher who has common experiences with participants may more accurately interpret and probe that which is implied or unsaid. It is important, however, not to over-emphasise the similarities above. Throughout this study and during my time as a physical education teacher it became clear that many young people shared experiences and concerns with each other that were different from my own – for example worrying about their bodies for appearance rather than performance reasons. These young people also negotiated social pressures that I did not encounter when immersed in a school environment as a pupil or at their age. For example, I was a teenager before internet use, online social networking and smartphones became culturally ubiquitous. Inevitably, some participants' experiences were very far from my own. I have never been a person who does not engage in, enjoy or have access to physical activity. Likewise, I have no experience of being overtly stigmatised for my bodily appearance, of being bullied, of being called names or of being 'over' weight. Therefore, it is possible that I was better able to understand and represent some voices relatively more or less than others.

Much of the above has alluded to the importance of becoming an 'insider' and becoming involved in school life. However, whilst aiming to become involved, it is also important to remain 'detached' from the research setting (Powdermaker, 1966). This is what Geertz (1988) terms the 'signature dilemma' that ethnographers face. How can one become involved enough to learn a culture yet remain detached enough to make strange any familiarities of that culture? Similarly, how can someone engage in bidirectional relationships of trust and friendship yet not skew their research findings and analysis to portray participants in a certain light or otherwise? These are questions I have wrestled with throughout the research process and were particularly important to consider during the interpretive and data analysis phase of the research. As I have continually emphasised, I could never be an 'objective' researcher. Striving to become completely objective hampers the richness and authenticity of a study like this. However, I could make efforts to enhance the confirmability the research – that is, I could endeavour to become a more neutral researcher and limit bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I did this by critically questioning, problematising and challenging my own practice and interpretations, encouraged through regular discussion and debate with my supervisory team.

Theorisations of research findings were especially laid open to peer scrutiny and were frequently discussed and debated with the supervisory research team. Credibility at the theoretical level can be threatened when researchers enter a context with knowledge of previous literature within their research area. Researchers must not use such knowledge to unduly shape findings, for example by using leading questions in interviews or creating artificial contexts for observation (Lewis, 2009). Further, when abstracting and theorising, a researcher should not artificially 'twist' or exaggerate data to fit a particular theory or to ignore any data contradicting theorisations made in the study (Robson, 2011). As such, conscious attempts were made to identify any evidence which contradicted causal explanations constructed during data analysis (Maxwell, 1992). Efforts were also made to ensure that interpretations and theorisations were rooted in empirical data and that the route through which they had been arrived at was made clear to anyone reading the study (Lewis, 2009). Various theories and interpretations were compared, contrasted and reworked in order to find the most plausible fit for the data (Danermark et al., 2002).

### 5.6.2 Dependability

Dependability is often used in place of reliability to discern how trustworthy a study is. A research process is deemed reliable if it were to produce the same results when repeated using similar contexts, methods and participants (Shenton, 2004). However, it is impossible to recreate qualitative research taking place within an open social system as the context, the environment, the participants and the researcher are always changing (Robson, 2011). Qualitative researchers may alternatively consider whether similar results would be obtained from their study if it were to be repeated in the same context, at the same time but by a different researcher (Davies, 2008). However, when the researcher is the research instrument, coming to the research with their own prior perspectives, beliefs and ways of interpreting and themselves having a causal impact on the research context and participants, it is again unlikely that identical results can ever be obtained. Resultantly, LeCompte and Preissle (1993) argue that the concept of reliability, when considered stringently, is not workable within qualitative research – particularly when conducting ethnographic research where the research context is crucial to analysis and where the researcher becomes immersed in that context. Efforts to ensure repeatability within an open social system may result in artificially altering that system and overlooking the idiosyncrasies of the context, participants and researcher which are all important to analysis, resultantly hampering the credibility of research findings. Shenton (2004) argues that rather than striving towards replicating results,

researchers should leave a dependability ‘audit trail’ so that their methods can be repeated by other researchers. This allows anyone scrutinising research findings to see exactly how research data was obtained and interpreted and how conclusions were made. Readers can then effectively critically analyse the research process and findings (Davies, 2008). Thorough accounts of data gathering procedures are therefore provided within this thesis and extensively evidenced within the associated appendices.

### 5.6.3 Transferability

Whilst acknowledging the idiosyncrasies of qualitative research, it is also important to consider whether a study has wider relevance or practical use beyond the confines of the study itself. In some forms of research, this is done by acknowledging whether research findings can be generalised to wider populations. That is, whether the research findings and explanations can be applied to other people, settings and situations (Lewis, 2009). However, ethnographic research is “highly situated,” formed by “this ethnographer, in this time, in this place, with these informants, and these experiences” (Geertz, 1988, p.5). Therefore, as with most ethnographically informed studies, findings are undoubtedly specific to the people and contexts involved. All explanations are anchored within a particular concrete, ‘real life’ context which is integral to explanation. Nevertheless, this does not mean the study cannot have wider relevance or that findings cannot be applied to other people and contexts. Whilst it may not be possible to generalise findings to a population, it is possible to generalise to theory (Danermark et al., 2002). Doing this allows the researcher to ‘say something’ beyond providing insight into the individual experiences and perceptions of research participants (Porter, 2002). The researcher can also cautiously trace causal configurations and tendencies, theorising the causes of events and experiences within the specific research context. Such theorising, intended to refer to the real causal powers and mechanisms at play within a situation, can then be recontextualised to explain other concrete situations and be modified according to what is witnessed empirically in that new situation.

Once the findings of a study have been analysed and written up by the researcher, the onus is placed on the reader to engage in the final phase of analysis: concretisation and contextualisation (Danermark et al., 2002). This involves taking the causal influences highlighted during the research and ascertaining how, whether, and to what extent these may be influential within their own concrete situations and circumstances (Davies, 2008). As Eastwood et al. (2014) claim, this is an important aspect of applied science. The findings of

this study do not just relate to abstract hypothetical situations. They have emerged from a real life setting, a specific context and an open system with its own intricacies. Each person reading this study will need to consider the intricacies and specifics of their own situations whilst applying any findings or explanations constructed within this study.

To assist with this process, detailed and vivid descriptions of the original research setting, participants and the causal configurations at work within these settings and within the lives of these participants must be provided for the reader (Lewis, 2009). Rich descriptions of the research context help the reader to experience a sense of really 'being there' so that they can accurately form their own subjective interpretations of research findings. This also aids readers in establishing the similarities and differences between their own lives and situations and those of the research participants, allowing the reader to judge the extent to which a transfer of conclusions can be confidently made (Lewis, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Readers can attempt to interpret and apply the findings of the present study by drawing upon the detailed descriptions provided of participants, myself and the local and macro contexts the study is located within.

## **5.7 Ethical considerations**

British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) were adhered to throughout the study. Ethical approval was granted by the Moray House School of Education ethics committee (University of Edinburgh) and the City of Edinburgh Council prior to making any contact with schools or participants (appendix G). Voluntary informed consent was also sought from participants (appendix H), their parent/guardians<sup>13</sup> (appendix H) and the participating school (appendix A) prior to their involvement in the study. Therefore, participants were informed of the research aims of the study, the nature of their involvement and of how data would be collected, used and disseminated. This was done verbally and in writing and care was taken to ensure that all participants fully understood these things. Participants were aware of their right to withdraw at any time, although no participants did so. Involvement in the study was anonymous. Therefore, care has been taken not to identify the school, teachers or pupils involved and pseudonyms have been used throughout. Participants were told that additional details such as their age and gender and descriptions of them, their actions and their appearances would likely be referred to within the study.

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<sup>13</sup> In agreement with the school, 'opt-out' forms were sent out to parents/guardians in addition to the 'opt-in' forms signed by participants themselves. Only one opt-out form was returned.

However, nothing alluding to their personal identity has been included. All collected data has been securely stored, accessible only to myself and my supervisory team.

Conducting participant observation requires additional ethical considerations. As Denscombe (2010) details, it is not always possible to gain voluntary informed consent from all participants when conducting participant observation. Additionally, as a researcher integrates into a social setting, establishing a rapport and trusting relationships with participants, there is potential for participants to reveal information that they consider to be ‘off the record’ or to engage in social practice differently to how they would have if they had felt details of this were always being recorded. Following Denscombe (2010), the decision was made to engage in participant observation but use such information only after ascertaining the following:

1. That no participants would be negatively impacted upon by being observed.
2. That material disclosed by participants, advertently or inadvertently, would only be reported if it would not cause harm to themselves or others.
3. When it was possible to keep the identities of those observed or referred to completely anonymous.

Assuring participants of confidentiality in focus group interviews can also be difficult, particularly when participants know each other and socialise in the same social setting as other participants (Litosseliti, 2003). At the beginning of each session participants were explicitly made aware of their ethical responsibilities as group members to ensure that the information shared within focus group discussion would remain confidential (Denscombe, 2010). This responsibility was also reiterated during the debriefing at the end of each session. Efforts were made not to harm participants in any way throughout the process and care was taken to treat participants fairly, sensitively and respectfully. This was especially important when interviewing young people in relation to potentially sensitive issues around the body. Berger (2015) explains that a researcher with personal experience of a research topic can be more alert to the sensitivities associated with it. I know, for example, how particular questions or comments around health and the body can trigger negative emotions or a desire to engage in certain (un)healthy practices and I took care when addressing such issues with participants.

Finally, reciprocity is a key principle of ethical research design (Hammersley and Trainou, 2012). Adopting the role of participant observer, and being a learning assistant, enabled me to assist teachers and pupils within physical education lessons on a day to day



basis and thereby hopefully enhancing pupil learning. Whilst in the school, I also helped out in other ways and endeavoured to make myself useful - for example, creating wall displays, organising equipment and helping with curriculum planning. I was very grateful to have been given the opportunity to be in a school for such a prolonged period of time and genuinely wanted to 'give something back' to those who had afforded me this opportunity. Further, acknowledging the demands placed upon teachers during times of curriculum change in Scotland (Simmons and MacLean, 2016), efforts were made to limit the impact of this study on teachers' time and workloads. The research was also planned to interfere as little as possible with pupils' day-to-day learning. For example, care was taken to organise interviews at times suggested by teachers. Therefore, the location and timing of interviews was very flexible. However, most did take place during physical education time – lunch breaks are very short at Benview and not all pupils indicated a desire to remain late in school at the end of the school day. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help both teachers and pupils at the school. A summarised report of findings will be created and made available to relevant school staff members. Some findings have already been presented to members of the physical education department during an in-service day and staff were regularly updated about my study at departmental meetings. The school and the City of Edinburgh Council will also be provided with copies of any subsequent publications emerging from this study. It is hoped that findings from this study will help inform approaches that the school take to increase pupil engagement within physical education. It is also hoped that these findings will also be informative to those working with young people who struggle with body issues and social aspects of school life.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

In summary, the research questions of this study evolved through and were addressed by a flexible and intensive research design, drawing upon key ethnographic principles. Data was generated across two phases. The first of these solely involved participant observation. Here I attended a school 2-3 days per week as a physical education learning assistant, keeping detailed field notes of the things I was seeing, hearing and experiencing. Through immersing myself in the daily lives of those attending one secondary school in the East of Scotland, I formed relationships with young people across S1-S6 whom I observed and informally spoke with on a daily basis. Whilst interacting with these young people, I became aware of some important aspects of their contemporary bodily culture which had not yet been extensively researched. I therefore, entered the research site with broad aims which gradually narrowed

and evolved as the research progressed. As this occurred, I embarked on the second phase of research, which involved supporting participant observation with qualitative interviews in order to examine such issues in more depth. A combination of paired and focus group interviews were conducted with a variety of pupils across all age groups (14 interviews with a total of 22 female and 19 male pupils). Both observation and interview data was analysed continually throughout the study through processes of dividing and sorting, abduction and retroduction. Throughout, efforts were made to ensure that the research process was trustworthy and ethically sound.

## **Chapter Six: Contemporary bodily culture within Benview**

### **6.1 Introduction**

An intensive research design facilitated a very rich description of school culture, providing fresh insights into how young people currently negotiate and construct bodily meanings and power relations. These insights build upon the growing base of literature already available in this area (see chapter two). The overall aim of this study was to spend time within a school in an attempt to understand, interpret and explain the bodily culture of young people within their own contemporary context. This broad research aim narrowed over time as I got to know, and listened to, the young people I interacted with. I gradually understood that certain contemporary issues, which had not yet received much attention from researchers, were highly influential in shaping these young people's thoughts and actions around the body. Accordingly, this chapter introduces three over-arching aspects of informal pupil culture within Benview: the centrality and importance of the body; the omnipresence of online social spaces and online social interaction; and the development of a celebrity-esque culture amongst the pupil population (the celebrification of self). The chapter also explains how these tenets of pupil culture facilitated and created a hyper-risky social environment where the body and self were hyper-visible, hyper-scrutinised and hyper-controlled. Although this chapter attempts to outline dominant tenets of pupil culture within Benview, there are aspects of pupil culture that I did not investigate and did not have space to write about. As such, what follows was not 'the' culture of pupils within Benview – if ever there was such a thing. Rather, I have tried to exemplify and explain facets of pupil culture that appeared particularly salient to those I interacted with whilst also responding to concerns and suggestions for investigation within the research literature.

### **6.2 Overarching tenets of pupil culture**

Contemporary societies change and evolve rapidly (Beck, 2009). Advancements in technology particularly add new dimensions to how people interact with and relate to one another. Accordingly, pupils within Benview High School negotiated 'virtual' worlds as an extension of their school culture. In these worlds, information spread quickly and widely and there were new possibilities for how they constructed their identities. These young people negotiated a context where many could (or wanted to) become 'famous' amongst each other

but where they were also intensely and obsessively scrutinised. The following findings<sup>14</sup> illustrate how influential these aspects of culture were within young people's lives; to their social relationships; and to their thoughts, feelings and actions around their own and each other's bodies. Bodies and bodily appearances especially, were very important to young people within Benview. Whilst this particular finding is not novel, the further findings of this study suggest that the omnipresence of online social interaction and the celebrification of self were bolstering the salience of bodily appearances within pupil culture.

### 6.2.1 The centrality and importance of the body

Previous research points to the centrality of the body within young people's lives, social interactions and social relationships (Azzarito, 2009; Hills, 2007; Kehler, 2010; Kirk and Tinning, 1994). Supporting this, pupils within Benview indicated both explicitly and implicitly that bodies mattered to them. There was concern over what bodies could do, how healthy they were, how they felt and, most particularly, how they appeared visually. For example, a number of pupils claimed that they thought about, analysed, compared, and contrasted their own and other people's bodies "all the time." Body-related issues can often be sensitive, and potentially embarrassing areas of discussion (Grogan and Richards, 2002). However, these pupils had much to say about bodies and had strong opinions about how bodies 'should' be. They often talked at length and unprompted about the latest bodily fashions, about what others looked like and about how to improve their bodies – frequently seeking my advice during casual conversations. For example, pupils would initiate conversations with me by asking questions such as: "do you think cycling will make my bum rounder?" "Which exercises should I do to get my stomach flatter?" and "how did you get muscles like that in your legs?"

The body was central to how the young people formed meanings around, and attributed worth to, themselves and others and to how they exercised power within social relationships. Supporting previous theoretical and empirical insights, the visible body was especially considered representative of 'who a person was' (Goffman, 1959; Johnson et al.,

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<sup>14</sup> The findings presented within this thesis come from a combination of interview and observation data. When interview data is attributed to specific individuals, names of participants are indicated along with their school year group. Information regarding the dates of these interviews, details of participants and the composition of interview groupings are provided in appendix C. Findings from observation data are indicated as field notes in brackets immediately following field note excerpts and include the date in which the data was sourced. Therefore, excerpts which are not explicitly labelled as field notes can be assumed to be taken from interview data.

2013; Shilling, 2012). Many pupils felt mostly judged by bodily appearances. For example, Mollie (S1) stated that her body was important to her because:

People just look at your appearance and make judgements. They don't actually see the person that you actually are.

Similarly, Natalie (S2) talked about the importance of clothing and make-up, stating:

People judge you first on the way you look before you meet them and start talking to them.

Pupils claimed that appearances were “pretty much what people judge you on” but also indicated that this was “frustrating.” These young people felt judged by a variety of body-related aspects such as “what you wear;” “how you are dressed;” “if you are fat;” and “if you have nice hair.” Bodily adornments and features of a person’s appearance were therefore symbolic and were used as character indicators (Goffman, 1959). Participants were aware that their appearance was socially important; often being the first thing others would know and notice about them. Whilst many complained that they felt judged by their own appearances, they also freely admitted that they too scrutinised and evaluated others by how their bodies looked.

Meanings associated with the body were clearly value-laden. Most participants voiced a desire to be admired by others. They noted that some pupils were respected due to their bodies whilst others were devalued and considered unworthy. Of course, bodily appearances were not the only route to social admiration. Academic and sporting successes were also valued positively. However, a pupil could achieve high examination grades but be socially shunned and derogatorily labelled a ‘geek’. Likewise, someone could be good at sport yet not achieve the same high social status as others who had achieved less in a sporting realm. For example, Gita and Jane (S2) explained how one of their peers, renowned for her sporting successes, was “popular because of her gymnastics... she’s also really clever as well.” However, they explained she was still considered “in the middle” of the school social hierarchy as she had a plain appearance and did not embody the ‘trendy’ image associated with more popular girls. When asked what people were admired for the most in school, these girls responded, “the way their face is or their appearance mainly, mostly their appearance.” They also referred to “prettiness,” noting, “people will like other people because they are really pretty and like stuff like that.” Appearance, therefore, became a mediator of social status and looking ‘good’ could certainly gain an individual respect amongst others. It was great to have it all, to be clever, physically talented, funny and

friendly but appearance was an especially powerful variable in a person's overall perceived social status.

Although pupils thought it was desirable to embody the 'ideal' appearance in order to attain social status, it was just as important to look 'acceptable' in order to avoid negative social treatment. Negative social treatment was especially associated with 'fat' bodies, which all pupils categorically classed as undesirable. Pupils claimed that if they became fat they would "try and fix it right away," implying that fat bodies were flawed and in need of rectification. Pupils, such as Chloe (S6), used examples of extremely fat people to claim:

That's such motivation [to exercise and diet], like I never ever want to look like that in my life.

The fear of becoming fat has been previously documented amongst young people in Scotland and elsewhere (Windram-Geddes, 2013). In some contexts, this fear is attributed to children's worries about their physical health and illness, perhaps stemming from their exposure to discourses of obesity and risk (Evans, Rich and Davies, 2004; Powell and Fitzpatrick, 2015). However, whilst the physical risks associated with being fat were influential in shaping some pupils' views, here social concerns were far stronger. Participants felt that other people would view them as "ugly" or "unattractive" if they were overweight and claimed that they would hate to be known as the "chubby one" or as a "fatty." For example, S6 girls explained:

Chloe: I would be so humiliated, like if I ever heard somebody like I dunno, like oh she has put on lots of weight. I would be like so upset... I don't think I could come back into school.

Emma: Yeah.

Chloe: More so than if they said oh she's quite ugly if that makes sense?

Me: Yeah, okay. So would the worst comments be...

Emma: Like you're fat.

Chloe: Like to call me fat, yeah.

Emma: That would be like the worst thing that someone could call me would be fat.

Chloe: The worst thing that someone could say, uh hu.

Me: So would weight and fat be the main thing you would worry about?

All: Yeah.

Chloe: Definitely.

Lucy: Like I think if you asked any girl, like every girl would say that the worst thing to say to you would be something about your weight.

This view was not exclusive to girls or older pupils but was expressed across age groups and genders, supporting Bell and McNaughton's (2007) assertions that the fear of fat is not solely a female issue. For example, S1 boys also claimed that fat would be "the worst thing someone could be called in school," and said that they would be "devastated" to be identified

as fat. Whilst pupils associated fatness with ‘ugliness’, they considered fatness much worse. This could be due to the derogatory connotations associated with fat individuals. For example, previous studies evidence young people attributing labels such as ‘lazy’ and ‘couch potato’ to those who are overweight (Burrows et al., 2002; Powell and Fitzpatrick, 2015). However, the young people within this study more often viewed overweight individuals with pity rather than disdain. For example, pupils claimed that if they were to become fat they might not feel good about themselves or like their bodies. Fatness was therefore frequently associated with unhappiness and a lack of satisfaction in life and with oneself. As Chloe (S6) claimed, it would be “humiliating” to be fat but she, and a number of other pupils, also claimed it would be “disappointing.” Being fat would be a stark representation of failure.

Some pupils were also of the opinion that fat people were “sad” and “lonely.” For example, Logan (S1) explained that fat people “might be all sad and stuff and not really have friends.” As Logan’s comments suggest, there was a strong perception that being fat would especially lead to a lack of social acceptance. These concerns were warranted in some instances. Previous research exemplifies how young people can be negatively treated within a school environment when their bodies are far from social ‘ideals’. Here pupils can be called names, teased, socially excluded and even become targets of physical violence (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Bromfield, 2009; Knowles et al., 2014; Powell and Fitzpatrick, 2015). Some pupils within the present study were subjected to such treatment. For example, Mollie and Mia (S1) spoke about how they had experienced bullying in relation to their bodies, which had also affected their own thoughts towards themselves:

Mia: I mean after being bullied you kinda you don't know where to... what to think... if you're fat or if you're normal or...

Mollie: Yeah.

Mia: Cause you get people telling that it's perfectly normal but then you kinda think back to when you got bullied and you kinda listen to the bullies and yeah.

Megan: Cause em, cause there is so many different people that have bullied me I will start, like I have started to think, well what they are saying must be true cause it is so many different people saying the same things.

Both Mollie and Mia explained how unkind comments about their appearances influenced the extent to which they liked and valued themselves. As Cooley (1902/1964) would suggest, they began to see themselves as they perceived others to see them. Therefore, although a number of young people within this study desired ‘good’ bodies to be admired by others; many were also influenced by deeper feelings around their own worth. Further, desires for social affirmation around the body went beyond longings to be admired to longings for social acceptance. Social acceptance and friendships were very important to pupils within

Benview. Pupils stated that friendships were “the thing that gets you through school.” Without friends, school life would be “shitty,” “horrible,” “boring” and “depressing.” For many, the social aspects of schooling were what they valued most about their education.

The findings above show why the body was so significant to young people within Benview. They help us to understand that bodies were far from neutral within pupil culture. The body was central to young people’s social lives and interactions because it influenced how people were socially positioned and grouped; who they could associate with; how they were valued and treated by others; and how they could exercise power over others or, conversely, become the weaker players within power relationships. Meanings and perceptions around the body also influenced how young people felt about and viewed themselves. To these young people, their bodies were associated with real social and emotional consequences. Such findings are not unique to this particular school and confirm many insights gained from previous research. However, I proceed to argue that the centrality of the body and bodily appearance within school life was reinforced and magnified by two further key cultural aspects: the widespread use of online social spaces and, associated with this, the celebrity-esque culture prevalent amongst young people attending the school.

### **6.2.2 The omnipresence of online social spaces and online social interaction**

The findings of this study support suggestions that online social spaces are now a ‘normal’ part of young people’s everyday lives (Meier and Gray, 2014). Online social interaction was evidently widespread amongst the pupils in Benview, where internet sites and mobile apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp were integral to pupil culture. For example, the majority of pupils indicated that social media was important to them, stating they “don’t know an awful lot of people that don’t have it.” Only one participant indicated they did not have a social media profile, as her parents did not allow it. However, she still accessed online social spaces via her friend’s accounts. A number of young people spoke of accessing online social spaces “constantly” throughout the day, mostly via smartphone devices with Wi-Fi access or mobile data. Some even stated that they would panic when unable to access this. Pupils frequently looked at their phones during break times and when walking between classes, but also checked their phones subtly during lessons, for example taking quick glances under their desks as the teacher’s back was turned. Some even checked their phones frequently during physical education lessons, keeping their phones in their tracksuit pockets against their teachers’ wishes. In all, online social spaces



were so ubiquitous that life without them seemed alien to many pupils. For example, during a conversation with S2 girls:

I mention that when I was at school there was no social media, few people had picture phones and people did not really post pictures of themselves. The girls gasp and say, “really? No way! But what did you have instead?” I think about it and reply, “I don’t think we had anything like that at all.” The girls are thoughtful for a moment and one comments, “oh actually, maybe it would be different if we didn’t have all that. Imagine if we didn’t!” (field note, 10/09/14).

Pupils valued online social spaces for a variety of reasons. For example, these virtual spaces allowed them to feel connected with friends and communicate with others, even when they were not physically present with one another. As Ryan (S1) claimed:

You can go home from school and just because you have left school doesn't mean you have left your friends, you have still got your phone.

Marwick (2013b) explains how online social spaces afford people with feelings of social connectedness, intimacy and friendship. People using online social spaces are able to ‘see’ and interact with each other frequently, sometimes simply by noticing information others post online. This leads individuals to experience feelings of ‘knowing’ others and their lives, even if they barely interact with these people offline. For example, Lucy (S6) referred to people she ‘knew’ who were:

Friends of friends like, you kinda know, like you would smile at them if you saw them but you don't really know them but you will see their pictures all the time.

These young people could also document their social experiences and ‘keep up’ with social happenings using online social spaces. Pupils were keen to document many aspects of their lives, including mundane happenings, as they presented themselves to the world. They also considered online social spaces to be forms of entertainment that countered boredom. For example, pupils talked about browsing online social spaces to talk to and ‘look at’ other people and to find out news and information when they had nothing to do. These online social spaces provided young people with ‘drama’ and sensationalised gossip, things to discuss during face-to-face encounters. As Kaylee (S4) informed:

I think now it has become all about social media and what people say on it. It's all anyone every talks about. All the time... it's like have you seen what so and so posted last night. It's all about what's said online (field note, 17/09/14).

Further, as pupils considered it ‘normal’ to be engaging with online social spaces, anyone not doing this was considered an ‘outsider’. A lack of online presence carried the risk of being socially isolated and ‘cut off’ from social happenings. As Marwick (2013b) suggests,

people often feel ‘peer pressured’ into connecting with each other online. Pupils within Benview voiced a fear of ‘missing out’ when they did not have their smartphone with them. Similar to Boyd’s (2007) findings with American teenagers, pupils within Benview saw online social spaces as ‘cool’ places to socialise, it was where their friends ‘were’. Not being connected online was similar to missing a party or not being ‘up town’ on a Saturday. Boyd (2007) suggests that whilst many people assume young people are obsessed with technology and gadgets and appear hooked on online social spaces, in most cases it is socialising and a desire for friendship that these young people are ‘addicted to’. For Benview pupils, these online social spaces may have been mechanisms for replicating feelings of acceptance from, and closeness to, others.

### **6.2.3 The celebrification of self**

The omnipresence of online social interaction meant that pupils negotiated large social networks expanding throughout the school but also beyond Benview and throughout the city. As Lucy’s quote previously suggested, they negotiated complex networks of friends and “friends of friends,” both people they felt close to in daily life and those whom they only knew online. As such, individuals were often celebrified<sup>15</sup>. The following discussion, within which S2 girls spoke about young people from other schools in the city, illustrates this:

Natalie: ...cause people go like oh she’s pretty in her pictures but in real life she’s ugly.

Summer: Yeah.

Me: Okay, so do you mean like people in school?

Natalie: Well just overall, in general.

Summer: Yeah like...

Me: Like famous people?

Summer: No like people who live in Edinburgh then you follow on Instagram and then if you see them in town.

Natalie: Yeah if you see them in real life.

Summer: Like, oh that’s Imogen from St Mark’s, she’s ugly.

Pupils ‘knew’ teenagers from other schools from their Facebook and Instagram profiles and followed them and their lives in similar ways to how they would celebrities. This was also

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<sup>15</sup> The terms ‘celebrification’ and ‘celebritisation’ are often used interchangeably within the literature. However, in trying to disentangle these terms, Driessens (2013a, p.643) explains that ‘celebritisation’ refers to “the broad social and cultural changes implied by celebrity,” whereas ‘celebrification’ refers to “changes at the more individual level,” and the processes by which ordinary people become celebrities. Therefore, the suffix ‘ification’ is used within this thesis when referring to the processes by which young people themselves were endeavouring to become, and were becoming perceived as, celebrities within their own social contexts.

the case with high status peers within their own school, for example older pupils. Pupils talked about popular peers who were, “really well known... everyone knows them,” and a number of pupils were aware of, and strived towards, becoming known amongst others in these vast social networks. For these pupils, it was important to be visible to many and have large numbers of ‘followers’ or online ‘friends’, who in a sense were viewed as ‘fans’.

Although friendships were important to pupils within Benview, for some young people, being seen to have friends and know many people was just as important as actually having friends. This was the case within school as well as online. As Seth (S2) explained, “the more people you know, the more popular you are perceived.” It was considered very undesirable and socially disastrous to be perceived as a “loner” or “the one that’s left by yourself” as no one else would want to be associated with loners. As such, pupils moved about in packs or at least pairs as many did not want to be seen sitting or walking to class alone. As Gita (S2) explained, appearing friendless would leave her feeling as if everyone was laughing and talking about her saying “look at that girl, she doesn’t have any friends.” During informal conversations, a group of S2 girls explained that having their pictures or online status updates seen by many was something that would make them feel good and popular:

“The main social media we use is Instagram for photos,” Samirah tells me. I ask if they put pictures up a lot and Samirah says yes but she would like to have more followers, “like Charlotte, she has like 4000 followers!” she tells me. I gasp, “really? 4000?” I ask. “Yeah but she just has wierdos follow her,” I am told. Charlotte agrees, “yeah well I just follow people and then they follow me back. You can put hashtags like #likeforlike and then you get more followers” (field note, 11/09/14).

Whilst the number of ‘followers’ Samirah and Charlotte had could have been exaggerated, it was still something they desired and, whether or not they achieved such feats, becoming known was considered a good thing. Turner (2010) explains that with new online technologies and a rising popularity in reality TV formats, ‘ordinary’ people now have the means to become famous and broadcast themselves to wide audiences. Select groups of people, such as agents or big corporations, no longer control the processes by which people become celebrities. Instead people can become ‘do it yourself’ celebrities (Cashmore, 2006). It is not always necessary to possess any talents or accomplishments in order to do this but it is crucial to develop an interesting self-identity (Turner, 2010). Creating a unique identity and gaining social visibility were important to young people within Benview. Pupils were aware that they had to be ‘noticed’ in order to be admired and respected and this meant competing against each other for attention. Many highlighted the importance of ‘standing out from the crowd’. As Mollie (S1) explained:

You want to be unique and different ... you don't want to be the same as everyone else.

However, much work is required to gain and maintain such attention. Some of these young people were continually involved in publicising the self, essentially engaged in a constant 'PR' campaign. As Driessens (2013b) suggests, fame can quickly fade and visibility needs to be persistent if someone is not to be forgotten or overlooked in favour of others. Posting pictures or text alongside multiple hashtags such as #likeforlike allowed pupils and their online content to be visible, searchable and discoverable by many. It also enhanced the apparent popularity of their posts. The more who viewed and 'liked' their posts, the more valuable these posts (and the person at the source of these posts) would become. Nevertheless, when attempting to construct 'stand out' identities, pupils also had to present themselves in 'acceptable' ways. As well as wanting to be noticed, young people were also concerned with 'fitting in' so that they did not stand out for the wrong reasons. As Mollie explained further:

You kinda don't want to be the same as everyone else but then you don't want people to judge you because you are not the same as everyone else.

Another pupil explained this dilemma by explaining, "you're still thinking like what's appropriate." Although it was good to be unique, different and interesting, there were still strict parameters within which this could be done. These parameters could relate to social norms constructed and adopted within the school population as a whole or to those dominant within the specific peer groups pupils belonged to (or wanted to be part of). Therefore, there were clear tensions between desires for uniqueness and group socialisation.

### **6.3 The body, the self and the contemporary social environment**

The following findings work to evidence *how* the centrality of the body was magnified by the omnipresence of online social interaction and the associated celebrification of self. For example, these two latter tenets of pupil culture meant that the body and the self were hyper-visible both online and within the school environment. Allied to this, the body and the self were hyper-scrutinised by young people. Further, these young people were afforded opportunities to create and present a self and a visual representation of the body that was hyper-controlled. Finally, contemporary aspects of pupil culture led to a social environment that was hyper-risky for the individuals who negotiated it.

### 6.3.1 The hyper-visible body and self

Benview pupils used a variety of online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram to post text and visual content. These sites and apps encourage people to post 'bitesize' snippets of information, with image sharing being a popular means of communication. In fact, Instagram, which is solely an image-sharing site, was cited as the most popular online social space amongst Benview pupils at the time. Participants often referred to Instagram when discussing body image issues. Accordingly, a number of the young people were very concerned about their bodily appearances in still image photographs. This was evident when chatting with a group of S6 girls about their forthcoming prom:

"Why are you worried about prom?" I ask. "All the photos!" Jasmine exclaims in response, "there will be so many!" The group continue to chat as we stretch and do some core exercises on the mats. "If I work on these exercises everyday till prom, will it make a difference?" Daisy asks me. The other girls contribute to the discussion by asking if the exercises will get rid of their "muffin tops" or "bingo wings" as they grab the 'flab' on their 'problem' areas. I ask them when the prom is and they tell me it is in April (it is only the beginning of October now). "That is a long way off!" I tell them with a smile. "No! It is sooooo soon!" they respond (field note, 08/10/14).

These girls were aware that a large number of 'unvetted' pictures would be taken of them at their prom, any of which could appear online, even within seconds. Such images would be open to scrutiny and potentially seen by many and, with a school-leavers' prom being an important event, these pictures would likely endure and be viewed for a relatively long period of time. Interestingly, their biggest concern was having photographs of them seen, as opposed to a fear of being seen and scrutinised in the flesh. Some of these girls were even concerned with choosing prom dresses that would photograph well regardless of being flattering in 'real life'. This almost mirrors celebrities' 'paparazzi' concerns, an idea further evidenced in the ways these young people prepared for such 'red carpet' events. For example, the S4 girls explained:

Fiona: Like if I've got a party at the weekend I would like not eat for like a week, just drink loads and loads of water.

Me: Oh really?

Fiona: I wouldn't like, I'd eat, but I'd like make sure it was not as much.

Courtney: Not as much.

Fiona: Yeah and I'd drink loads and loads and loads of water.

Me: So would it be important to look good for parties and things as well?

Fiona: yeah.

Courtney: Yeah cause then you are getting photos and you dinnae wanna look minging.<sup>16</sup>

Since the young people tended to document many aspects of their lives online, there was always the potential to be photographed by others at social gatherings. However, as well as being photographed by others and having others share images of them online, pupils also posted self-images of their own bodies and faces for others to view, share and comment upon. Some pupils proclaimed that pictures of themselves comprised half the content they posted online, others stating that most of their posts were selfies, referring to themselves as “the selfie generation.” Participants explained that posting selfies was common practice, a ‘normal’ thing to do. This was also evident by their actions, and unspoken communication, as the following field note demonstrates:

As I leave the classroom, I pass a group of three girls walking along the corridor – one takes her phone out of her bag and stretches out her arm so that she is holding the phone in front of the group. Without a word spoken or any pauses, all three girls ‘pout’ to the screen before the first girl checks the resulting photo and they seamlessly continue walking to their next class (field note, 04/09/14).

Some pupils stated that they posted selfies to attain social approval from others. For example, they were keen that others would ‘like’ their pictures and provide them with affirming feedback and comments such as “oh you are beautiful.” As Mollie (S1) explained, “people tend to compliment you more on social media than in school.” This was something that made her feel, “quite accepted” and “kinda good” about herself. Charlotte (S2) also explained:

When you put your picture up, you are waiting for people to like it or comment. If they don’t I will change it a bit then put it back up again [laughs] (field note, 18/09/14).

Crude measures such as numbers of ‘likes’ were often used by the young people to ascertain how worthy they and their bodies were in comparison to others. Stover (2014) suggests this practice of posting bodily images online is part of the ‘feedback culture’ normalised within online social spaces. Here, an individual’s self-esteem can become dependent on the explicit affirmation they do (or do not) receive from others in relation to their outward appearance. Stover (2014) also proposes that selfies encourage body objectification by framing the body as an object, subject to the gaze and evaluation of others. When young people use pictures of

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Dinnae’ is a Scottish term meaning ‘do not’ and ‘minging’ is a slang word used in Scotland to mean ‘disgusting.’

themselves as a way of gaining attention, it is concerning that ‘standing out’ can be achieved by posting, for example, provocative and revealing pictures. As Tegan (S6) explained:

You will have more followers [on Instagram] like say if you post pictures and guys say you're really hot, you'll get more followers and if you're like beautiful obviously more girls will follow you.

The word ‘hot’ was a synonym for ‘sexy’ amongst the young people. The conversation continued:

Me: Would that be like people you would know that would follow you or would it just be anyone?

Tegan: it could be people you know and anyone.

Lucy: Yeah, it seems a bit weird but yeah!

Tegan: Cause that's [Instagram] like more made for selfies than Facebook is.

Me: Oh okay, so what's that mean?

Tegan: Like cause its like, yeah, photo based.

Lauren: More people will see it probably.

A number of pupils claimed not to personally know all of their online ‘followers’ or those who were able to see their pictures. However, they did not seem overly concerned that others could objectify their bodies. When asked if they were concerned that unknown people could follow their lives and use their pictures for any means, one S3 girl, Danielle, replied, “it’s only pictures that’s what I say!”

As the above data alludes, girls spoke more often and more extensively about posting pictures of themselves than boys did. Whilst objectification of the male body is increasing within contemporary times, the objectification of the female body has long been ingrained within Western culture (Grogan, 2008). However, although there appeared to be more pressure on girls to engage in such practices and have their worth affirmed by bodily image, boys were not immune to this as indicated by the following conversation with a group of S2 boys:

Me: So do boys post as many pictures as girls, as in selfie-type pictures?

Freddie: I think it’s about equal.

Seth: Yeah cause they are looking for the same things from girls as well, like comments.

Me: So what sorts of pictures would boys post?

Freddie: Usually just their face ... I've noticed girls usually have their whole body or either their upper body in them but boys just usually it’s just their face but some boys post in front of mirrors so obviously most of their body gets shown - showing off their clothes like designer brands or whatever.

Seth: Yeah and you do see guys with their shirts off a lot on Instagram and... but less people do that than just their face but it’s still quite prominent.

The perceived tendency for girls to reveal more of their bodies in pictures, perhaps supports the notion that girls felt more pressured than boys to look 'hot' for social approval. However, as Seth's observation implies ("they are looking for the same things ... comments mostly"), these boys were critical of approval seeking practice. This was also evident in discussions with female pupils:

Courtney: No but even when they go to parties and that and they put like dresses up, like photos up in dresses, and they are like oh my God I look like I'm a whale! And I'm like oh yeah [sarcastic].  
Maddie: Aye where about!<sup>17</sup>  
Courtney: I totally look like a whale...  
Me: And then what do people say in return, do people say then say oh you're so...  
Maddie: Aye!  
Courtney: yeah, you've got an amazing figure... like oh my God, shut up!  
Maddie: That does ma heid<sup>18</sup> in that.  
Fiona: They're fishing for compliments.  
Courtney: Yeah for attention.  
Me: Yeah, okay and how does that make you feel then? You've said...  
Maddie: I'm like can you just get a grip o' yourselves and stop sooking<sup>19</sup> each other  
All: [laugh loudly]  
Fiona: That's what it is! It's embarrassing, like it actually makes me think get a grip!  
Maddie: What straw d'ye want? [laughs]

Approval seeking practice was often wrapped up in false modesty, of which many of the young people were cynical. These young people looked upon those outwardly seeking approval with scorn and framed their practice as evidence of their underlying insecurities. However, whilst they were critical of such practice, many struggled to ignore it or remain carefree in relation to what others had or appeared to be. For example, the girls above still indicated that they were envious of the "bitches" who received such affirmation and attention. Palmer (2015) found similar attitudes amongst young men who evidenced contempt for those constantly posting self-images of their 'perfect' physiques online, particularly if they felt jealous of such individuals. Parrott (1991) explains that people experience envy when feeling that they lack something someone else has whilst wishing it for themselves or wishing the other person did not have it. This can be an especially strong emotion when another person's superiority is perceived to concurrently emphasise an individual's own failures and inadequacies. Therefore, as well as feeling unhappy and frustrated about their own failures, individuals can also feel "agent focussed resentment",

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<sup>17</sup> 'Aboot' is a Scottish pronunciation of 'about.'

<sup>18</sup> 'Heid' is a Scottish term for 'head.'

<sup>19</sup> Here 'sooking' refers to 'sucking up to' or engaging in inauthentic flattery.



dislike and hatred towards a person or the people they are envious of, leading to problematic social relationships (Parrott, 1991, p.14).

A number of male and female pupils complained that it was “tiresome” always seeing “selfie after selfie, after selfie.” As this indicates, young people within Benview were constantly bombarded by pictures of their peers’ bodies, regardless of whether they wished to be or not. They could ‘block’ content from other users but this would lead to the possibility of missing social happenings. Therefore, even those not drawn into contributing to the selfie culture themselves were exposed to, and influenced by, such images on a regular basis. Further, those who stated that they did not post selfies themselves or explicitly engage in such culture, could still act as ‘lurkers’ online - being those who frequently engage with other people’s posts and pictures but who rarely post anything themselves, thereby foregoing the ‘risks’ associated with putting the self ‘out there’ (Berriman and Thomson, 2015). As Palmer (2015) suggests, such individuals still engage implicitly with online content and can still be negatively affected by it, experiencing the same feelings of body inadequacy as those outwardly engaged in such culture. Additionally, these young people were not just exposed to their ‘friends’ bodies online. They were also inundated with numerous pictures of, for example, celebrities, athletes and fitness gurus, sometimes inadvertently. These pictures could come under the guise of advertising, through pages and profiles that they followed, or from their friends ‘re-tweeting’ or ‘reposting’ images of others:

Me: Do you think things like social media make you think about your body?

Chloe: Hm, so much...

Me: In what ways?

Chloe: Like seeing people, like especially on Instagram you always see people.

Lucy: You always see people.

Emma: Seeing people, like on Instagram, if you follow like famous people...

Chloe: ...there's accounts which are like fitness motivation and stuff ... I follow some of them and they all have like loads of pictures.

Lucy: Yeah they just upload like constant pictures of girls that are literally just like perfect.

Emma: But then scrolling through your feed you always see pictures of girls with like abs and stuff like that.

Text sometimes accompanied such images. For example, S4 girls claimed that boys on their year would ‘re-tweet’ pictures of celebrities alongside phrases such as “oh my!” or “perfection!” Of course, some young people could also explicitly seek out images of body ideals. As Chloe explained, she purposefully ‘followed’ specific accounts or pages where pictures of the body were often circulated. Sites like Instagram also allowed pupils to search for body trends by inputting hastags such as #thighgap, #fitspo or #abs into search engines.

However, they could also discover such images unintentionally. Pictures of the body are often accompanied by numerous hashtags that enable them to be noticed by more people. These include hashtags that can draw the attention of people to pictures they never intended to discover. For example, pictures accompanied by #summer #body are also returned by solely searching for #summer (Ghaznavi and Taylor, 2015).

### **6.3.2 The hyper-scrutinised body and self**

As well as being hyper-visible, the body and self were also intensely scrutinised within this contemporary context. Bodily scrutiny was firstly apparent in the ways the young people thought and talked about body ‘ideals’. For example, the body ideals they upheld and aspired to were very comprehensive and specific. Previous research illustrates how young people often refer to broad indicators such as being slim, muscular, toned and tall whilst describing the bodies they admire (Johnson et al., 2013). However, young people within Benview drew upon further layers of detail. They not only wanted to be, for example, a certain size or shape but also wanted to develop certain lines, grooves and very specific features. For example, Natalie (S2), referring to her upper arms and biceps stated, “it is better if you don’t have a bulge,” meaning too much muscle. Then, pointing along the inside of her bicep, explained, “it is okay if you have that line here like Lisa has, but not a bulge.” Natalie and her peers also talked about their desires to develop certain lines along their rib cages; looking for selected bony protrusions along their hip and collarbones; and wanting to develop specific lines and indentations in their stomachs as they sought after “faint abs.” Such specific appearance ideals were not just confined to the body. Pupils were also very particular about the ideal facial appearance as field notes evidence:

The girls begin to talk me through some of the things that they have written about the ‘ideal’ appearance. I am taken aback by how much detail they go into. For example, Charlotte begins by talking about her jawline saying, “it should not be too long or too short and round.” She explains that she wishes hers was more “angular.” She also states that she would like to change the arch of her eyebrows whilst telling me it is also important to have “flawless skin” if you are to look beautiful. I ask her what flawless skin is and she says it would be, “smooth with no spots or bumps.” Her friend, Gita, mentions that to look good you would need to have “high cheek bones and a nice nose, a flat stomach, big eyes with long eyelashes and a toned butt” (field note, 04/09/14).

Much of this detailed scrutiny and evaluation of appearance also occurred within the online realm. ‘Following’ and looking at other people in detail was a normalised practice amongst pupils, as the following conversation between Charlotte and Gita demonstrates:

“You have those white converse [trainers] with the blue line, don’t you?” Charlotte asks. Gita responds, “yeah.” “You never wear them though,” Charlotte continues. Gita pauses, “how do you know I have them?” she asks quizzically. Charlotte quickly replies, “oh I seen them on your Instagram, that photo you posted... that was 47 weeks ago!” Gita laughs, “oh yeah! I forgot about that!” (field note, 12/11/14).

Gita did not seem phased here that Charlotte knew such specific details about her due to her online activity and Charlotte appeared to be okay with admitting how she knew these details. Individuals often use online social spaces to watch and follow other people’s lives in detail. This can be evidenced when individuals themselves acknowledge their practices of ‘creeping on’ or ‘Facebook stalking’ others (Marwick, 2012). These practices were accepted amongst pupils and were not taboo in ways that offline ‘stalking’ would be. Accordingly, the young people spent much time analysing photographs of other people’s bodies within online social spaces. As pupils explained, “social media is for looking at other people basically!”

The body ideals young people used as reference points for scrutiny did appear to reflect their engagements with contemporary culture. This was especially apparent in the ways female pupils talked about the body. Aligning with previous research, some girls within Benview did desire and value thinness (Brown and Slaughter, 2011; Rich et al., 2004; Halse et al., 2007; Smink et al., 2012). For example, some talked about wanting to go to the gym “to get skinny,” viewing the ideal body as “tall and thin” with a “small waist.” Some also spoke about a desire for protruding bones, for example idealising defined collar bones that “stick out more,” visible rib cages where “you can see the lines between the bones,” and jutting hip bones. These descriptions of thin body ideals encompassed ‘trends’ and fashions prominent within online social spaces. For example, when talking about the ideal female body Gita (S2) stated:

It is good if you can get a ‘thigh gap’, it means your thighs don’t touch, lots of celebrities have it but it is difficult to get.

However, the equation of slenderness with the ideal feminine body was not straightforward. In fact, many girls concurrently spoke of thin bodies as being undesirable. As a group of S6 girls stated:

Lucy: But then that's far from ideal as well [points to thin model].

Emma: Yeah that's far from ideal.

Chloe: Way too skinny yeah!

Lucy: I don't want to look like that.

Very thin bodies were framed as “featureless,” “bad,” “scary,” “unhealthy” and even “disgusting” by participants. For example, when referring to the picture of a thin model, Jane (S2) claimed, “that looks a bit bad... I would hate to be like that... that’s just anorexic”

as her friend replied, “it’s not nice to be that skinny.” Another group of S6 girls similarly explained:

Eilish: Cause I think they [very thin people] look just as unhealthy as the people who are overweight, it's just as bad.

Tegan: It's just that one looks like so bad [again pointing to thin model].

Eilish: It's quite scary.

Tegan: Cause her bones are like out and everything.

Katie: I know that's not nice.

Such findings were not entirely surprising given previous research, which evidences the stigma often associated with being ‘too thin’ and the negative judgements directed towards those perceived to have any form of eating disorder (Crisafulli et al., 2008; Rich, 2006; Whitehead and Kurz, 2008). Pupils considered being too thin as ‘wrong’ and gossiped about, pitied and even mocked those who were overly ‘skinny’.

These traditional perceptions were strengthened when the young people drew upon current popular discourses which form a ‘skinny backlash’. Here ‘real’ women are celebrated whilst those considered too thin are ‘shamed’ as being irresponsible and bad role models (Meyer, 2016). To an extent, pupils had internalised such messages into their own culture. During the first few months of data collection young people at Benview would often sing and dance along in corridors to a then popular chart hit, “All About That Bass” (Trainor and Kadish, 2014). Lyrics referred to “bringing booty back” as that is what “boys like” and told listeners “don’t worry about your size.” Pupils also mentioned the influence of songs and music videos such as “Anaconda” (Maraj et al., 2014), which includes lines such as “he don’t like them boney” and “fuck them skinny bitches... fuck you if you skinny bitches.” The girls explicitly talked about current trends for a ‘big booty’ (Garcia, 2014) and would make comments like those below:

Samirah is standing side on to a mirror alternating her gaze between her reflection and looking over her shoulder. “I wish my bum was a bit more out to here,” she remarks to her friends and she holds her arm a few inches away from her silhouette, “more rounder,” she continues, “it’s soooo flat!” (field note, 29/10/14).

Therefore, many of the girls in this study idealised the ‘curvy’ and shapely body whilst frequently mentioning curvaceous celebrities that they ‘followed’ on social media such as Kim Kardashian and Beyoncé. In many cases, pupils juxtaposed the curvaceous physique against the thin physique, framing curvaceous as more ‘healthy’ and therefore more aspirational. As one pupil explained, you want to “have some meat on you” and not look like you have “starved yourself.” Such counter-discourses may have been working to deconstruct some of the pressures for young people to be thin and the commonly held view that one must

be thin to be loved and accepted. However, these messages still strongly focussed on body shape and size. They still upheld the views that some bodies were 'good', 'better', more 'real' and 'womanly', and more morally desirable than others which were framed as 'bad'. Further, in many cases the female body was still framed as subject to the male gaze, a body which would be sexually attractive and appealing to men as indicated by the song lyrics quoted above.

Further, not all 'curvy' bodies were celebrated and there were limits to 'how shapely' the female physique should be. For example, the girls talked about wanting "boobs and a bum" but stated that these should not be "too big." As Gita (S2) explained, using pictures she had found on the internet to illustrate her point, the "full hour glass" figure was "too much." Instead, she explained, the "neat hourglass" was ideal. 'Curves' also had to be in the right places and the bust-waist-hip ratio was crucial:

Summer: She's got a nice body.

Natalie: Yeah she has got a really nice body.

Me: What makes her...

Natalie: Well she has got a flat belly...

Summer: A flat belly.

Natalie: ...and she has got a good bum, so.

Me: So what's a good bum?

Natalie: Round.

Summer: Yeah

Natalie: Round and big but if you don't have one then you just gotta do squats but people are too lazy sometimes, so... [pause]. Yeah but Beyonce isn't like that but she has still got a good figure... like she is curvy but it's still nice.

Therefore, the majority of the girls in this study admired the 'curvaceously thin' ideal (Harrison, 2003). In one sense, the 'skinny' body was appearing to go out of fashion amongst some of the young people. However, whilst 'very skinny' was potentially 'out' for them, thin was still very much 'in' and the range of acceptance before a body became too fat was still fairly narrow.

Both male and female pupils highly valued a body that looked 'healthy' and 'fit', particularly admiring toned, lean, muscular and strong-looking bodies. These were not necessarily bodies with muscle bulk but more those that were 'tight' and 'ripped', bodies with definition where the shapes and furrows of muscles could be seen clearly. This was not surprising in relation to male pupils since previous research focusses on adolescent boys' respect and desires for a muscular, fit-looking physique due to its association with masculine ideals (Johnson et al., 2013; McCreary and Sasse, 2000; Smolak et al., 2005; Stanford and McCabe, 2005). Accordingly, male pupils such as Reece (S6) explained that the ideal male

body amongst boys in the school was, “tall, it’s got a six-pack, pecs, muscles, strong jaw, all that.” However, the desire for a strong physique was just as apparent amongst female pupils who strongly indicated that the ‘healthy’ and ‘fit’ body was currently fashionable. Whilst some females equated this ‘healthy’ body with a curvaceous body, they did not necessarily desire ‘soft curves’. Rather, most of the girls desired ‘strong curves’ and expressed a desire for toned abdominals, shapely calf and thigh muscles, muscular buttocks and toned biceps. They admired ‘empowered’ athletic bodies and longed to be seen as strong, independent women who challenged traditional notions that the female body should be weak and submissive. They also drew upon ‘inspiring’ mantras which they explained were circulated within online social spaces and which they claimed were, “so motivational.” As such, the girls admired individuals who had obviously worked on their body:

Chloe: It's like they have been like working.

Laura: Working out, yeah, like they have worked to get that way.

Emma: Yeah and she's still got a good arse!

All: [laugh]

Chloe: ... yeah to be like really toned, like not to be really skinny but to be like toned and like lean.

Both male and female pupils admired hard work and effort. However, for some, it was *looking* rather than *being* strong, fit and healthy that was most important. It was being seen to be working out and eating virtuously rather than actually doing this:

Chloe: Yeah, I think it's fashionable to be like really healthy and really fit.

Lucy: I feel like in the past it was more fashionable to be like skinny.

Chloe: And now it's like to be fit.

Emma: Now it's like to be healthy.

Lucy: Like it's sooooo fashionable right now to be like really healthy.

Chloe: Like muscles.

Emma: Like all the pictures [on social media] that are like really amazing are like people at the gym in like gym stuff.

Chloe: They are like so toned.

Emma: They are proper like fit.

For such pupils, fitness was not so important for performance reasons but more for social reasons. These pupils explicitly acknowledged that it was currently the ‘in’ thing to look toned, to dress the body in lycra, to attend gym classes and take gym selfies, and to drink healthy smoothies. It was the fit and healthy image and identity that was important to them and the thought of being identified as ‘fitspirational’ was both attractive and persuasive.

Online social spaces provided young people with opportunities to scrutinise pictures of others but they were also exposed to more images of their own bodies within this context, for example images visible on their own online profile pages or pictures they were ‘tagged’

in. This provided an extra avenue for frequent self-scrutiny beyond looking at and analysing mirrored reflections. Scrutinising other people's bodies, therefore, involved the young people making very detailed comparisons against images of their own bodies. Pupils compared and contrasted themselves to a wide array of people such as close friends, pupils from other peer or year groups, well-known celebrities and other 'normal' people who had a big online presence (micro-celebrities) - that is all the images that continually bombarded them. These pupils frequently engaged in 'upward comparisons' (Festinger, 1954) by comparing themselves against those perceived to be 'better' than they were. For example, Mollie explained how she often looked at pictures of her peers, thinking to herself, "I wish I could be that pretty." This was something that made her "feel bad." She stated that she always compared herself to prettier girls as "I don't really think there is anyone that kinda looks worse than me." The following conversation with S6 girls provides further evidence of upward comparisons through the online realm:

Chloe: But like other people my age, other people our age, I'd be like oh I wish I had their body.

Lucy: Yeah so much.

Emma: Yeah, like you know from different schools.

Me: Okay, so people from different schools, would that be people you follow on social media?

All: Yeah.

Me: ... So how does that make you feel when you see their bodies and you are like oh I want to look like them?

Chloe: How do they do it, like what's their secret?

Lucy: You're like that's shan<sup>20</sup>

Chloe: ... Like I dunno, there is a girl who I am really good friends with who works like so hard to get a good figure and she's got like such a good body and I am like I wish I had the determination... you're like oh why don't I have that determination?

Lucy: Yeah like she goes to the gym like 5 times a week, she's got such a good body, literally.

Emma: Yeah like when we asked her how many times she went to the gym, cause we had never spoken to her about it, and then she told us that I was like oh God, I should probably go a bit more, like it makes you feel bad that you don't go as much I suppose.

Lucy: And she eats so healthy as well though, like she's just like, she's got her health like on point but it's like hard work.

Pupils therefore, not only compared and contrasted their bodies, but also compared and contrasted bodily practices. Upward social comparisons led individuals to feel frustrated and

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<sup>20</sup> 'Shan' is an Edinburgh slang term meaning 'unfair.'

disappointed with themselves when they did not live up to their own expectations, especially when they considered other people to have met these.

Within a culture of intense bodily scrutiny and evaluation, Benview pupils felt they were constantly being 'judged' by others to "the furthest extent possible." Judging others and feeling judged were just considered to be part of school life. As Freddie (S2) claimed:

It's just the way things are and will always be... everyone is judgemental... teenagers are the most judgemental people.

Although the young people intensely scrutinised one another within the online realm especially, the school environment was also considered a very judgemental social space. As Katie (S6) stated, "everyone more has their guard up in school." Feelings of judgement and scrutiny influenced how comfortable these young people felt (or did not feel) within the school setting. For example, some of the S4 girls spoke of feeling 'on edge' as they walked along corridors or through social spaces:

Courtney: Walking past people as well, like I hate walking down the concourse in case people are looking at me like saying things and like laughing.

Maddie: You know when we get told to get in the hall, I even feel uncomfortable walking in when they are all sitting there.

Fiona: Oh walking in yeah!

Me: With the boys sitting there?

Fiona: yeah

Maddie: Everyone.

Courtney: No, but even just the girls, like just the class. I'm like, urgh I hate this.

Similar to the online realm, most pupils' worries about social judgements within school centred on the body and bodily actions. Again similar to the online realm, perceptions around the depth and detail in scrutiny further strengthened their self-conscious feelings. Although the majority of these pupils came across as being very self-conscious of their bodies, in some of them there was almost a fantasising of the idea that all eyes were on them. As Natalie (S2) mused, "some the girls on our year look at us and are like oh I wonder what it is like to be in their group." Further, these young people (both those desiring and fearing attention) were aware of how mundane, everyday actions could be evaluated by others. For example, Summer (S2) claimed:

Yeah, when I'm eating lunch, like when I'm eating something I always think, like when I'm eating my sandwich I just don't like eating it. Because like, I dunno... like if I was eating a chocolate bar, people will be like why is she eating that?

This does not necessarily imply that Summer's peers were actually scrutinising her eating behaviours but does highlight her perception that they could be. Summer was very engaged



with celebrity culture, frequently mentioning celebrities and reality TV stars that she followed. She was also highlighted as one of the ‘popular’ girls in her year group, a girl who “everyone knows.” Yet at the same time, she felt very insecure. Celebrities’ eating habits are often scrutinised within the media, frequently associated with value judgements around bodily appearance whilst any ‘falls from grace’ are sensationalised - for an example of this, see Giles (2015). Here certain foods and eating practices become symbolic of gluttony and imperfection. In a sense, Summer perceived herself to be under the same levels of scrutiny. Of course, it is likely numerous factors were impacting upon her feelings of insecurity around eating in public and there may likely have been much deeper dimensions to this. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the breadth of young people’s culture around eating, food and the body in relation to informal aspects of schooling.

As implied above, pupils felt under intense scrutiny within informal school contexts – for example when in the cafeteria or social spaces such as corridors and common rooms. They claimed not to feel under such judgement within more formal ‘desk based’ learning contexts. However, they explained that such feelings of scrutiny were intensified within practical formal learning contexts such as drama and physical education. Physical education was especially highlighted as a place where they felt under magnified scrutiny:

Connor: When you're in maths or something all your work is just there in front of you, nobody is really wondering about your essay and stuff.

Reece: But PE, it's right in front of everybody, it's like under the spotlight, physically.

Connor: Exactly, it's like a performance or something.

Some pupils found a culture of hyper-surveillance and judgement to be off-putting in relation to their physical education participation. For example, when asked why few pupils in her year group elected to study physical education, Paris (S4) responded:

ohhh I will tell you about that! .... where to start .... well one reason is our year group is judgemental, not really close, they judge us and we judge other groups. Like we can say we don't but we have all done it. That's why some people wouldn't want to do PE because they wouldn't feel comfortable in front of the others (field note, 23/10/14).

Therefore, although many Benview pupils valued a fit-looking body ‘ideal’, some of those who really wanted to embody a fit and healthy image did not consider physical education an opportunity to ‘work on’ their bodies due to its public-evaluative nature. Engaging in actual body-work was something they wished to do backstage, in private. It was only the results of such work, or a censored and edited version of the process behind these results, that they

wished to make public. Chloe (S6) was a pupil who strongly indicated a desire to embody the ‘fitspo’ ideal. However, she explained:

I never work that hard in PE though cause I know that I am going to be sweaty and I know that I am going to have to go back into my school uniform so like I know that I am not going to get a good workout at PE anyway so like I never really mind when I don't do it.

She and her friends could not feasibly achieve ‘proper workouts’ in physical education as they did not want to ruin their pristine look or let others see them exercising. They also did not want to feel unhygienic, smelly or sticky – perhaps due to a lack of time or lack of privacy, space and comfort for changing, showering and freshening themselves up. These girls were not only protecting their image during physical education but also making sure it remained intact for the remainder of the school day. They claimed they would “try more” in physical education if it were the last period of the day. Doing physical education early in the day meant they would “get all messed up” and would “need to spend the rest of the day like that.” It was not just a case of looking “minging,” they also did not enjoy feeling that way. Further, despite their desires to embody fitspirational identities, it was not the norm to work hard within physical education. As Tegan (S6) explained, “you know everyone” in physical education and they would all “be like, why’s she working so hard.” She claimed that exercising in a commercial gym was different because “everyone’s there to work out and get sweaty.” As the S4 girls also explained, “you don’t know who they [other people in the gym] are.” Therefore, it was not only the public evaluative nature of physical education that was off-putting, it was the lack of anonymity and the identity repercussions. These girls did not want other *pupils* to see them exercising, as they valued most highly the opinions of those within their immediate social field.

### **6.3.3 The hyper-controlled (presentation of) body and self**

The control over self-presentation afforded to individuals by online technologies added more dimensions to the aforementioned practices of bodily scrutiny and social comparison. Individuals can tightly manage and censor the information that they ‘give’ to others when presenting an online identity (Fardouly et al., 2015; Mabe et al., 2014). They can also make use of technology to enhance and embellish representations of their bodies and their lifestyles. The young people in this study considered it very important to have control over ‘published’ images. For example, those who tended to post ‘selfies’ detailed the lengths they went to in order to ensure their images looked the best they could. They explained that they

would practice their poses, experiment with angles and lighting, apply various filters to images and even use ‘apps’ or photo-editing software to edit their pictures. Some online social spaces had in-built features for doing this. For example, Instagram was also popular amongst pupils due to its array of pre-selected and easily applicable filters that could enhance and alter images. The young people here had access to tools that would allow them to meet dominant body and beauty ideals within the virtual realm. The following conversation provides a glimpse of this:

The girls are chatting about an app called ‘Perfect365’, which can alter appearances in photographs. I ask them what the app does and they respond: “it can make faces thinner and eyes bigger and it changes cheek bones so you can see them more;” “it makes you look prettier and slimmer;” “if you use it, you can see these bits more [pointing to her collarbones] so it looks like they stick out more and the same with here [puts her hands around her ribcage], you can see the lines between the bones more” (field note, 10/09/14).

As the above implies, the pupils placed value on achieving ‘unreachable’ ideals sometimes only possible ‘in the flesh’ through drastic measures like plastic surgery. Such alterations, whether ‘real’ or virtual, change the very essence of an individual’s appearance and may reflect a deep discontent with the body as it is. Again, pupils often embarked upon such alterations in search of social approval, as Charlotte’s earlier comment about changing then re-posting her photographs to get more ‘likes’ implied. Some pupils stated that they would feel uncomfortable if ‘real’ images of themselves appeared on their social media accounts:

Chloe: Like putting a filter on a photo...  
Emma: Like on instagram you can edit.  
Me: Would you be happy putting pictures up without filters and things?  
Chloe: No! [Laughs]  
All: [laugh]  
Emma: Probably not!  
Lucy: It's too like real...  
Chloe: But they make your skin look more tanned everything.  
Lucy: Yeah you just want to look better.  
Me: So how does it feel when you look at a picture of yourself and you've put filters and things on it?  
Chloe: You're like oh like I look better in this picture yeah.

Therefore, young people within Benview were often comparing themselves to unrealistic ideals that they could not compete with in the face-to-face school environment. Additionally, these young people not only had enhanced control over bodily appearances but also engaged in selective self-presentation in relation to bodily practices. For example, they explained how they and their peers could ‘check in’ to gyms, relay details of their exercise habits and post pictures of nutritious meals online. By doing this, they could present a ‘healthy’ image but

these snippets of information could be selective and not show, for example, the hours they spent watching television or the ‘unhealthy’ snacks they also ate throughout the day.

Many pupils took it as given that images of celebrities in the traditional media were digitally altered and heavily censored. However, they did express some surprise around the extent of this when very subtle examples were revealed to them. Interpreting photo-editing within online social spaces can be a more ambiguous practice. For example, it may not be taken-for-granted that ‘normal’ people engage in such photo-editing activities. Further, any awareness of this may be less concrete than beliefs that images in the traditional media have been doctored (Harrison and Hefner, 2014). Analysing peer images can become more of a guessing game, a belief that images might be altered with uncertainty around the extent to which this has occurred or how this might have been done. Interestingly, however, the young people I spoke to were far from being ‘duped’ in relation to edited images. They were well aware that much of what they were seeing online was not entirely ‘real’, including the content shared by their friends. Image altering was so normalised within pupil culture that to an extent, pupils’ awareness of the relative authenticity of images and online content was not always the issue. In some cases, the young people considered their online representation of self as just as important, if not more important, than their ‘real life’ representation of self. For example, even if the ‘truth’ about a person’s appearance were known, these young people would still compare themselves against that person’s enhanced online image. They evaluated others within the unrealistic virtual realm but transferred the same standards of comparison to their evaluations of themselves within the flesh. Therefore, it was still possible for individuals to feel jealous of a virtual, digitally enhanced appearance. Such envy could be even more pronounced when accounting for the associated social affirmation that one would receive upon constructing a desirable and admired digitally enhanced representation of self:

Me: How do photo-shopped images make you feel?

Danielle: Ugly... fat... because they are so skinny, they have nice faces and bodies and you’re just sittin’ there all fat and ugly.

Me: But do you think these celebrities really are that skinny?

Danielle: No but they are made out to be that way.

Me: But if you knew they were photo-shopped, would that change it, even if you knew that’s not what they really look like?

Danielle: No... cause they are still being looked at in that way, people still see them as perfect.

Me: So if you saw a friend’s picture and it had filters on it but looked really good but you knew that was not what they really looked like, would it still make you feel a bit rubbish about yourself?

Danielle: Yeah cause they would be getting lots of likes and nice comments, like aw you look amazing. Then you put up something and you don't get that. (field note, 03/02/15).

Some participants indicated that having others view them as beautiful would make them feel good even if they did not perceive themselves in that way or even if they felt others had a 'false' impression of them. They more strongly desired to be secure in the knowledge that others considered them to have the 'ideal' body or appearance than to be secure in the knowledge that they actually had that body. It was possible for them to feel proud of an altered self and many were content with presenting a 'lie' in the online environment. However, these young people also knew that being 'found out' to be doing this was not desirable. Some pupils complained about peers who "look completely different in their pictures than they do in real life." For example, whilst gossiping about a girl on their year who has been making herself slimmer in photographs, the S3 girls told me:

There is this girl in our year and in her photo you could tell cause it was all like bent and in the background (field note, 03/02/15).

It was important that anyone making alterations would do so subtly. Being 'caught out' as overly dishonest came with negative implications and these S3 girls were very scathing of the girl detailed above. In a similar way, Depper and Howe (2016) illustrated how 'sporty' adolescents, with a sense of injustice, could be very cynical and scornful of those they perceived to be duping others on social media into thinking they were also 'fit' and active.

In contrast to the control and censorship afforded to young people online, these young people felt exposed and out of control in relation to how they presented their bodies within the school environment. They especially felt this way within physical education. Unlike the online environment, or even the traditional classroom settings, there was no 'backstage' within physical education. Pupils could more easily keep up appearances within some school contexts but felt that within physical education it was very difficult to hide their bodies and perceived bodily 'flaws'. Betraying any allusions of a fitness-inspired 'ideal', physical education was a place where bodies would "wobble" and "jiggle" and this was something that pupils could neither conceal nor control:

"High jump is the worst, like when you get up from the mats and everyone is watching you and your thighs are jiggling," Robyn explains, "I hate my thighs, all wobbly like chicken thighs." Her friend Michelle adds, "yeah, I used to worry in PE because my t-shirts had been washed so much... everyone could see my sports bra through them!" The conversation continues with Gita saying that she hates when people see her running in PE. "Oh yeah," says Charlotte, "remember that time when you fell down in PE and said you were hurt so you wouldn't have to do the sprinting!" (field note, 04/09/14)

However, it is important to stress that the risk inherent in physical education did not solely lie in it being a place where the body itself was exposed. For example, some pupils attempted to take control of their identity construction by defiantly insisting on wearing more revealing clothing in physical education, such as leggings, which were not allowed as part of the school kit policy:

Chloe: Like our PE kit, like I think it is the most unflattering kit ever.

Lucy: Yeah like you have to wear this [pulls on baggy t-shirt], oh my God.

Emma: Yeah like I have to wear this then I look at myself in the mirror and I am like oh my God.

Lucy: I look obese [laughs]

Chloe: I am like this is awful, I actually look like a whale... like because we're not allowed... at the gym I wear gym leggings and like, em... like a sports top and I have worn gym leggings here [in physical education] before and I have been told not to wear them.

Emma: I just feel more comfortable in gym clothes than in this stuff.

They explained that lycra clothing was more flattering than their shapeless physical education kit and explained how they liked 'working out' in "fashionable" outfits and the "brightest shoes I [they] can find." These were fashions that were 'trendy' amongst their peers and amongst celebrities – the clothing that adorned 'fit' bodies on Instagram and that the focussed advertising campaigns of big sports brands had linked to virtuous, high achieving identities. Some of these pupils also evidenced less concern over being physically active in situations where fellow pupils were present but where they could more easily maintain their idealised image. For example, during the Seniors' Christmas dance, pupils were encouraged to be physically active but were able to 'dress up' for the occasion:

The pupils who claim to feel exposed in the PE department, self-conscious in PE kit, worried about engaging in physical activity in front of others and who I have observed being very disengaged within PE actually appear very confident this evening. This is despite them wearing more exposing clothing and being a lot more active through the ceilidh dancing and doing physical activity in front of the whole of their year group (field note, 16/12/14).

In this setting, many of these pupils' bodies were more exposed than they ever were within physical education and, as the young people had warned me, there were lots of pictures taken at these events. Whilst large numbers may allow more opportunity to hide than in a class of 20, those pupils who claimed to be self-conscious in a physical education environment were happily 'strutting' confidently across the empty dancefloor in between dances. In contrast to when they were in physical education, these pupils had some censorship over their bodies and behaviours. They were engaging with an activity that did not expose them as being inept or unskilled. Further, they could also be physically active but at the same time maintain their

desired image – for example through the clothing and footwear or make-up they were wearing. Such is the image that they also cared to carefully construct on their online profiles with many stating that most of their selfies were taken on occasions where they were most ‘well-presented’ and dressed at their best.

#### 6.3.4 The hyper-risky social environment

The contemporary social environment that young people were negotiating was also a hyper-risky social environment. This was especially so with regards to online interaction. Whilst the online environment afforded pupils increased control over self-presentation, these pupils concurrently felt they lacked control over how their identities were constructed by others. The spread-ability of information contributed to this. Within online social spaces, information could spread very quickly, almost instantaneously. Due to the size of social networks, information could also spread widely. The young people were well aware of this. In some situations, they regarded this positively as the spread of information could increase a person’s fame, make them more visible to others and help them to receive more attention and social affirmation. However, the risk of infamy was always present. Pupils could be easily shamed and humiliated in front of large audiences, which could even include those they did not know personally. Identities could be spoiled or even destroyed via online social spaces and this was a constant threat.

Identity spoiling could occur through seemingly ‘trivial’ means such as being tagged in unflattering photographs. As previously suggested, some pupils felt uncomfortable when they had no control over images shared of them and felt anxious when in social situations where they were likely to be photographed frequently or unsuspectingly. Their concerns around being caught ‘off-guard’ are understandable bearing in mind the importance they placed upon not being ‘found out’ as being inauthentic. However, the young people also referred to more serious incidents of social shaming as they discussed how inappropriate photographs could be shared without their consent. Worryingly, they highlighted specific online ‘gossip’ pages that provided explicit platforms for this:

Fiona: ...I worry if it’s up in my room [her phone] and I’m downstairs in case something gets put up of me or something like that.

Me: What like other people posting stuff?

Fiona: Uh hu.

Ashley: Yeah, like I worry if I don’t have it.

Maddie: Or if I miss something out.

Ashley: Yeah cause there is a new page called Edinburgh gossip.

Fiona: Yeah.  
 Courtney: And like Edinburgh slags and stuff and it's like nude photos of girls.  
 Fiona: It's like people send photos in of other people.  
 Ashley: And gossip of people.  
 Maddie: Like gossip of like what they've done and stuff.  
 Me: Like people like in school and...  
 Fiona: Yeah.  
 Courtney: There's like a few people from our school.  
 Fiona: There's like Benview...  
 Ashley: There's loads of them.  
 Maddie: yeah  
 Fiona: What was the one on Twitter it was like Benview, St Mark's and Castle Hill or something, it was like all the gossip of people.  
 Me: Really?  
 Courtney: Yeah, stuff like blah blah blah slept with blah blah blah behind Tesco and stuff like that.  
 Maddie: Aye.  
 Ashley: Like even if it was lies or anything.  
 Courtney: Like totally slagging people off like.  
 Me: Ah, and would people then who were the target of it would they likely see it?  
 Ashley: Yeah they would.  
 Fiona: People tag them.  
 Ashley: They get tagged in it.  
 Me: Oh right... okay... and is that, as well as gossip, is it pictures as well?  
 Ashley: Yeah.  
 Maddie: Oh yeah.  
 Fiona: Like ina, ina...  
 Maddie: Really inappropriate.  
 Fiona: Like nudes kind of.  
 Erin: Like with nothing on, no clothes.  
 Me: Would that be pictures that people had sent to other people trusting...  
 Maddie: Yeah.  
 Fiona: Yeah, like screen shotted them, yeah.  
 Ashley: No or people like, even some people send in like fake photos of people and pretend that it is that person but it's not actually that person.  
 Me: Oh, okay, yeah.  
 Fiona: Like photos that don't have faces and stuff in them.  
 Ashley: Yeah and pretend that they've been sent it by that person but they've not actually.  
 Maddie: It's actually disgusting.

Although the young people were fairly blasé about the photographs they published of themselves, they were still aware of the potential risks associated with losing control of this process, particularly in relation to images that they did not intend to be published to a wide audience in the first place. Pupils also felt uneasy since they knew that lies could be unfairly constructed and spread about them. Much rumour spreading in the online environment brazenly occurred 'front stage', and was not necessarily hidden from the people it was about (Marwick and Boyd, 2014; Nycyk, 2015). As these girls explained, people would be 'tagged' in, and made aware of, their destruction. The enduring legacy of social interaction also



contributed to the risks associated with online interaction. As Ryan (S1) explained “everything you say on social media, it's recorded and it stays there for ever.” Pupils explained that they could delete comments and pictures but that there was always the possibility of these being re-shared by someone who had ‘screen shot’ the original.

Exposure like that detailed above could lead some young people to become stigmatised within the school and be attributed a derogatory reputation which was not always deserved or fair. Such reputations could ‘stick’ as the following conversation with S6 boys implies:

Me: Okay so what do you mean by if you are a slag?

Kristoffer: [laughs]

Me: [pause] I mean, like would you judge certain girls and things like that?

Kristoffer: Oh yeah, definitely.

Reece: Definitely, a lot yeah.

Me: Like for what though? [pause]... Don't be embarrassed just say whatever...

Reece: Just for minging things that they've done.

Kristoffer: Yeah, cause like how many people they've slept with and stuff like that.

Reece: It's just like what minging things they have done. Cause like when one person knows, everyone knows. It's like we are living on a farm like.

Kristoffer: [laughs]

Reciprocally, what occurred within the school environment could quickly find its way online and influence how pupils were perceived and treated in that realm. If a Benview pupil were to embarrass themselves or be ridiculed within physical education, for example, this would not necessarily happen solely in front of their immediate audience of classmates. As Kaylee (S4) explained:

Kaylee: I think the problem is that people don't want to look stupid [in physical education]. You know, if you fall over or do something stupid it will be all over Twitter!

Me: What like people making comments?

Kaylee: Yeah there could be something about it or it could be all over it.

(field note, 17/09/14).

Both online and offline social interaction was even more risky since many aspects of young people’s lives and interactions were dramatised within a celebrity-esque culture. Marwick and Boyd (2014, p.1187) explain that ‘drama’ is a term young people themselves use to describe social occurrences that encompass “performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience.” This audience then becomes engrossed in, and part of, social situations and happenings that were not originally their own (Allen, 2015). Therefore, ‘drama’ occurred amongst the young people within Benview when they, as active and engaged audiences, viewed and talked about others and their relationships and when

they themselves also played to their audiences, attempting to entertain as they socially interacted with one another. Marwick and Boyd (2014) add that young people's 'dramas' can take place both offline and online but frequently take place within online social spaces where people's lives and interactions can be followed as entertainment.

Drama also involves exaggerated reactions to social events, which are attributed excessive importance and emotionality and drawn out over a long period of time (Marwick and Boyd, 2014). Exaggerated reactions and heightened emotionality were evident amongst Benview pupils. This was apparent in the ways pupils themselves framed conflict amongst each other, as evidenced in the following field note taken from an S2 physical education lesson:

Throughout the lesson it becomes clear that there is something going on between the two groups of girls. Frequently, when there are breaks in activity, each group sits huddled together whispering within their respective grouping. At times pupils will whisper something then glance over their shoulders at the other group. "These girls are always falling out... everything is made into such a drama," their teacher tells me as the lesson ends and the class head away to get changed. A while later, two girls come out of the changing rooms in tears, lots of their peers begin flocking around them... "we are getting framed!" they accuse (field note, 27/11/14).

The young people within Benview perceived social life theatrically. There was lots of talk about betrayals and broken trust and certain events and people were made a big deal of and sensationalised. Here, there was sometimes also a revelling in the downfall of others and almost a 'soap opera' or 'reality tv' quality to the ways in which social relations were perceived and talked about. Within this context, pupils specifically spoke of the importance of friendship, stating that friends were important in order for them to feel socially safe within school. For example, Liam (S2) asserted that a person would be "safe" in school with friends but without friends would be "eaten alive." Pupils were, however, aware that it was possible to appear popular and be treated well by others but not necessarily be liked by them. They highlighted superficial friendships where people were "backstabbers" rather than "pure friends" and did not appear to care about one another. As such, pupils such as Logan (S1) warned, "be careful who you are friends with." Since any fall outs or social conflict could be ongoing, pupils were wary of who they trusted, especially in relation to 'secrets' or rumours. As Kaylee (S4) explained:

I have had things that have made me stop trusting everyone [friends]. So I don't need to worry as much cause I don't put my trust in one person. I think though if someone says something behind my back or if I tell them something and they go and tell everyone else, I won't pull them up for that. I am quite soft like that (field note, 17/09/14).

As Logan similarly claimed of his experiences:

I had a secret and I told someone who I thought was my friend and he blabbed it round and I got bullied quite a lot for it and ever since then I had trouble like letting people in to my life.

Some pupils depicted their culture to be one where everyone was out for themselves, a social context where individuals would work to enhance their own status by engaging in 'aggressive facework' (Goffman, 1967). That is, spoiling the reputations of others for their own gain. As Reece (S6) explained, reflecting back upon his experiences:

Reece: We just slagged each other like everyone was like, like just to see who could get more laughs out of it.

Me: Is that laughs from like other people?

Reece: Yeah and to get like crowds like... if you put someone else down you are only getting up higher.

However, aggressive facework is not always explicit and can be subtle, especially when embarked upon in front of an audience. An individual can be perceived negatively when spoiling another person's identity, for example being considered mean and heartless (Goffman, 1967). This may explain why it is often easier for an individual to cyber-bully someone when shielded with anonymity (Berne et al., 2014; Mishna et al., 2009). When not anonymous though, individuals can manipulate and wound other people's reputations and relationships covertly so that it appears they did not intend to (Marwick and boyd, 2014). For example, Benvue pupils spoke of the anger they experienced when peers had 'purposefully' shared unflattering photographs of them within online social spaces, often claiming that their peers did this in order to make themselves look better:

Courtney: Like say if I am with all my friends and, like a lot of them are skinny, so I am like aw well if they want a nice photo then I won't go in it cause if I don't like it and they look good then they might want to put it up on something.

Ashley: yeah and you tell them to delete it.

Maddie: Yeah and oh and then you'll be like can I delete that please and they will be like nah that's really nice... well they look nice, I dinnae.

Courtney: I'm like just crop me out of it.

Massie: That's what happens.

Courtney: Yeah so I am just like no yous just get a photo and they're like aw no I'll take a photo of you.

Fiona: Yeah they're like oh no you look nice [sarcastic], you look nice in it... when I look like an absolute bulf.

Courtney: ... I'm dreading summer cause they are all just gonna be putting photos up with like hardly any clothes and that on and you'll just see me in a burka [laughs].

In many cases this subtle aggression within face-work serves a dual purpose of enhancing and re-asserting an individual's social worth externally in the perceptions of others whilst

also serving to bolster their own personal feelings of social worth internally in relation to their bodies. It also becomes a way for people to gain attention, put themselves in the public eye and strategically influence how both themselves and others are perceived (Allen, 2014).

Of course, such power struggles did not only occur online. Similar power struggles occurred within the school environment and physical education especially became a catalyst for the exertion of explicit aggression around the body. For example, the following observation taken from an S1 physical education lesson exemplifies a pupil being teased about her size during a fitness lesson, something she said happened “all the time”:

“Where is Mollie?” Josh asks whilst pointing to the rate of perceived exertion scale on the wall. He has singled her out of all the girls. “Probably in the canteen!” his ‘sidekick’, Ben, hurtfully exclaims. Josh laughs loudly at this response and so do some other pupils, including a few of Mollie’s friends. Within seconds, Mollie moves to the other side of the room, her back to the class. Tears stream down her face as two girls attempt to comfort her. She quietly sobs, trying to mop up her tears with her fingers but they just keep coming... (field note, 22/01/15).

Mollie spent the rest of this lesson crying as she talked to me about how she “hated” school due to the constant mocking and weight-related teasing she encountered. These episodes led to feelings of shame and humiliation and affected her ability to concentrate in lessons. Further, they not only affected her physical education experiences, but also her feelings towards school as a whole. Unfortunately, such episodes do occur within physical education, even more so than within other school spaces, as the physical education environment often provides opportune moments for such incidents to occur (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012). Physical education also provided opportune moments for more subtle aggression around the body. The following observation with Benview pupils (S4) provides an example of this:

The class have divided themselves into two very distinct social groups, evident in how they are using the physical space of the dance studio. To the right there is a group of slim, confident and loud pupils and to the left another group of larger, quieter and more timid pupils ... At one point the teacher stops the class. “Girls, you sound like a herd of elephants! Try to land softly...” the teacher begins. This phrase causes quite a ‘stir’ with the rest of the group. “Miss you saying we are fat? She’s saying we are fat!” Becca exclaims jokingly. Immediately more of the ‘populars’ jump on this, “yeah miss you calling us fat!?” a number of them exclaim whilst repeating the question numerous times in a funny accent. They do this in a ‘jokey’ way as opposed to sounding accusatory or angry. However, at the same time the less dominant group stand back and appear to look on very self-consciously - hugging their bodies and almost looking ashamed. One larger pupil is looking straight at the floor blushing, her face red (field note, 20/08/14).

What is perhaps most damaging about the, often dramatically framed yet subtle, practices of putting others down, spreading rumours about them and derogatorily talking about people

and their bodies is that young people do not perceive them as bullying in the ways that adults would (Marwick and boyd, 2014). Often young people do not want to be identified as a bully but framing something as drama can justify a practice and distance people from any emotional harm that they are causing.

Within a social context like this, some Benview pupils felt physical education was socially unsafe. They indicated that there was “something about PE” that made them feel especially self-conscious and anxious about their bodies. It was not only ‘overweight’, ‘unfit’ or less ‘able’ pupils that felt self-conscious within physical education. Those who ‘trained’ out with school also detailed their self-presentational concerns:

Tilda: you almost don't want to embarrass yourself in front of your class like if you try really really hard.

Ruth: People will be like, ‘urgh, you’re just trying hard.’

Me: But what about at training then, because you must try hard at training?

Ruth: yeah you try like really hard and your face goes pink but you don't... it doesn't matter there...

Tilda: Cause every one's like that

Ruth: But if your face went like bright bright red cause you've been working so hard in school, then that's embarrassing.

Tilda: Yeah, if you've got sweat dripping down your face and everything

Ruth: ... Yeah, cause everybody judges you when you are at school.

Pupils themselves desired a ‘safer’ environment within which they would feel comfortable, accepted by others and protected from judgement and ridicule. Therefore, most pupils felt comfortable when with their friends or within a small, close-knit group where they had time to build trusting relationships:

Kaylee: See I do dance after school and if someone new comes in then we chum them and we help them so that they don't have to be worrying about what they look like or about looking stupid when they dance. We are a bit like a family if you get what I mean?

Me: Yeah, I suppose you could say it is a safer environment if that makes sense?

Kaylee: Uh hu, that's what my dance teacher says and it is, because we don't need to worry about what other people are thinking and we don't feel worried about trying anything... In school you don't want to make a fool of yourself. You get these different groups in school and there is you know the popular ones and all these groups (field note, 17/09/15).

Like participants in Azzarito and Hill's (2013) research, these pupils preferred being physically active out with the school environment. For example, they enjoyed exercising with their own friends and families or within their homes where they felt less judged, less self-conscious and more “free.”

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that there were three defining tenets of contemporary culture amongst the young people within Benview. Firstly, the body was very central to, and important within, the young people's social relationships and to how they constructed their identities. This, of course, is not a new assertion and a wealth of previous research studies have argued this in relation to the contexts they have investigated. However, the rest of the chapter has argued that two newer cultural tenets, namely the omnipresence of online social interaction and, coupled with this, the celebrification of self, have been associated with some important mechanisms through which many issues previously discussed within the literature are now evolving. It was asserted that the young people negotiated a contemporary social context where both their own and other people's bodies were very visible and considered key indicators of who they were. The young people were frequently exposed to bodily images, which were often intensely scrutinised, and this led to them upholding very detailed body ideals. They often compared themselves to images of 'perfection' as many of the images that they saw, and published themselves, represented virtual selves and bodies that had been enhanced by the use of technology. In a sense, the young people had much control over how they presented themselves and appeared to others, control that was not possible amongst previous generations. However, they also lacked control in how their identities were constructed by others and the social environment was very risky in this sense. Identities could be quickly spoiled online and this was a critical threat as online identities were extremely important to these young people, in many cases just as important as their identities in 'real life'.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion and implications**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter asserted that Benview pupils constructed, and were part of, a culture where the body was central, where online social spaces were omnipresent and where individuals were, to an extent, celebrified. This culture was hyper-risky, within which the body and the self were hyper-visible, hyper-scrutinised and hyper-controlled. The present chapter debates and theorises these findings by exploring young people's negotiations of social interaction and social relationships within, and between, online and offline social spaces. Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of social interaction (1959; 1963; 1967) helps to explain the majority of research findings. Whilst Goffman himself specifically focussed on face-to-face interaction, that is social interaction in the flesh, his sensitising concepts are also relevant when explaining social interaction within online social spaces (Blumer, 1954; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). For example, ideas around impression management, face work and stigma each help to explain how, and why, young people engage in online practices such as 'selfie' taking and photo-editing as they present themselves to others. His theoretical ideas also highlight associated implications for offline interaction. Both Bourdieu (1984; 1986) and Foucault's (1977; 1980b; 1997) work is used to strengthen theoretical analyses in places, particularly in reference to social power relations. For example, the informal social network of Benview pupils can be considered a 'social field', within which people endeavour to acquire and exchange capital as they aspire to become favourably positioned (Bourdieu, 1984). Foucault's (1977) theorisations around surveillance and the ubiquity of power also explain why young people may feel constrained to present themselves in certain ways. Whilst not necessarily aligning to each theorist's stance as a totalising explanation of social life, I propose that their theories and concepts can be effectively synthesised to offer a coherent explanation of the data generated within this study.

### **7.2 Identity construction within a contemporary context**

To explain the research findings of this study, the significance of identity construction and strategic self-presentation within a contemporary context must be explored. The self-orientated online environment becomes an important medium for identity work within a contemporary context. Benview pupils perceived online social spaces to be places where

they were often seen and known by others. They also learnt to scrutinise one another and to present themselves tactically within these environments. Therefore, online social spaces were also attractive sites for identity construction as they afforded young people with new possibilities for constructing socially 'ideal' selves. Within online environments, these young people could construct virtual idealised fronts (Goffman 1959), which helped them to accrue virtual physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984), and this had implications for how they are perceived and treated in online *and* offline settings.<sup>21</sup> However, these young people not only had opportunity to embellish themselves within an online context – they also felt pressure to do so. The online environment provided them with opportunity but was still a social space where the body was constrained and objectified and where societal norms, ideals and power hierarchies were magnified. These young people did not, and could not, construct online identities detached from their 'real' selves, nor negotiate online environments completely removed from the physical school environment. Both school and online contexts influenced one another in bidirectional fashion, as did online and offline facets of the self. Therefore, coherence in self and self-presentation across the two overlapping contexts was important. Once we gain a deeper understanding of these processes, we can begin to suggest and examine the implications for young people within physical education.

### 7.2.1 *Becoming known: the importance of online identities*

Engaging in identity work is an important endeavour within individualistic, neo-liberal societies. Benview pupils were part of a society where there is much focus on self - on who people 'are', what they do, their successes and failures and their relationships with others (Griffin, 2014). Within such a context, the self becomes a work in progress, always in need of improvement (Giddens, 1991). Accordingly, the young people within this study considered appearance-related bodywork as being integral to becoming a 'better' person. As one pupil explained, engaging in bodywork was satisfying as "you are actually doing something to get the way you want to be." However, the way these pupils wanted to 'be' was often tied to what they thought they ought to be, to what they felt was socially acceptable,

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<sup>21</sup> Goffman (1959) uses the term 'virtual' to denote an idealised, hoped for and expected identity. As will be explained later, the term 'virtual idealised front' encompasses Goffman's theorisation as it refers to an ideal self-representation. However, the term 'virtual' is also being used here in reference to its more contemporary everyday usage. That is, something that is a computerised or digitised simulation, which is "not physically present as such but is made by software to appear to be so" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). Similarly, Bourdieu (1984) himself did not use the term 'virtual physical capital' but the term will be used within this chapter when applying his concept of capital to a contemporary context.



expected and admired and they worried about what people thought and said about them. They seemed to be engaged in a narcissistic and superficial culture where strategic self-presentation was highly prioritised. Goffman's (1959) work around impression management helps to explain pupils' pre-occupations with their bodies and the opinions of others. Within a culture of hyper-visibility and hyper-scrutiny, pupils were continually aware of having an audience, whom they wished to please and impress. They were also aware of how important and symbolic their appearance was to who they were. In many situations, these young people could only play the roles of 'popular', 'trendy', 'virtuous' and 'healthy' feasibly and successfully if their external appearance allowed them to.

The young people did not just engage in body and identity work in the flesh. Much of their identity work took place in the online realm. The previous chapter indicated that pupils frequently interacted within online social spaces as an extension of their school social environment. Benview pupils constantly interacted within a social field as they formed their identities. That is, they navigated a structured and bounded network of social positions, divisions and power relations within which they constructed and negotiated meanings, norms and values (Bourdieu, 1984; Hay and Penney, 2013; Jenkins, 1992). This informal social network comprised of young people all socially connected through their common association of belonging to the school. It was anchored within, but certainly not confined to, the school as a physical location. Online social spaces were integral to the social field these young people negotiated. Therefore, the online environment was an important space for socialising but was also a space where identities and power relations were constructed and established in connection to their offline environments.

Online social spaces were especially important sites for young people to engage in identity work as these were spaces where young people became, and felt that they became, 'known' to others. As previously suggested, pupils 'knew' each other based on their online activities and online visibility. They felt close to those with whom they barely interacted with in 'real life',<sup>22</sup> explaining that they sometimes visualised others by their 'screen-names' in their thoughts. Interestingly, many of the young people felt that online was where their peers saw them and knew them *the most*. Online social spaces facilitated big and omnipresent audiences and were spaces where lots of people interacted on a frequent basis

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'real life' was placed within inverted commas in the previous chapter and will be throughout this chapter. Later analysis asserts that online social interaction was no less a part of real life than social interaction in the flesh. However, the young people themselves did explicitly refer to the offline realm as 'real life' during conversations about social media and online social networking sites.

(Boyd, 2014). These online audiences could be very wide and, in some ways, these audiences could see more of people's lives than would normally be possible. For example, if a pupil went to a party at the weekend, their online 'followers' would likely see a representation of what they wore, what they looked like and what they did, even if those 'followers' were not physically at the party itself. The online environment was not only 'front stage', it was a 'mega-stage' where anything that did become visible became very visible indeed (Goffman, 1959).

However, being 'known' online went beyond simply being recognised or seen. As people actively engage with online social spaces, they continually create an impression of themselves, both advertently and inadvertently (Marwick, 2013a; Zhao et al., 2008). Pupils were conscious that others would form opinions of them within online social spaces and these social spaces clearly became important avenues for them to engage in projects of the self. Much of their engagement with social media and social networking sites became a calculated process of producing content for others to consume. As Gita (S2) asserted:

It is important what you post [on social media] because it says something about you as a person, it's like your account says something about you. It tells a story about you (field note, 18/09/14).

Since these young people were aware that other people were looking at, and monitoring, them and their 'stories', they thought carefully and strategically about their online activities and about any content they posted such as pictures or status updates. They continually crafted characters within online social spaces and worked upon maintaining and bettering this representation of themselves on a daily basis. Their online personas became almost like people in their own rights, characters individuals could relate to and become familiar with. Even virtual images could take on a 'being' (Miah and Rich, 2008). Therefore, when these young people considered their peers, they not only reflected upon their previous face-to-face interactions but largely referred to instances where they had 'seen' and 'engaged' with these peers in the online realm. As such, these young people understood that putting effort into constructing a favourable online identity was worthwhile as this was where many people would cast judgement on them and formulate opinions of who they 'were'. Of course, this also meant that protecting online self-representations was an extremely important social task.

As the previous chapter evidenced, becoming 'known' within the online environment was not without its risks. Online social spaces with their large and watchful audiences were also sites where young people constructed each other's identities and imputed meaning on one another. Just as individuals could make themselves known for the

‘right’ reasons, they could become widely known for the ‘wrong’ reasons. Here knowledge, constructed through online rumours and gossip, could be used to classify and label individuals. Often, bodies and bodily practices became equated with the person, even if the knowledge used to classify and label was not necessarily ‘true’. For instance, a girl could be classified as a “slag” due to “minging things” others said she had done, even if she had not done these things. This could have very real implications for how she would be treated by others both online and offline. In such instances the term ‘slag’ and knowledge around what this means functions as a ‘dividing practice’; being known as this can lead an individual to be ‘set apart’ socially from others (Foucault, 1977). In Goffman’s (1963) terms, they become stigmatised and socially shunned, as less people are willing to become associated with them in fear of also tarnishing their own reputation by mere association. Whilst Foucault (1977) mostly theorises around ‘scientific classification’, that is the processes by which individuals draw upon ‘expert’, scientific knowledge to categorise themselves and others, it is clear that ‘folk’ knowledge can be just as powerful. The online context provided a new and exaggerated mechanism through which such classification and stigmatisation could occur.

### 7.2.2 Learning how to ‘be’: strategic self-presenters and expert watchers

The young people within Benview engaged in a number of learnt practices and strategies relating to their online identity construction. Goffman (1959) argues that individuals learn how to act based on what is normal within their social context and therefore can model their actions, interactions and ways of being and presenting themselves on one another. The previous chapter argued that some young people were becoming celebrified through their engagements with online social spaces and this influenced the extent to which, and ways in which, people knew one another. Celebrity culture is ubiquitous within contemporary Western societies and increasingly infiltrates, and is proliferated by, new media technologies (Marwick, 2016). Accordingly, these young people reported to spend much time ‘following’ the lives of their favourite celebrities on sites such as Twitter and Instagram. It was the ‘norm’ for these young people to put the self ‘out there’ and be noticed by others. In a sense, this was just what people did and what they witnessed others doing - especially the traditional celebrities that they ‘followed’.

Traditional celebrities frequently use online social spaces to construct their self-identities in a commodified brand-like fashion, as they use their public personas to promote products such as food, clothing and accessories (Driessens, 2013). For example, athletes may

be encouraged by their sponsors to post images of themselves on their personal social media sites that show them working out, wearing their branded clothing and drinking their branded recovery beverages. Accompanying text, quotes and hashtags may associate these brands and athletes with, for example, greatness.<sup>23</sup> This inspires followers to buy such products in the belief that doing so aids them to become, or be perceived as, determined and successful like their heroes. The young people within Benview used similar self-presentation techniques to traditional celebrities and in many ways adopted the same celebrity ‘subject position’ whilst acting as micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2016). For example, they strived to gain attention and admiration through name-dropping their peers in ‘tweets’, through using trendy hashtags and re-creating particular looks and poses for selfies. They also recreated the drama and spectacle that was prominent within the celebrity lives and interactions that they actively engaged with as audiences (Allen, 2014). These practices were seeping into their own culture to the extent that they were also modelling and learning similar behaviours from each other. Marwick (2016) suggests that micro-celebrity is what someone does as opposed to being what they are. It is a set of practices, self-presentation techniques and ways of thinking about the self. Here, the self is strategically perceived as a commodity for the consumption of an ‘audience’ or ‘fans’ or ‘followers’ but the size of this audience is not necessarily important (Marwick, 2016). People can engage in these practices when very few, or no, people are watching them. The young people within Benview were not necessarily turning themselves into commodities for financial gain. However, they did understand that members of the public admired and adored these celebrities and perhaps wanted to emulate their behaviours in the hope of experiencing such adoration themselves.

Yet, whilst many aspects of this learnt self-presentation could have been conscious and calculated, it is also possible that these young people were being socialised so that these ways of acting and inter-acting were gradually becoming part of their habitus and how they subconsciously thought, interacted and presented themselves (Bourdieu, 1984). An individual’s habitus develops continually in relation to one’s surroundings and Rich and Miah (2014) suggest that people’s experiences of social media and digital technologies influence how they subsequently interact with, and through, such technology. As these young people were interacting within an online environment and engaging with online content, they will have intuitively learnt and adopted ways of presenting themselves. Their habitus will have developed in relation to the various, and overlapping, sub-fields they

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<sup>23</sup> ‘As an example, “find your greatness” is one of many inspirational quotes used by Nike and Nike athletes (see Nike, 2012).

engaged with, whether that be the fields of celebrity, health and fitness or others. As they engaged with these fields, they would begin to instinctively understand valued ways of presenting the self. Part of this process would also encompass the development of their own schemes of perception and appreciation, forming their tastes and influencing the sorts of content and social experiences that they would be attracted to (Bourdieu, 1984). Bolstering this, online social spaces have mechanisms that assist and guide the development of such tastes, for example targeted content based upon a person's demographics or previous browsing history.

The young people were not only developing tastes and learning how to present themselves online. They were also learning how to scrutinise and watch one another and this, again, increased the importance of successful online self-presentation. It was 'normal' for these young people to make themselves visible online but it was also 'normal' for them to be watching each other and to be under the constant gaze of others. Interestingly, they knew that they were continually being watched and judged because they also constantly watched others in this social space – as clear from comments such as, “social media is for looking at other people basically.” Although this can be explained in terms of audience awareness (Goffman, 1959), applying Foucault's (1977) theorisations around panoptic surveillance allows us to understand more comprehensively how young people constructed their identities under the gaze of others as they also negotiated social power relations. The young people here were clearly aware that there could always be others watching their online activity. Although this surveillance was normalised and open, in some ways it was also very covert. Online social spaces did not have mechanisms that allowed users to know just who was watching them and when. Pupils were still anonymous as they watched others. This protected the watcher and also maintained levels of uncertainty around surveillance. Like prisoners in a panopticon prison, these young people were under the constant threat of being watched but without being able to see their 'watchers' actually doing the watching. They were, however, served with intermittent reminders that they were under surveillance. For example, receiving comments, 'likes' or 'shares', let them know that others had seen their content. Therefore, they possibly felt pressure to regulate their conduct even at times when it was possible no one else was observing them as they *could* always be under scrutiny. Being under an audience's gaze did not just lead these young people to construct their identities in opportunistic ways. They were aware that their online audiences were particularly scrutinous and felt they *had* to attribute time and effort to get these identities just right.

The surveillance that young people within Benview were under and engaged with was more complex than the above analogy infers. Panoptic surveillance implies that a select few in positions of power watch over others but are immune to the gaze themselves (Foucault, 1980a). There are, of course, many elements of this type of surveillance within online social spaces. For example, big corporations can have access to people's personal details and browsing histories, which function as marketing data and inform targeted advertising (Fuchs and Trottier, 2015). Although beyond the scope of the present study, this undoubtedly has implications for how young people are exposed to messages and images relating to health, fitness and the body. However, the surveillance Benview pupils were under also had synoptic elements (Bauman, 1998; Mathiesen, 1997). Synopticism indicates how the 'many' intensely watch the 'few'. For example, the general public can scrutinise celebrities, politicians and those in positions of power in much detail through traditional press and media outlets. Nevertheless, with the rise in online social spaces, such intense scrutiny is not just reserved for a select group of people but is apparent in the ways 'ordinary' people intensely watch each other (Doyle, 2011). The detailed scrutiny that Benview pupils were subjected to appeared no less than the levels of scrutiny these young people engaged in when they looked at images and the lives of traditional celebrities. However, pupils were also immersed within an omnioptic environment where the many watch the many (Marwick, 2012). Omnioptic surveillance implies that power relations are diffuse, supporting Foucault's (1978) claim that power is exercised in all relationships and in all directions. Benview pupils adopted dual roles - they were watching others but were also being watched themselves, from all different angles. It was not only big corporations or media outlets that defined what was normal, acceptable and desirable within their online social spaces. Rather, the judges of normality were everywhere - anyone and everyone - including those of similar social standing (Marwick, 2012). As some pupils claimed, their peers' definitions of 'perfection' became more powerful regulators of their own behaviours and self-perceptions than anything they were 'told' by other avenues such as the media or their teachers. However, although surveillance was diffuse, it was not diluted. These young people were under an extremely intense form of surveillance which was panoptic, synoptic and omnioptic all at once.

Within an intensely scrutinous environment, these young people were also becoming 'expert watchers' of the body. They were constantly monitoring others whilst concurrently monitoring themselves and making comparisons. Further, they had access to explicit cues and tools that assisted them in doing this. Rich and Miah (2009) suggest that digital technologies provide explicit means for people to monitor, assess and regulate themselves.

To provide one example, fitness apps often encourage people to input and track their bodily measurements and practices so that their self becomes quantified. The quantified self can be easily monitored, perhaps via statistics, graphs or targets that an app produces. However, a scrutinised digital self does not need to be numerical. For example, online ‘fitspo’ sites often encourage people to log and track themselves visually by posting pictures that track bodily ‘improvements’ or transformations. Despite the availability and presence of these means, the young people within Benview did not talk much about monitoring their bodies through such targeted tools and mediums. Rather, they alluded to engaging with subtler mechanisms for bodily surveillance via online social spaces – for example, applying the tools they were adept at using for general surveillance more specifically to the body. Fuchs and Trottier (2015) explain how social media and social networking sites have a number of inbuilt surveillance devices, such as location ‘check ins’, picture ‘tagging’ and so forth. These tools aid big corporations and intelligence agencies in tracking people and their behaviours but also creep into everyday life so that ‘normal’ people become familiar with them, using them to aid their own surveillance practices. It was these cues that helped young people scrutinise each other and that also helped them to scrutinise themselves. When pupils received ‘likes’ or had their content ‘shared’, they were monitoring and regulating their ‘performances’. For example, they took down ‘selfies’ before altering them and putting them back up again if they had not been ‘liked’ by enough people. Such informative feedback indicated to these young people how ‘good’ their bodies and bodily practices were in relation to others, how successfully they had gained and maintained audience attention and how successful they had been in constructing an idealised impression of themselves. To an extent, the young people were very in tune with how they felt others were perceiving them as they were also able to view their own profile pages, pictures and interactions from an outsider’s perspective (Manago et al., 2015; Meier and Gray, 2014). They could engage in self-surveillance and self-monitoring by getting to know the characters they were constructing as others would do (Cooley, 1902/1964). Therefore, the online environment was a place where they knew others and were known by others but also a place where they knew themselves.

### **7.2.3 Embellishing the ‘good’: virtual idealised fronts**

As well as being an important medium for identity construction, the online environment was an attractive medium for engaging in identity work. Young people are often motivated to engage with online social spaces since they afford them with possibilities to more

strategically present themselves in a flattering way (Manago, 2015). The previous chapter asserted that the young people within Benview presented themselves to others in a hyper-controlled fashion. Pupils' practices of meticulously controlling, altering and enhancing the images they published of themselves provided clear indication of this. They had access to tools such as photo-editing apps and had time to embellish the 'good' parts of their bodies and hide the 'bad'. Therefore, body work did not just involve physically going to the gym or dieting. During social interaction, the external appearance of the body becomes part of a performer's 'front' (Goffman, 1959). Traditionally young people have also employed strategies such as wearing make-up or flattering clothing to create their idealised front (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002). However, within a contemporary context, Benview pupils had access to new possibilities such as apps making them look thinner or filters giving them clear complexions. They could more easily create an idealised impression of themselves, which was complimentary and aligned to the norms, values and ideals espoused within their sociocultural setting and were able to do this by constructing and employing a virtual 'idealised front' (Goffman, 1959). Of course, virtual idealised fronts were not only comprised of virtual bodily appearances but also encompassed virtual representations of an individual's manner, conduct and social activities. For example, pupils' pictures of parties and nights out were symbolic of how 'fun' and 'popular' they were to others. Pictures of 'healthy' meals and gym selfies were also 'props' which helped construct a fit, healthy and honourable image. However, much of the pupils' efforts to construct a virtual idealised front did especially centre upon creating an idealised bodily image. The young people in this study were living within an image-driven society where looks and appearances were highly valued (Shilling, 2012) and it is unsurprising that they invested any available additional resources in working on their virtual appearances. What was perhaps more surprising was the lengths that they went to in order to do so and the importance that they attributed towards these virtual images.

Virtual idealised fronts were important to young people as they helped them to be who they really wanted to be and to more easily perform the roles that they really wanted to play. Through digitally working on the body and interacting within online social spaces, they were able to construct the identity they would aspire to embody if there were no external constraints on them. This is what Zhao et al. (2008, p.1830) term their "hoped for possible self". Therefore, the online environment afforded some pupils with increased 'freedom' in relation to their bodies as they could construct appearances not so constrained by their own physicality. In one sense, this could be considered to be a playful practice (Rich and Miah, 2014). The young people could use the online environment as a means to creatively



experiment with who they were and what they looked like. Further, although these young people attributed much effort into working upon their digitised images, this was less effort than that required to attain the same result by traditional means. For example, pupils who struggled to diet and exercise could ‘nip’ in their waists in seconds or apply shadows and filters to pictures to enhance muscle tone relatively quickly when compared to the amount of time and effort that would be required to engage in strength training. Similarly, those who perceived themselves to have ‘imperfections’ such as spots or blemishes could easily erase and brush these over. In some ways, this front with its lack of physical constraint could be considered more authentic than any other despite it being heavily manufactured (Bowen, 2010). The overweight pupil who felt trapped and constrained by their body in the flesh had the opportunity to play at being an ‘acceptable’ size, the pupil traditionally perceived as ‘ugly’ could play at being ‘attractive’. These roles may have been difficult, or even impossible, for them to perform in ‘real life’. In some cases, they may have been unsafe roles to enact physically. For example, a pupil giving the impression of jutting hip bones in images did not have to have the desire or the restraint to follow through with severely limiting their calorie intake. Therefore, these were roles young people would perhaps play in the flesh were it easier to do so or if their bodies were not hindering them. However, these are not necessarily roles that these young people would intrinsically desire to play were they not concerned about the opinions and acceptance of others.

The previous section implied that young people were becoming expert scrutinisers of their own and each other’s bodies within online social spaces. They were able to view themselves as outsiders, make comparisons with others and had tools to help them more easily ascertain where they were socially positioned. However, bearing in mind the above arguments, it is also important to clarify that online social spaces led these pupils to feel uncertain about the authenticity of their peers’ performances and about how their own performances compared. The online environment is certainly a place of contradictions and with hyper-visibility comes increased censorship. Rich and Miah (2014) explain that the boundaries between public and private lives are becoming increasingly blurred within online environments. Benvue pupils were sharing many aspects of their private lives with others but, paradoxically, findings indicated that the boundaries between public and private were also becoming solidified. In many ways, these young people were able to maintain distance from their online audiences, meaning there were elements of mystification to how they presented themselves (Goffman, 1959). Young people presented a ‘finished product’ to one another, keeping hidden the processes behind getting there. Therefore, what made it onto the online ‘mega stage’ was carefully filtered and the young people had tight control over what

remained 'backstage' and 'off-stage'. As such, there was mystery around what had been embellished, and particularly levels of uncertainty and suspicion around the extent of such embellishment.

Even with the uncertainties detailed above, pupils were aware that they were often being 'duped' by others and that they were, in a sense, being presented with 'misrepresentations'. It was common and accepted practice to alter pictures and there was a general consensus that "everybody does it." Many of the young people felt that modifying the body to create a virtual idealised front was just part of online social interaction. As Goffman (1959) explains, what is considered a misrepresentation amongst some groups of people or within certain sociocultural contexts, can also be considered merely 'decorative' amongst others. He cites the 'accepted' practice of dying grey hair as an example. In a sense, the online modification of appearance was akin to a new layer of decorative creativity in presenting the self, similar to wearing make-up or hair dye. Since "everyone" was doing it, including the audience, the young people's frames of reference for judging one another were altered. Pupils believed that all had access to the same tools and resources and that those who presented the most idealised front were considered to have had a better 'starting point' to begin with. This was opposed to perceiving them as being the most skilled embellishers.

Despite embellishment being 'acceptable', there was certainly a tension between acceptable embellishment and 'duping' an audience. Pupils needed to present themselves coherently across various social contexts and being 'found out' to have been overly misleading in self-presentation came with negative implications. However, being 'coherent' does not necessarily have to mean being 'consistent' (Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006). As long as an individual maintains the same overall impression across various social contexts, they can maintain face - that is, as long as their ways of being, acting, saying and appearing complement one another and are not incompatible (Goffman, 1967). For example, pupils understood that their peers would not look so 'perfect' in the flesh and made some allowances for this in the ways they judged and evaluated each other. Therefore, pupils were afforded some leeway in relation to their offline appearances - whilst offline, they did not need to look *exactly* as they looked online. However, they did have to generally embody the online image they had presented. The more so, the better. There was a fine line between what an audience considered acceptable and unacceptable embellishment. Although it was acceptable to modify appearance, it was still important to 'live up' to this embellishment across social settings. Not being able to do so could discredit what an individual was perceived to be underneath their 'front'.

Since audiences, like the young people within Benview, are aware they are vulnerable to performers potentially misleading them by ‘misrepresenting’ themselves, they often look for cues that contradict an individual’s claims about who they are (Goffman, 1959). A performer ‘caught’ playing a role in an inauthentic way can experience negative social consequences such as having their positive reputation tarnished and losing any associated social rewards. Further, the audience, who consider themselves to have been duped, may treat the performer negatively. For example, the performer may be slandered or made fun of. As Benview pupils explained, keeping up appearances within the offline realm was important so others would not make assertions such as, “she’s pretty in her pictures but in real life she is ugly.” In other words, so that others would not explicitly call attention to, ridicule and berate the discrepancy between their virtual idealised front and their actual self. As previously suggested, Benview pupils wished to avoid being negatively talked about, particularly when in relation to their external appearance. Further, as well as external implications, the threat of being ‘found out’ can impact an individual’s emotional state, making them feel ashamed, humiliated, anxious and distressed whilst also feeling inferior, disappointed in themselves and bad about themselves as a person (Goffman, 1967). These negative feelings can manifest in individuals who perceive their image to be threatened, or to be at risk of being threatened, regardless of whether this occurs or not. Constructing a coherent sense of self is important for outward appearances and the opinions of others but these also contribute towards an individual’s emotional wellbeing and how they feel about themselves.

Although pupils did consciously ‘misrepresent’ themselves by constructing virtual idealised fronts, it was important for them to protect their ‘online selves’ as these selves were just as real to them, and just as much part of who they were, as their offline selves. Therefore, when a pupil’s online identity was attacked, threatened or deconstructed, their emotions would possibly be just as negatively affected as when any other aspects of their identity unravelled. In one sense, the process of constructing a virtual idealised front was a process of duping an audience and hiding an ‘actual’ self behind a digital façade. Here, we could argue that these young people did not mind being ‘false’. However, in another sense, we must consider whether or not the young people themselves actually considered their embellished self to be a misrepresentation and, even if they did, whether or not that ‘misrepresentation’ was any less part of them than their supposed real self (Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). We could argue that there is no falsity in creating and enacting multiple ways of being, particularly when there are attempts and desires for these multiple ways of being to align and complement one another. Pupils may have been playing certain roles

online or presenting themselves in particular ways but that is not to say that such representations were not real. These self-representations had real consequences for how these young people lived their lives and had real feelings and emotions attached to them. As Goffman (1959, p.43) claims:

while we could retain the common-sense notion that fostered appearances can be discredited by a discrepant reality, there is often no reason for claiming that the facts discrepant with the fostered impression are any more the real reality than is the fostered reality they have the power of embarrassing.

As such, the issue of concern is not about which facet of the self is more real and authentic than any other. Instead, it is about whether, and how, *any* facet of an individual's self-presentation has potential to be discredited, damaged and disrupted (ibid). We cannot elevate one presentation of the self over another as being more sacred because it is 'more real'. However, a performer themselves may hold one presentation of self as being the most sacred, particularly if that is the aspect of themselves that they hold dearest, that they value the most and consider the most imperative to protect.

#### **7.2.4 Amassing and exchanging virtual physical capital**

The young people within Benview had a lot vested in protecting their online identities. Pupils experienced pleasure and social reward accompanied with successfully enacting idealised roles online. In some cases, these were rewards they did not usually receive offline. As Mollie (S1) explained, posting flattering 'selfies' online helped her to "feel good." The online environment provided a social space where she was complimented on her appearance, told she was beautiful and felt accepted by others. This contrasted with her day to day experiences where she endured body-related teasing and bullying. She was able to build face online and experience the positive emotions associated with doing so (Goffman, 1967). Of course, pupils could also experience negative social interaction online as evidenced by the prevalence of gossip pages, trolling and cyber-bullying (Cassidy et al., 2009). Nevertheless, for many, the prospect of social reward made online interaction worth the risk.

Creating virtual idealised fronts helped individuals to amass both virtual physical capital and virtual social capital, which could have exchange value within offline settings. Individuals can exchange various forms of capital for others if the form of capital they originally possess is valued within their social field (Bourdieu, 1984). Benview pupils valued physical capital in the form of ideal bodily appearances and could convert this to social

capital in the form of friendships and popularity. In the previous example, Mollie was amassing virtual physical capital and was accordingly treated with respect. In other words, the online realm was also a space where she amassed virtual social capital in the form of compliments from others, visible approval or ‘likes’ from her peers and feelings of friendships and acceptance. The exchange value of Mollie’s virtual capital was largely limited to the online context. However, for some pupils, their virtual physical capital had exchange value within the offline realm, carrying ‘real life’ consequences. This seems logical when online and offline social contexts are conceived as facets of the same social field. For example, Kaylee (S4) explained how those who “always look amazing in their [Instagram] photos” are pupils who others “look up to,” want to be like and “suck up to” within the school environment. Virtual social capital was also valuable within face-to-face settings. As Kaylee further explained, the ‘popular girls’, who were very active within online social spaces and who received lots of online attention in relation to their appearances, also received attention in daily life, even from pupils in other schools:

Say they go to the boys’ football games on Saturdays and people know them, everyone knows them. Everyone’s wanting to speak to them (field note, 17/09/14).

Becoming an online ‘celebrity’ led these pupils to be treated like ‘celebrities’ daily where they were accordingly admired and respected across numerous social contexts. Further, since exchanges in virtual physical and virtual social capital were bi-directional, the S6 girls explained that it was possible to build up an online reputation of being “really pretty” or “really hot” by amassing virtual social capital in the form of followers, fame and public comments from others. As Tegan(S6) explained, once a number of people begin to think and indicate that an individual is beautiful and popular, other people seem to “latch on to that idea.” Therefore, as Danielle (S3) also explained, it was important to be “made out” to be a certain way because if lots of people thought a person was beautiful then, in a self-fulfilling fashion, that is what that person became – both in online and offline settings.

It is possible to theorise some of the mechanisms behind the exchanges detailed above. For example, Bowen (2010) explores how online environments can become ‘rehearsal spaces’ for real life performances and encounters, for both performer and audience. By enacting a particular character online, individuals may gain more confidence to enact that role in the flesh and therefore play that role more convincingly. In Goffman’s (1969) terms, they can be taken in by their own act and so can their audience be taken in by that act as the performer plays their role with more conviction. Additionally, an individual’s online performance can alter their audiences’ perceptions, expectations and frames of

reference as to who that individual is and how they should be regarded across a range of settings, including the offline realm (Baker, 2009; Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013). To expand on this, both Baker (2009) and Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013) draw upon the idea that online and offline identities become 'blended'. As individuals create new versions of themselves online, these online identities influence and merge with their offline identities, influencing how they (can) act offline and how others perceive them in subsequent offline social interactions.

Despite asserting that online and offline contexts were facets of the same social field and that online and offline identities were 'blended', it cannot be ignored that capital acquired online could be exchanged offline only in some instances and not in others. When considering the concept of blended identities, it is important to note that young people could, to an extent, create new *versions* of the self as they embellished and enhanced their virtual idealised fronts. However, they could not create a completely new self. The young people within Benview used social networking sites to engage in 'offline-based' online social relationships (Zhao et al., 2008). Their interactions and their social field were still 'anchored' within the physical school environment (ibid). Therefore, they could not segregate their offline and online audiences and in most instances there was an over-lap between those who saw them online and those who saw them face-to-face within their everyday lives. They could not anonymously create 'avatars' detached from who they were in 'real life' settings. As such, they could not radically alter their appearances but could only enhance and embellish what they already looked like (Manago, 2015). In many ways then, what these young people could 'be' online was still largely constrained by who they were offline. Virtual physical and virtual social capital only had exchange value offline for those who could 'get away with' performing their idealised identity, at least to an extent, in the flesh. The exchange value was valid for those who were at least somewhat valued both physically and socially in the first instance (that is without their virtual idealised front).

As implied above, online social spaces in many ways amplified and continued to re-establish the social norms and social power relations that were already in existence within the social sphere of the school. Often it is pre-established offline norms and power structures that are recognisable and bolstered in online social contexts (Bailey et al., 2013). For example, the bodily 'freedom' young people were afforded online was often not freedom at all and pupils were still very much constrained by dominant societal ideals. These young people still had to embody a particular type of appearance online, they had to align themselves to the very detailed body ideals that they were exposed to and that were

‘trending’. They were under increased pressure within the online environment as they had more tools at their disposal to do so and were very regularly exposed to ‘ideal’ images. Pupils used their new found resources to emphasise and replicate current appearance ideals such as thin waists, high cheek bones and toned biceps in their own photographs. With additional tools and resources such as time and photo-editing software they were even more likely to conform to what they and others thought they ought to be. Embellishing the good became a practice of super-aligning to dominant body ideals as opposed to challenging them. The more aligned to these ideals an individual was, the more they would be socially rewarded. As Zhao et al (2008) explain, individuals are still required to navigate social norms and ideals in the online environment and will still be socially rewarded and sanctioned based on how well they do this.

The social field of Benview was very competitive, both online and offline. To become physically distinguished, individuals had to set themselves apart from others. They had to vie for attention and admiration and one way of doing this was to ‘become’ better looking than their peers and be regarded as stunningly attractive. By using digital resources to construct virtual idealised fronts, some young people could become more socially competitive. In some ways this levelled the social field and provided new opportunities for those traditionally positioned unfavourably within social power relations and who struggled to compete in the flesh. However, as young people increasingly engaged in practices such as publicising themselves and editing selfies, there was more pressure on others to also do this, or do more, in order to stand out. As the young people claimed, most pictures were, to some extent, altered. It was just “too real” to post an un-edited version of the self. With so many people so tightly managing their identities, more onus was placed on individuals to invest increased time and effort to ‘raise their game’. Those not keen to engage in such practice were potentially left behind, missing out on the social advantages that could have been available to them. As Marwick (2016) suggests, publicising and strategically presenting the self is increasingly becoming a ‘normal’ feature of daily life within contemporary societies and knowing how to negotiate this culture, in many ways, becomes a life skill.

### **7.3 Physical Education in a contemporary context**

The informal social networks that Benview pupils negotiated spanned across online and offline contexts. What occurred and how people perceived one another within one context often had implications for what they did and for how they made judgements in the other

context. Therefore, the overlap between online and offline life was clear and it is important to debate whether or not the offline context of physical education could, in any way, be implicated in this. In many ways, physical education as a social space shared similarities with online social spaces. Both were avenues where bodies were very visible and under much scrutiny, both were avenues where young people felt highly judged and both were high stakes avenues for identity construction and for accumulating, or losing social status within a school (Hill, 2013; Hills, 2007). However, whilst pupils often desired high visibility online, visibility was often eschewed by pupils within a physical education setting. Previous research evidences how young people can feel anxious, uncomfortable, self-conscious and even ashamed of their bodies within the physical education environment. (Fisette, 2011; Knowles et al., 2014; Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Sykes and McPhail, 2008). Accordingly, a large body of literature focusses on pupil disengagement and non-participation within physical education due to body image issues, especially in relation to adolescent girls (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2015). There were pupils within Benview, both boys and girls, who claimed body worries “definitely” hampered their learning within physical education. Some found physical education a socially unsafe and a socially and emotionally difficult environment where they had experienced body-related teasing, discrimination and bullying. However, this study did not aim to simply repeat insights aligning with previous research but aimed to consider how contemporary aspects of informal school culture may have been implicated in this and amplified some of the issues already apparent.

This section begins by arguing that the physical education environment can threaten online identity work and foster offline situations where reputations are easily deconstructed and disrupted. Young people risk being discredited within physical education, which is characterised by a lack of control over bodily identity in sharp juxtaposition with the intense control over self-presentation afforded to individuals online. Further, as young people become ‘expert scrutinisers’ of themselves and each other, both online and offline contexts may work cyclically to reinforce the intense self-reflection, scrutiny of others and evaluative judgements that pupils engage in. This may intensify the feelings of social surveillance young people already experience within physical education. Pupils may also be becoming ‘hyper-attuned’ to their own self-presentation within the offline realm and this can also detract from their learning. Finally, being discredited within physical education may be an unpleasant prospect for pupils, whose lives and social interactions are played out dramatically to audiences that do not necessarily need to be within close physical proximity. Therefore, within a contemporary physical education context a number of pupils may: be



avoiding discreditation; be skilled at watching and scrutinising one another; be hyper-attuned to self-presentation processes; and be managing new forms of risk.

### 7.3.1 Pupils who are avoiding discreditation

Benview pupils attributed much time and effort to creating particular impressions of, and reputations for, themselves within online social spaces. They felt it necessary to protect these carefully crafted identities. To do this, they had to live up to these idealised impressions and ‘maintain face’ as much as possible within their offline social interactions and encounters. Therefore, just as their online self-presentation was restricted by who they were offline; their offline self-presentation was constrained by who they were, or tried to be, online. The young people could more easily construct favourable impressions of themselves within an online environment and had to take care not to contradict the most idealised facet of their overall identity. For some, their online front was very important, perhaps even more so than the ‘reality’ underpinning it. They happily gave the impression that they were, for example, a healthy individual regardless of whether they thought that was what they actually were. In a sense, they did not mind being ‘false’ providing that others perceived them as intended and as long as information that would jeopardise this idealised impression remained hidden. However, suppressing such information was not always easy.

By constructing a virtual idealised front, that could be easily hidden behind or employed online but not in the flesh, these young people were continually ‘discreditable’ and at risk of becoming ‘discredited’ as they interacted with their peers in face-to-face settings (Goffman, 1963). As pupils constructed and enacted particular images of themselves online, they were altering the expectations and frames of reference that other people had of them during face-to-face interaction. As previously argued, this was sometimes a positive thing, especially when there was an exchange of virtual physical capital. However, it also meant that very high standards had been set for these young people, who had to ‘keep up their act’ within offline settings. If a pupil looked ‘stunning’ in their selfies, their peers thought they ‘ought’ to look that way within ‘real life’, despite *some* scope for leeway. Further, many pupils had intensely worked on their online images in order to get a competitive edge over others. They were negotiating a constant tension between embellishing their virtual idealised fronts to gain more virtual capital, pushing the limits of what they could get away with, but also concurrently ensuring they were not ‘outed’ as having misrepresented themselves.

These pupils risked having their positive online identities deconstructed within face-to-face interaction but felt this was a risk worth taking.

‘Destructive’ information, potentially inconsistent (or even incompatible) with a pupil’s idealised impression of themselves, could easily come to the fore within the school environment. School was a place where these young people could be ‘found out’ as having misrepresented themselves and a place where the identity they had worked hard to establish could be threatened and easily deconstructed. In school, pupils did not have access to many of the tools and resources that had helped them to construct their virtual idealised front and they did not have the same levels of control over how they presented themselves. Further, there were certain aspects of school life, and contexts within the school environment, that were especially risky for pupils and where pupils were more likely to be exposed as not quite measuring up to their idealised image. The juxtaposition between the intense online control and limited offline control afforded to bodily self-presentation was particularly apparent within the physical education environment since physical education was a place where the body was exposed, where there was an explicit focus on the body and where bodily scrutiny was magnified. The young people were not just worried about their bodies being exposed and visible within physical education, for many their many worries lay in having the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual revealed.

Pupils within Benview claimed to frequently post selfies online, where they could ‘show off’ their bodies in a very controlled and censored fashion. The body ideals they aspired to were aligned to fit-looking, toned bodies which had been worked upon and were heavily regulated. Of course, pupils could aim to portray such an image for themselves in photographs where their bodies would be seen from particular angles and amidst flattering lighting but they also knew that their bodies could betray them in the flesh. Further, it was not only their appearance front that could unravel within physical education. Pupils, who were using the online environment to craft a virtuous fit and healthy image, could also share ‘gym selfies’, pictures of healthy meals and status updates boasting of their workouts. However, a pupil who had bragged about their exercise endeavours online, and was then encouraged to exercise in, for example, a fitness lesson, could easily be exposed as not being that fit or healthy after all. These young people could post pictures and videos of themselves ‘working out’ whilst looking pristine and attractive and moving effortlessly. Even pictures where they were sweaty and dishevelled and which told the story that they had pushed and disciplined their bodies, could be chosen selectively and put through an editing process. However, it was difficult to actually exercise intensely in front of others whilst maintaining

the ‘fitspirational’ ideal of concurrently looking good. Many pupils hoped to embody fitness and leanness in their selfies, accompanied by carefully crafted and flattering hairstyles, facial expressions and clothing. This image could quickly be deconstructed within physical education where they were moving about in front of others, where their bodies were jiggling and wobbling and where they were hot, sweaty, puffing and panting.

One of the simplest ways to avoid a loss of reputation is to avoid or withdraw both physically and emotionally from threatening situations. Goffman (1967) terms this ‘protective facework’. When some of these pupils engaged in physical education, information was revealed to others inconsistent with the positive fitspirational image they hoped to sustain. Having built up a certain reputation for themselves, they would instead be in a situation where they were ‘out of face’ and would not be able to appear as others expected them to. They were aware that full engagement with physical education could lead to a loss of face and pre-emptively chose not to engage with that risky environment. They still attended lessons but reported, and were observed, to employ ‘avoidance tactics’ such as choosing activities that did not require much exertion, chatting in groups, not volunteering for demonstrations, not fully committing to tasks sets and participating half-heartedly. Observations evidenced that this was sometimes still the case when they were in what could be considered a ‘safe’ social environment, for example when allowed to use the fitness suite in their small friendship groups. Framing physical education as something that was not valuable also helped these pupils to employ avoidance tactics, and justify such tactics to themselves. Physical education is about far more than working upon the body as one would within a gym or a fitness class and getting a “proper workout” (Bailey et al., 2009). However, not all pupils recognised or agreed with this. As a group of S4 girls claimed, “PE is for burning calories mostly.” However, such pupils also knew that physical education could not be for ‘burning calories’ – not necessarily because of the content of physical education but because of their unwillingness to invest enough effort in participation. The cost of doing so would be more than the immediate return would be worth to them (Bourdieu, 1984). For a number of them, physical education was a necessary evil to negotiate with as little damage as possible to their identity. Further, as these girls claimed, they could get such returns elsewhere.

The dissonance between online and offline self-representations not only has implications for pupils who have bought into a fitspiration culture. For example, it can also affect those who are trying to construct a high achieving ‘sporty’ identity. Perceptions of a young person’s physical competence can also be deconstructed within physical education

and a pupil who broadcasts or exaggerates online any of their sporting achievements may not live up to their claims within a 'real life' performative context. To provide another example, physical education (and the school environment as a whole) is highly social. Pupils who project a very outgoing character online or create an impression of belonging particular social groups, can also feel under pressure to keep up such an image on a day to day basis. Of course, many of the above points mirror previous research, which details how some young people consider physical education to threaten their established identities and hamper their self-presentation efforts (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002). However, such findings become even more salient within the contemporary social environment as the 'established identities' young people construct for themselves can appear so 'perfect' that they are even more difficult to maintain. Some pupils explicitly made this link themselves. For example, Charlotte (S2) who was very conscious of her facial appearance and particularly her jawline, explained that she put her pictures in 'reverse' before 'publishing' them online so that her jaw would appear more symmetrical. However, she acknowledged she could not control the visual appearance of her face in 'real life' and revealed the depth and detail of her body concerns and self-consciousness within offline environments stating, "I worry that my jaw sticks out when I run in PE."

### 7.3.2 Pupils who are skilled at scrutinising one another and hyper-attuned to self-presentation processes

Physical education has long been a social space where individuals scrutinise and judge each other's bodies and are aware of being under intense surveillance (Kirk and Tinning, 1994). Such scrutiny can lead some to feel uncomfortable, vulnerable and exposed within the physical education environment – particularly in relation to their bodily appearance but also in relation to their physical ability and their social practice (Fisette, 2011; Sykes and McPhail, 2008). The young people within Benview had been brought up within an individualistic and image-driven society where they were encouraged to competitively work upon themselves and their bodies and to scrutinise each other's social worth (Shilling, 2010b). However, these aspects of Western culture were evident before the advent of Web 2.0 (Featherstone, 1982). Further, as evidenced within previous literature, young people have long scrutinised and been concerned with their bodies and bodily appearances. Therefore, it is not being asserted that online social spaces are *the* cause of young people's body worries in general or their body worries within the physical education environment. In fact, when considering the ways in which social fields are structures that are concurrently being

structured (Bourdieu, 1984), these pre-existing tenets of Western culture will have, in part, shaped how online social spaces have been designed, socially constructed and used by those who continue to engage with them. However, the data from this study does evidence that online spaces were becoming, and providing, mechanisms for young people's increased surveillance and self-presentation efforts. Therefore, they could, in part, be increasing and exaggerating young people's body concerns within the physical education environment.

As previously asserted, these young people were becoming 'expert watchers' of the body, each other and themselves within online environments. Online social spaces provided platforms for scrutiny and judgement to be magnified, meaning the ways in which young people were perceiving and evaluating the body were evolving. These young people were learning exactly what details to look for in each other's bodies, their attention was being focussed on very specific physical features and they were constantly examining one another in a meticulous fashion. They were very accustomed to what was desirable and undesirable in relation to the body, right down to the minute details. They were also immersed in a culture where value judgements were very explicitly linked to particular ways of being, where 'appearance conversations' were the norm and where overt tools were used to assist in self-presentation processes. These young people were hyper-attuned to who they and others 'were' and to how they could 'become' certain types of people.

These pupils were not only skilled scrutinisers within the online realm. They were skilled at scrutinising each other's bodies in the flesh. Drawing upon detailed body ideals, they were well accustomed to the details to look for and critique in each other - even in the fast paced face-to-face environment. Whilst bodies have always been scrutinised within a physical education setting, it is possible that the ways young people are scrutinising one another are now moving to another level. Within Benview, bodies were being 'picked apart' within the offline realm and, within a celebrity-esque culture, it was 'normal' to talk openly about other people's bodily flaws and successes. These young people were very comfortable having 'appearance conversations' in person and physical education fed, and was a catalyst for, these conversations. As the young people themselves claimed, "without social media, *school* would be soooo much better because people wouldn't be as judgemental." Therefore, pupils' engagements with online social spaces possibly contributed to their practices of scrutinising and judging one another within face-to-face settings. An enhanced focus on identity construction, body scrutiny and body objectification online may have been increasing the salience of the body within physical education and vice versa, creating a hyperbolic maelstrom effect.

Further, it was not only actual surveillance that was increasing in face-to-face settings. Perceptions of being under surveillance were even higher and did not necessarily need to equate to actual surveillance. These young people were so concerned about their own identities and their bodies that they really believed they were continually being watched by others. Further, those occupying a micro-celebrity subject position even fantasised, to an extent, that others were paying close attention to them as they conducted daily tasks. Therefore, they were extremely self-conscious, especially within physical education, paying attention to very small details of their bodies but also believing that their peers were too. It is likely that in many cases they were so absorbed with watching their own bodies, that few were actually paying much attention to the bodies of others. In association with this, these young people were not only becoming hyper-attuned to being under surveillance, they were hyper-attuned to processes of self-presentation. Much of their action was deliberately thought out and calculated. In some pupils, this can draw their attention away from learning within physical education and towards themselves. Physical education becomes another stage upon which to consciously act whilst learning takes a back seat.

### 7.3.3 Pupils who are negotiating new forms of risk

The preceding arguments suggest that pupils' engagements with online social spaces may have had implications for how they interacted and presented themselves within the physical education environment. However, the relationship between online social spaces and physical education was not necessarily one-way. The physical education environment has already been evidenced as a socially 'risky' social space in relation to young people's bodies and a public space where there is increased potential for body shaming and body-related embarrassment (Sykes and McPhail, 2008). It is perhaps *the* riskiest social space within the school in relation to the body for numerous reasons. For example, it is a space where physical inability is exposed. It is also a space where bodies are very vulnerable, especially in relation to the informal aspects of the subject such as changing and showering in unsupervised areas (Atkinson and Kehler, 2012; Fissette, 2011). Since Benview pupils negotiated a hyper-risky culture where information could spread quickly and widely, this space was becoming even riskier for some pupils. As previously argued, 'real life' acts, perhaps previously dismissed as insignificant, were now being reported to an online audience. The stage young people presented themselves on was far bigger than it ever was in Goffman's time.

Being found out to have a misrepresentative appearance was not the only way in which pupils could be discredited within physical education. Pupils could lose face and be shamed and humiliated for a variety of reasons – many of which would have posed risk before the advent of Web 2.0. These situations can be embarrassing for the victims at their centre and are not something that people would wish to be constantly reminded of. With a rise in internet use amongst young people, research has evidenced how body-related bullying can occur within online environments and, in some instances, stem from online contexts and move offline (Berne et al., 2014). However, the reverse also occurs. ‘Real life’ episodes can now be talked about online or even circulated for example via the use of videos, as recent crazes for ‘happy slapping’ have evidenced (Smith et al., 2008). As such, the social ‘risks’ associated with already risky social environments can become even higher. If someone were to be involved in a scenario where they were ridiculed for their appearance; if they turned up to physical education wearing ‘uncool’ trainers, if they messed up a demonstration, if they ‘broke wind’ in front of the class – in short if they were embarrassed or shamed or if their bodies betrayed them in anyway - then it was possible that almost everyone in the school could become aware of this. The risk could be even higher considering that pupils would sneak their smartphones into physical education lessons, phones which had cameras and video-recording capacities. As such, acting or being out of face (Goffman, 1959) not only had immediate consequences but had consequences that could be disproportionate to the original act or ‘mistake’. As such, the stakes invested in social interactions were heightened and the endeavour to maintain face could be very precarious.

The risks pupils negotiated also stemmed from them negotiating a hyper-competitive and individualistic culture. They were encouraged to look out for themselves and set themselves apart from others so that the ‘I’ was sovereign (Samovar et al., 2016). As some pupils claimed, “if you put someone else down you are only getting up higher.” Since social occurrences were dramatised and much communication occurred online, young people often viewed each other like disposable ‘characters’ and their perceptions of each other could become detached from ‘real’ emotion (Berne et al., 2014). This has implications for school life in general but may be a crucial important issue for consideration when helping pupils engage with a very social learning environment, such as physical education, where pupils do not often sit behind desks and work alone but continually interact with one another.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has explained and theorised young people's engagements with contemporary bodily culture, particularly in relation to their bodily identity work. The online environment was an important site for identity construction as it was a space where young people became known. Within the online environment, these young people were continually watched and judged and were also becoming expert scrutinisers of themselves and others. Further, they were becoming skilled at strategically presenting themselves, using digital resources to enhance their efforts. It was socially beneficial to do so and could be socially detrimental not to. As such, the online environment was a place of opportunity but also a place of constraint in relation to what young people did, to how they interacted and to how they constructed their identities. This chapter also suggested that online interactions and power relations had implications for offline life. The young people constructed 'blended identities' and both online and offline contexts were interconnected. Therefore, the issues discussed within this thesis may have more specific implications for certain offline social contexts and learning environments within the school, particularly those such as physical education where there is an intense focus on the body. When constructing this assertion, a number of over-arching arguments were put forward. Firstly, it was argued that being more easily able to control self-presentation online can lead to feelings of being out of control offline, particularly within physical education. Accordingly, individuals can easily become 'discredited' within the physical education environment. Secondly, it was suggested that the use of online social spaces may increase the salience of bodily appearances, self-identity construction, scrutiny and judgement within offline spaces. Thirdly, the spread-ability of online content, a competitive and individualistic culture and an increased potential for identity spoiling could lead to the physical education environment becoming more socially 'risky' than previously. The following chapter explores how teachers might respond to the findings in this thesis and provides suggestions as to how physical education can instead become a social space that socially protects young people and potentially transforms their bodily perceptions.



## **Chapter Eight: Considerations and future possibilities for teachers**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter argued that overlaps between online and offline social contexts may implicate young people's experiences of, and engagements with physical education. Further, this thesis has evidenced that young people's engagements with contemporary bodily culture may impact negatively on their social, emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. All teachers in Scotland are responsible for nurturing and protecting young people's health and wellbeing (Scottish Executive, 2006). Therefore, it is important to consider how those working with young people might respond to some of the issues highlighted within this study.

This chapter is organised around three key suggestions, each intended to complement one another. The first of these relates to the importance of creating socially safe learning environments within schools, and especially within physical education. 8.3.1 presents key characteristics of such environments and discusses how these were, and could be, nurtured within Benview. Efforts to create safe social environments may help pupils to experience physical education more positively. However, they can become reactive solutions that work to limit the damage of the more negative aspects of contemporary bodily culture. Therefore, 8.3.2 also advocates a more pro-active approach, which engages young people in critical inquiry around the body and bodily culture. This approach encourages pupils to challenge dominant norms, expectations and power relations around the body. Benview pupils did have the capacity to problematise taken-for-granted knowledge and practices and Benview teachers endeavoured to implement such an approach. However, 8.3.3 argues that critical inquiry alone is not enough, particularly when solely focussing on young people's minds and thoughts, effectively ignoring the body. Therefore, the chapter concludes by arguing that it is important to enhance young people's embodied experiences within physical education and suggests that this is where physical education can uniquely contribute to addressing some of the issues outlined within this thesis. The chapter closes by re-asserting the need for socially safe environments, framing the safe social environment as a pre-requisite for more critical and body-focussed approaches within schools.

Following Oliver and Kirk (2016), what follows are *suggestions*. They are not intended as panaceas for the complex issues that have been explored within this thesis. Nor

is there any intention to tell teachers how they ‘should’ teach or to provide a set of rules for teachers to follow. Rather, teachers and researchers may consider the following suggestions in relation to their own pupils and unique social contexts, using their professional judgement to learn from the experiences of the pupils and teachers within Benview.

## **8.2 A physical education that is socially safe**

As the present study illustrated, pupils wanted to learn in a space where they felt comfortable, where they did not feel negatively judged or scrutinised and where they were not pre-occupied with the social ‘risks’ of being active. It is important to examine how the physical education environment can become this place. Pupils will never be able to work anonymously within a school nor will power relations ever be equal. However, teachers can respond to pupils’ desires for strong, trusting relationships and more diffuse power relations. They can also address some of the social difficulties pupils face due to their bodies being objectified and under surveillance. There is, of course, merit in analysing and building upon the positives of what teachers already do (Enright et al., 2014) and there were many examples of Benview teachers attempting to create positive social environments for their pupils, as exemplified in the following situation:

The class begin to set out their ‘step aerobics’ steps as Mairi sorts out the music. They have arranged their steps in rows, facing the mirrors but clustered towards the back of the dance studio. Pupils are quiet and their body language seems fairly self-conscious (arms across chests, heads down or looking around at others). As Mairi finishes sorting the music she quickly scans the room and walks to the back, “let’s turn our steps around,” she says (field note, 07/01/15).

Mairi acknowledged that pupils would feel more comfortable with their backs to the mirrored wall. Field notes also evidenced that Mairi frequently let her pupils demonstrate skills in groups rather than individually, thereby limiting opportunities for pupils to be publically embarrassed and discredited. In a sense, she endeavoured to construct a safer social environment for her pupils by altering their stage, guiding their performances and managing their audience’s attentions, thereby helping them to protect face (Goffman, 1959). Whilst visual learning is important for skill development, teachers can use their judgement to use tools such as mirrors and demonstrations appropriately depending on the classes they teach and the pupils within them. Small gestures like Mairi’s may help pupils feel less self-conscious and more engaged in their learning. However, physical education departments may also need to consider bigger structural changes to create a more welcoming environment

for pupils. These could relate to, for example, timetable changes (more allocated time for changing as opposed to five or ten minutes) or physical changes within school buildings (more private learning spaces and changing and showering facilities).

Graham was another teacher who worked hard to create a socially safe learning environment for his pupils and this appeared central to his teaching philosophy. His interactions with Eilidh (S5) provide an example of this. Eilidh was larger than the rest of her peers and explained that she did not feel comfortable within her body. She often asked to wear her baggy hooded sweatshirt within physical education and initially refused to remove it for lessons. Graham allowed this, despite it being contrary to the department kit policy. However, following a block of work where Graham had particularly focussed on creating an inclusive social environment, Eilidh began wearing a t-shirt to physical education. The following field note reflects Graham's thoughts about this:

“It was like a comfort barrier, a blanket,” he explains, “but look at her now!” I look over at Eilidh and she is smiling, high fiving her peers, shrieking ‘yes!’ at victories and sprinting forward to the line on the whistle. “I think this block has been really good for her,” he continues, “like I know its dodgeball, there is only so much you can do. I know we haven’t worked hugely on skill level and haven’t had huge improvements in that respect but sometimes that’s not what it’s all about. Sometimes it is about more than that... confidence... these are some of the small victories that make me feel good about my teaching... I know it sounds cheesy! And I know it’s not a big thing, like she is not wearing a hoodie, some people would not even notice it but I find it rewarding. Like it’s a small success, still a success though. I know it’s not like I have met some big written target but I know that it’s important so I am happy with it... I think she feels safe here” (field note, 12/09/14).

Like Mairi, Graham cared about, and for, his pupils and this caring perspective was also apparent in other members of the Benview physical education department. Caring teachers are engrossed with “doing for” and “being with” their pupils (Owens and Ennis, 2005, p.393). Therefore, they are committed to helping them develop holistically as individuals and are concerned with their wider lives and futures, wishing their pupils to become secure, happy, empowered and successful. They also strive to account for pupils’ own perspectives by acknowledging, respecting and valuing pupils’ concerns (Noddings, 1992). Graham did not dismiss Eilidh’s body worries as irrelevant or insignificant, even though some pupils indicated that they themselves were ashamed of attributing so much importance to body worries. These pupils felt “silly” for worrying about their appearance when “there are more important things happening in the world.” However, these issues can take over people’s lives - as strongly evidenced by eating disorder research (Rich, 2006). Further, for young people, school is their world. The informal social networks within a school comprise a social field in which young people are heavily invested, and with which they must engage incessantly. This

is the social arena that these young people know and experience on a daily basis, providing a 'here and now' context with immediate, deep and long-lasting implications. In the words of Kaylee (S4):

People will think that these worries are too small, but all these wee<sup>24</sup> things make a difference... they make a big thing (field note, 17/09/14).

Graham considered it his responsibility to help his pupils overcome their body worries. He knew that superficial responses would not make a difference and indicated that he had to really understand and take into consideration how pupils were feeling on an ongoing basis. Therefore, field notes evidenced that he spent time engaging in dialogue with pupils, getting to know them as individuals whilst being friendly, approachable and generous with his time. Frequent dialogue, presence and time are crucial in the development of caring teacher-pupil relationships (Tarlow, 1996). Through investing these things, teachers can become sensitive to their pupils' thoughts emotions and actions – for example being able to read pupils' moods and body language and noticing and responding to subtle signals that indicate pupils' comfort levels (Owens and Ennis, 2005). Physical education provides many opportunities for social interaction, perhaps more so than other subjects do, and caring teachers often capitalise and value such opportunities (Larson, 2006 Larson and Silverman, 2005).

Some teachers do need to care more and need to respond to their pupils' [body] concerns more seriously (Tarlow, 1996). However, that is not to suggest that teachers already trying their best for their pupils, who are using the resources and time available to them, should 'break' themselves whilst being under immense pressure from the demands of their work. It appeared that many Benview teachers were highly committed to their jobs and were striving to do their best for their pupils. They worked far beyond their contracted hours and often went above the call of duty. However, these teachers also seemed tired, and sometimes run down, from their efforts. In reality, being a caring teacher is extremely hard work and very demanding of time and energy. Caring can also be emotionally difficult for teachers as caring relationships between teachers and pupils can feel predominantly 'one-sided' (Noddings, 1992; Owens and Ennis, 2005). Since teachers are human beings, they must care for themselves if they are to also fully care for, and invest in, others (Tannehill et al., 2015). They also need support to be able to care for their pupils as much as they would like to. Within secondary schools, time is short and large classes quickly come and go. Further, physical education is often traditionally arranged around multi-activity blocks, meaning there can also be a lack of constancy in class compositions and teacher-class

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<sup>24</sup> 'Wee' is a Scottish term meaning 'small.'

allocations (Thorburn et al., 2009). Therefore, establishing authentic relationships is not always easy. Teachers need time to do their work and they need smaller class sizes, administration support and adequate staffing allocations – all of which cost money. They must be acknowledged for their caring roles and efforts and those in senior positions within education must perceive this aspect of teaching as valuable. In many ways, the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence makes much of the above explicit with its holistic, learner centred rhetoric (Scottish Executive, 2006). However, we must also examine whether or not these principles are valued in practice. When individual responsibility is mounted on teachers to care, we must critically ask whether this responsibility is considered a worthy investment and authentically valued in the ‘high’ regions of education and society and amongst those making economic and political decisions as well as by those making pedagogical decisions.

The caring aspect of teaching should not be considered a ‘soft’ or ‘extra’ dimension to teaching, an aside to academic outcomes. Perceived attributes of caring teachers are extremely consistent with attributes of effective teachers (Tannehill et al., 2015). As Tannehill et al. (2015) explain, teachers care for their pupils when providing them with an engaging and challenging curriculum and when willing their pupils to learn and improve. Such teachers do not evade challenge or constructive feedback. They do not ignore ‘mistakes’, but expect these and re-frame them as being valuable to the learning process. Therefore, caring within physical education does not involve abandoning physical learning outcomes in favour of social and emotional aims. Graham stated that he had not worked much on skill level and felt his class had not made improvement in that regard. This was perhaps an under-estimation on his part as observations evidenced that learning and developing physically were central aims within his units of work. However, he did not just want to ‘tick boxes’ in relation to what pupils had been taught. He really cared about how his pupils developed as individuals. Perhaps he did not always get this ‘right’ and this is not to claim caring teachers are flawless. As Noddings (1992) claims, there is no ‘perfect formula’ or prescriptive set of behaviours for caring - each situation requires different responses depending on the people involved, the context and resources available.

Of course, it is also crucial that pupils develop empathy, care and respect for one another and learn to guard, and be sensitive to, each other’s rights and interests (Tannehill et al., 2015). Just as teachers need time to develop relationships with pupils, pupils need time to build relationships with one another. The young people within Benview did not always want to be accepted by others so that they would be favourably treated for what could be termed ‘shallow’ reasons. Some did value authentic friendships and longed to be accepted by “real

friends” who they could “really trust” and who “like you for who you are.” These pupils could distinguish between superficial and authentic relationships and desired the latter. They were critical, and tired, of superficial self-presentation but were still engaging in this for many of the reasons highlighted in the previous chapter.

One way of helping pupils become less focussed on self and more attuned to each other’s needs is by implementing a ‘co-operative learning’ approach. This approach was integral to Benview’s school improvement plan. Here pupils are encouraged to work together and become more dependent on one another so that the focus in learning moves from ‘I’ to ‘us’ and ‘we’ (Education Scotland, 2016). Such an approach may help pupils to develop more collectivist aspects to their culture so that group needs take precedence and individuals become concerned with how their actions affect others (Samovar et al., 2016). Pupils themselves suggested that experiencing more empathy amongst each other would go some way towards alleviating their body concerns and making school a more accepting place. They claimed:

It might help if we think about how that person may feel first or about how we have felt when this has happened to us (field note, 11/09/14).

Teachers can model empathetic behaviours for their pupils by acting in a caring way (Owens and Ennis, 2005). However, teachers also need to explicitly address social issues within their teaching, although not necessarily as the ‘focus’ of lessons. For example, both Mairi and Graham capitalised upon, and responded to, opportune and unplanned moments within their lessons to teach pupils the importance of respecting one another. They did not let their pupils ‘get away with’ ridiculing others or ignore or make light of incidents where pupils were disrespectful to one another. Instead, they addressed such issues with either the individuals involved or the whole class when appropriate. As Owen and Ennis (2005) suggest, teachers can use everyday situations to engage pupils in discussion with one another, to help them understand how they would feel within particular interactions and to help them learn that they have similar experiences and feelings to one another. A caring pedagogy calls for both ‘tenderness’ *and* ‘toughness’ (Noddings, 1992, p.xi) and a caring teacher must act fairly and be ‘strict’ when required (Owens and Ennis, 2005). However, it is also important to note that Benview pupils were not simply devoid of empathy for others. Whilst, there were examples of pupils being badly treated within the schools, many recognised that this was unjust, even the perpetrators. However, the quest for self-survival meant that even those critical of such practices and underpinning power relations, claimed they often became “bystanders” who

were empathetic towards those poorly treated but would “not really go out of my [their] way” to help them.

The above suggestions may help teachers facilitate more positive pupil experiences within physical education. However, many of these suggestions react to a negative situation and do not necessarily address the roots of the issues discussed within this thesis. If pupils are to become more empowered and less constrained in relation to their bodies in the long-term, deeply ingrained attitudes and perceptions must change. Therefore, the following section considers the merits of a critical inquiry focus within physical education.

### **8.3 A physical education that is critical**

Researchers recommend that young people be supported to question and resist taken-for-granted ‘truths’, beliefs and values relating to the body through a critical inquiry approach to learning (Azzarito, 2010; Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Wright, 2004). Here, schools can become spaces where pupils critically debate and reflect upon the ideal ‘selves’ proposed by the media and wider society and be encouraged to devise an assortment of ‘subject positions’, which are not necessarily tied to universal ideals (Azzarito, 2010). Therefore, critical inquiry directs young people towards certain kinds and bodies of knowledge to call into question. This in itself could be problematic - an educator, in a privileged position, is deciding which knowledge is problematised and which is not (Pringle and Pringle, 2012). However, engaging young people in critical inquiry does not involve indoctrination or telling pupils what (not) to think (Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2015). It involves developing young people’s abilities to think critically in general, as a process (Wright, 2004). To do this, teachers alert pupils to the ways in which knowledge is constructed and negotiated within complex power relations (Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2015; Foucault, 1980). The teacher helps pupils to scrutinise the knowledge they and others construct so that they can rationally arrive at their own informed judgements and opinions. Encouraging pupils to make informed judgements is important as there is little use in raising ‘hope-less’ young people who view all knowledge and beliefs as relative and who can never stand for anything or change the world for the better (Scott, 2010; Shipway, 2011). As Macdonald (2002) explains, social action is a key response to critical inquiry. Therefore, teachers can encourage young people to problematise knowledge and unjust power relations but can also inspire them to respond in action to help those unfairly disadvantaged by the dominant order of things.

There is some uncertainty within the literature as to how a critical inquiry focus is enacted in practice. Work in this area can be abstract and harshly critical of current practice, yet devoid of practical examples and suggestions – particularly when the complex nature and realities of school life are not accounted for (Macdonald, 2002). However, some curriculum intervention studies do provide starting points for investigating *how* pupils might be encouraged to critically engage with knowledge relating to health and the body. For example, Oliver and Lalik (2001; 2004) have developed and trialled a curriculum strand where pupils engage with media images and think critically about how the female body is constructed within popular culture. Here, pupils partake in interviewing tasks, self-projects, photography and poster making, all designed to challenge dominant stereotypes, practices and taken-for-granted ways of viewing the body. They are also encouraged to reflect upon their own bodies and perceptions through journal keeping tasks and small group discussions. Using a similar approach, Azzarito (2012) demonstrates the value in young people becoming ‘researchers of the self’. Participants in her participatory ethnographic study used digital cameras to craft photographic diaries whilst exploring what it meant to ‘move in their worlds’. Photography was revealed as an effective pedagogical tool for encouraging reflexive practices around the body and the self and provided the young people with ‘critical resources’ when exploring their identity formation and ‘body knowledge’. Providing a slightly different example of critical inquiry in action, Garret (2006) presented trainee physical education teachers with stories portraying the voices of pupils who struggled with their physical identities and felt their bodies did not meet attractive, fit and healthy ideals. Her findings demonstrate that such stories may elicit empathy and aid people in seeing things from the perspectives of others. This may be useful given that physical education teachers and student-teachers often have similar biographies, coming from ‘sporting’ backgrounds, and may have developed a habitus that is at odds with the habitus of some of their pupils (Green, 2003). Pringle (2008) found merit in a similar approach using ‘collective stories’ to critically engage school pupils with dominant perceptions of masculinity and the masculine body. He used the ‘story’ of a marginalised male to prompt debate and discussion amongst pupils and guided them to think about the workings of discourse and power in a way that resounded with Foucauldian theorising.

Teachers and health promotion workers endeavoured to introduce approaches like those detailed above within Benview. Therefore, Benview pupils were encouraged to be critical of narrow perceptions of health and pressures to look a certain way, sometimes within their physical education curriculum. For example, S1 pupils engaged with a block of work where they explicitly explored health as a holistic concept. S2 pupils embarked on



group projects where they examined topics such as ‘body image’ and considered where appearance pressures may come from. Additionally, all S3 girls partook in an 8 week ‘Health for You (H4U)’ unit of work during their physical education time, led by external providers. These girls critically explored themes such as ‘women in the media’ and ‘photo-shopping’, alongside issues relating to healthy eating, self-esteem and physical activity. Pupils also spoke of their engagements with projects in other subjects such as Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) or Personal and Social Education (PSE). One example that pupils talked about was the Mentors in Violence Protection Programme (MVP) where they examined gender and the body (Katz, 1995). As Harry (S4) explained:

We talk about things like morals [in MVP] ... they did talk a lot about the ways people think a girl should look and they asked, em, the boys and girls to split up and come up with different things that a girl should be, what they believe a girl should be, and then what society tends to make girls think that they should be. And you had the funniest answers. Em, they also talked about sexism quite a lot and they asked us to come up with the most sexist things that they could think of but that still exist so it does make you think, which is quite good.

Whether as a result of such initiatives or not, the young people I spoke to were not passive ‘cultural dupes’ when negotiating socially constructed beliefs and practices around the body. Many seemed critically aware of how power relations operated within their micro-context, for example being critical of the body as currency within popularity hierarchies. Some also critiqued the macro context and wider societal power structures that they were constrained by. For example, pupils provided insightful explanations around messages relayed to them within the media, advertising and music:

Seth (S2): ... cause they [girls] tend to be more targeted in the media and things like that to look...

Freddie: Like all the supermodels that are like that [holds in ribs and sucks in cheekbones]... skinny.

Seth: Yeah, it can be like that for guys though as well because I mean, you know, you go into any shop and you’ll see like exercise magazines with guys with you know massive muscles, things like that and you know people aspire to be that and they don’t think they’re worthy if they aren’t that ...and a lot of male artists, I mean I use the term artist loosely but they tend to have, eh, a nice car in the video and they tend to have their shirt off 90% of the time and you might not think initially that’s a big thing but, you know, it’s... it’s a bigger issue than people give it credit for, I believe like subliminal messaging and things like that it, eh, it can affect you not initially but you start to realise it.

Liam: ...I think it’s more straightforward for girls, it’s more like to the point.

Seth: Yeah, yeah, that’s true actually, I’ll agree with that.

Me: So what do you mean by that?

Liam: Well like there's so many, there's like 'Blurred Lines' was a big one, that was like really bad, and 'Anaconda'.<sup>25</sup>

And:

Harry (S4): In the kind of sexist world I think, it tends to be more the people who think that the guys are the dominant people who know what they are doing and like its the girls who need guidance which is why I think there is also a lot more propaganda targeted at them.

Clearly, the young people within Benview were immersed in a complex bodily culture where they negotiated a myriad of power relations, both within their micro and macro contexts. A critical inquiry focus endeavours to make the complexity of such situations visible and needs to go beyond a 'surface level' approach (Wright, 2004). Although some pupils were aware of the insidious and subtle nature of the macro power relations they were subject to, they had potential to engage in deeper levels of critique. Teachers can therefore encourage pupils to move beyond simplistic explanations (e.g. it is what 'society' or the 'media' wants us to think or do) towards more multifaceted critiques of, for example, the economic or political forces at play within society.

Young people may be alerted to the complexity and subtlety of macro power relations through analysing the 'counter discourses' they are exposed to. For example, counter discourses around 'strong is the new skinny', 'love yourself', and 'be strong, independent and high achieving' are often constructed in relation to sport and physical activity and are posited as empowering. Current trends where 'fit' and 'healthy' are considered socially desirable could optimistically be considered helpful trends which encourage young people to engage with physical activity and look after their bodies. Therefore, it is tempting for teachers to re-inforce such discourses by introducing more fitness and 'gym-like' activities into the curriculum, framing these as incentives for pupils to engage with physical education lessons (Walseth et al., 2015). Some educators within Benview reinforced such discourses when urging pupils to be critical of body-objectifying beliefs and practices – especially when encouraging critique of the 'thin ideal'. However, reinforcing these celebratory 'can do' messages may further constrain and objectify young people in relation to their bodies since these discourses align strongly with consumerist principles that encourage people to purchase and contribute to global economies (Heywood,

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<sup>25</sup> 'Blurred Lines' and 'Anaconda' were popular music songs released in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Both songs were criticised for objectifying women in their lyrics and in their accompanying music videos. Blurred Lines was especially condemned for normalising rape culture (Lynskey, 2013) and was subsequently banned from Edinburgh University Student Association venues. Anaconda was condemned for sexualising the female body. However, some have countered such criticism by arguing that Anaconda and its associated imagery reclaim the sexuality of women of colour and expose the double standards applied to gendered and racialized bodies (Lhooq, 2014).

2007). Here, individuals are encouraged to 'love themselves' by investing in their bodies, which are still considered symbols of success. These discourses do not allude to the wider structures and barriers that can hamper people from 'bettering' themselves. Instead, those who do not become strong, skilled, independent and self-confident are blamed for their own inadequacies (Azzarito, 2010). Benview pupils held a deficit perspective of how they could achieve self-satisfaction. Rather than highlighting how wider power structures, norms or beliefs needed to change, they focussed on how they personally needed to change in order to achieve their desire of feeling happy and confident within their own bodies. This meant identifying parts of their bodies that needed 'improving' ('I need to become thinner, prettier or more muscular') or aspects of their personality or mentality that needed to change ('I need to care less and become more resilient'). These views may not necessarily have been an outcome of their teachers reproducing the counter discourses above. However, these pupils may become more alert to wider, yet subtle, injustices and power relations if they are encouraged to think more critically about these 'positive' messages.

Well intended empowerment mantras, whether purported within the classroom or society wide, are often ineffective and distracting when young people are still immersed in a culture where they are continually scrutinised, socially punished and rewarded by how well their bodies match up to established ideals (Heywood, 2007). As pupils at Benview explained, expectations to completely let go of body worries can be unrealistic and the rhetoric of "just be yourself like the teachers tell you" can often become empty. Young people can be very critical of the pressures they are under to look a certain way but still find it very difficult to reject such messages. Further, when they are not fully aware of wider power struggles, they can become ashamed and disappointed in themselves for not being able to do so. Even very critically aware individuals can feel guilty and ashamed for being concerned with their bodily appearances (Liimakka, 2011). One Benview pupil explained how she felt guilty for worrying about her body "when you see people on the television [on the news] getting killed." Interestingly, almost all of the young people I spoke to either recognised or felt that they were constrained in relation to their bodies but desired not to be constantly worrying about their appearance. They did not want to care about what others thought of them and did not like being constrained and judged by dominant body ideals. These pupils claimed that "you shouldn't care what people think" but concurrently said things such as, "I wish I could do that," and, "I can't do that, if people say they don't like how I look then it affects me." Therefore, many felt they could not help being "bothered." Some 'battled' with this. As Reece (S6) explained:

I've always thought that [I don't want to have to change myself for other people], like from when I was younger but like when I got picked on for my weight, like that would obviously drive me to try and be a lot healthier but it was also in a way that I'll change myself so they don't pick on me so like it was in a sort of like, I was in sort of a bit of a struggle.

Such findings support a number of other studies where individuals have struggled to move beyond a conceptual critique to resistance in action (Garrett, 2006; Johnson et al., 2013; Oliver and Lalik, 2004). What was concerning was that many of the young people I spoke to lacked hope that things could be different. These pupils felt that body worries were just an inevitable part of life – something all young people experience at least at some point. Even some younger pupils who said they were not too worried about their appearance currently, claimed they expected to start worrying soon. There was also a sense of helplessness around negative social treatment which some pupils considered to be “part of human nature,” and, “just the way things are and will always be.” These young people were accepting that the world as it is (Bourdieu, 2001) and the role of the teacher may be to alert pupils to the idea that things could be different. However, teachers may also have to help pupils understand that radical change in perspectives can be difficult rather than inflating pupils', or their own, expectations of how they should feel and how resilient and empowered they will become when thinking critically about the body. As Tinning (2002) claims, critical approaches may need to be ‘modest’ and not exaggerate the promise of emancipation. Within a modest approach, small steps and changes can be considered positive rather than being seen as failures to achieve a radical outcome. Further, teachers may need to alert pupils to the ways that wider institutions, structures and norms shape their habitus and their tastes in relation to bodies and bodily practices (Bourdieu, 1984). Through this, pupils may become less critical of themselves for desiring a certain body (yet wishing they did not). Instead, they may become more critical of how these tastes are socially structured, rewarded and punished.

Of course, the issues discussed within this thesis are complex, meaning quick and simple solutions are not possible (Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2015). *Continual* reflection and self-reflection by both teachers and pupils is necessary if any initiatives to help pupils become less constrained in relation to their bodies are to have any lasting impact. Therefore, critical inquiry should not only occur in explicit, isolated blocks. These units of work can have a strong impact when implemented but this impact can dilute over time as pupils move on to other things (Oliver and Kirk, 2016). As Fitzpatrick and Russell (2015) note, teachers who engage pupils in critical inquiry do cover critical topics but they also embody a critical approach, integrating it into everyday practice. These critically aware teachers may keep watch for opportunities to engage pupils in critical debate, not letting these opportunities

disappear unnoticed. For example, many female pupils within Benview insisted on wearing tight, revealing leggings during physical education, which the department had banned. These pupils perceived leggings to be more 'flattering' than traditional physical education kit and, if we were to draw upon Goffman (1959), we may argue that these garments could enable young people to exercise more comfortably since they allowed them to more easily keep up their 'attractive' image. However, the physical education staff were critical of such clothing, which they felt objectified the female pupils. A number of pupils were frustrated with this outright ban, which they perceived as unreasonable, and did not appear fully aware of the key reasons underlying their teachers' decision. This issue could be used as a tool to engage pupils in critical discussion around the objectification of female bodies and then perhaps, when appropriate, the girls could come to their own informed decision as to whether or not they would wear leggings during lessons. An approach like this would de-construct traditional teacher-pupil power relations and encourage pupils to realise they too have a voice in decisions affecting them (Oliver and Kirk, 2016). Continually integrating such an approach means pupils engage with issues meaningful to them, issues they encounter in their everyday lives. Of course, this research explored pupil culture as opposed to intensely analysing teacher practice and there is no suggestion that teachers within Benview were not capitalising on such opportunities at times, it is just a suggestion that this is something teachers may wish to become more attuned to. As all this implies, educators also need to continually examine their own personal beliefs, philosophies and teaching practices, even when implementing approaches that appear inarguably positive (Oliver and Kirk, 2016).

It is also important to recognise that much pedagogical work in relation to the body occurs out with school settings (Azzarito and Kirk, 2013; Rich, 2011). As argued within this thesis, individuals frequently access and construct information about health and the body within online social spaces. Therefore, as well as focussing generically on the body, teachers can specifically engage young people in critical debates around the messages they receive and construct online. Rich and Miah (2014) suggest that social media education should be a crucial part of school curricula, just as important as education around, for example, drugs, sex and finances. Benview pupils claimed to value knowledge constructed online more than that constructed within the school or physical education environment. For example, pupils claimed that school-based health knowledge was too simplistic and generic and instead valued other sources of information which they considered to be more contemporary and less staid:

Me: where do you learn about health? Where do you get your information about how to keep healthy?

Katie: Online

Tegan: Online yeah

Katie: ... If you are wanting to have a healthy lifestyle you can look up the sorts of things that you should eat and things like that, like what's right to eat and what's good for like what part of you.

Tegan: Yeah we don't really learn stuff in school.

For these pupils, the internet and online social spaces were the 'go to' places for finding out information about health, particularly through blogs, social media posts and links:

Me: Where would you go for your information or knowledge about what's healthy and what's not healthy?

Justin: Em, probably just internet to be honest, there's things like Twitter and stuff you can be influenced by things on that and then Twitter accounts, somebody could re-tweet something on Twitter you'd get a link to something and then you could read this whole article about being healthy and stuff... I do find it quite attractive, well not attractive but does attract you.

Previous research has evidenced how individuals use online fitspiration content as educative resources (Palmer, 2015). There are, of course, many merits to learning about health and the body across a range of contexts. Encouraging young people to inquire critically with online social spaces certainly does not involve persuading them to ignore such messages or reject social media altogether. Such a strategy would be fruitless. As Bordo (2003, p.xxvi) notes, young people cannot just "turn off" things such as televisions, computers and mobile phones or avert their eyes from advertisements, films, newspapers and magazines, all of which are so deeply ingrained within daily life. To do that they would need to "stop participating in dominant culture entirely" (Heywood, 2007, p.112). Rather, engaging young people in critical inquiry involves helping them learn how to engage judiciously with the wealth of content they are exposed to and contribute towards producing. As Wright (2004) argues, schools should not remain isolated from, or be positioned in opposition to, young people's broader social lives and contexts but should engage with these. Whilst certainly not taking an 'either-or' 'school versus internet' approach, it is also important that teachers are alert to the health messages young people engage with online and consider how these may conflict with, or be reinforced by, those constructed within schools and physical education.

Interestingly, online social spaces can potentially become sites for challenging taken-for-granted ways of thinking and being since they can expose people to a whole range of viewpoints from diverse sources (Sirna, 2014). For example, online social spaces can be more egalitarian sites for knowledge production than, for example, the traditional media since users simultaneously construct knowledge *as well as* consuming it (ibid). Despite learning, and at times imitating the interactions and practices of influential others, Benview

pupils had some agency in how they used and interacted within online social spaces and they often learnt from, and regulated, each other. They not only consumed knowledge around the body and were told what was (not) valued - they also contributed towards producing knowledge and defining value. For example, the interactive element to social media provided a new and powerful dimension to how bodily norms and valued were internalised by young people. When a young person saw someone else post a selfie and, accordingly, an abundance of people 'liking' that picture and commenting using phrases such as 'OMG your abs are AMAZING!!!' they began to understand that developing visible abdominals was a good thing, something that they too would be admired for if they manage to achieve it (Meier and Gray, 2014). They also began to understand that this was not just how celebrities should or could look but how they, and people like them should and could look, or appear to look, too. Helping young people to see and understand their role in (re)producing some of the practices around health and the body that we are encouraging them to be critical of, may be one way forwards and helping them to see that they too can have a voice in changing these (Sirna, 2014).

Finally, it could be argued that a critical inquiry would be much more effective were it more action based (Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2015). For example, Gray et al. (2016) use interviews with university students to evidence that when there is a disproportionate focus on critiquing the taken-for-granted, a critical approach can actually close down the potential for people to think positively and creatively about how things could be. As such, acting on an impassioned spirit is often difficult when there are no external points of reference for alternative ways of being (Bordo, 2003; Heywood, 2007). As Macdonald (2002, p.171) explains, a critical approach should foster a commitment in young people to 'do something' and help them to respond to their critical thoughts with critical action. Individuals may find it difficult to refute or resist dominant ways of thinking and acting alone, even in online environment (Sirna, 2014). However, such action can be more easily enacted collectively. As previously argued, it is important that teachers help create a safe social environment for pupils and encourage pupils to think of themselves as part of a collectivist community. Once this is achieved, it may be useful to facilitate pupils in coming up with ideas of things they can do together to respond to their critiques of dominant physical culture. Encouraging pupils to then do these things is likely to bring about much more change than solely 'transforming' their thoughts and feelings.

In all, there is certainly potential for young people to engage in critical inquiry within schools. It may seem obvious for this learning to occur in subjects such as physical

education, specifically when questioning meanings and power relations around the body, health and fitness. However, young people can develop their capacities to think and act critically in relation to a multitude of issues and in a variety of school subjects. Further, there is much potential for teachers to address body-related issues using a cross-curricular approach (Wright, 2004). It could make sense for physical education to link with other 'health and wellbeing' subjects, such as home economics and personal and social education. However, strong links could be made with subjects such as history, geography, modern studies, English, religious and moral education, drama and other expressive arts. Possibilities for critical, body-themed work are endless. For example, teachers can help pupils to explore how body ideals have evolved throughout history and across cultures, they can help pupils debate issues from an ethical and moral standpoint, they can aid young people in critiquing media text or political discourse and they may help pupils develop expressive critical responses in dance, drama and art. This would align particularly well with the Scottish curriculum, which advocates holistic and cross-curricular approaches to learning (Scottish Executive, 2006).

#### **8.4 A physical education that is body-focussed**

Young people can engage in critical inquiry across the school curriculum. However, it is through a more embodied approach to critical inquiry that physical education - and other movement-based subjects such as dance and drama - can make unique and special contributions to addressing some of the issues highlighted in this thesis (Fitzpatrick and Russell, 2015). A dualist mind-body philosophy has traditionally underpinned Western education systems (Stolz, 2014). Here, mind and body have been considered separate entities whilst 'head knowledge' has been privileged and the body afforded relatively low status. Many efforts to engage young people in critical inquiry around the body tend to focus on transforming the mind (Liimakka, 2011). For example, the pedagogical approaches detailed above were mostly classroom based - done with pen and paper and pupils sitting in chairs. However, a number of scholars argue that the mind and body cannot be separated (Dewey, 1928; Satina and Hultgren, 2001). Pupils can learn how to become critical of bodily issues through a mind-focussed approach but such learning may be even more salient when it occurs through bodily experience.<sup>26</sup> As, Liimakka (2011) argues, individuals' bodily

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<sup>26</sup> I acknowledge here that *all* human experience, and therefore all learning, is embodied (Kirk, 2002; Satina and Hultgren, 2001). However, I specifically refer to bodily experience which encompasses movement and a more explicit focus on the physicality of the body.



experiences have potential to be transformative. Being critically aware is not always enough to empower young people to perceive or use their bodies in alternative ways. However, combining critical inquiry with positive bodily experience may be a way towards increased bodily freedom (Liimakka, 2011; Scott and Derry, 2005).

The majority of young people in Scotland experience physical education in a practical setting. Whilst some certificated physical education lessons do take place within traditional classrooms, the rationales for such courses often advocate practical experiential learning (SQA, 2015). Therefore, it is important to consider the approaches that can be implemented by teachers who teach in games halls, swimming pools, gyms and sports fields and who help pupils to learn about, through and in, the body concurrently (Brown and Penney, 2013). Benview pupils valued physical education for its movement opportunities. Whilst they had some ‘classroom lessons’ in order to learn about ‘health’ and engage critically with body discourses, they referred to these lessons as not being “real PE.” As Seamus (S1) explained, it is “disappointing when you come to PE and you are sitting in a classroom.” Pupils argued that most of their school day encompassed desk-based learning. However, physical education provided them with something different – the opportunity to experience bodily freedom out with the constraints of sitting still. As Eilish (S6) explained, “it gets kinda sore sitting in a chair all day!” *Learning and movement through physical experience* are at the heart of physical education and I would argue that these practical, embodied and experiential characteristics of the subject should not be lost or diluted.

Through movement, young people can begin to experience their bodies in ways that question and contradict dominant power structures and taken-for-granted beliefs (Bourdieu, 2001; Oliver and Kirk, 2016). For example, those who excel in physical education and sport, yet do not look ‘fit’ and ‘sporty’ may disrupt dominant stereotypes and challenge preconceived ideas around the body and around what it means to be a talented performer (Sykes and McPhail, 2008). As such, movement can be used to help young people challenge, and become critical of, the constraints placed upon them within society. Gard (2004b) exemplifies how this may be done practically through the medium of creative dance. For example, when encouraging individuals to move their bodies in a variety of ways, an educator can ask accompanying critical questions such as:

What is the difference between normal and weird movement? Why does it feel good/bad to move in new ways? To what extent are these feelings influenced by the expectations of other people? Do we go through our lives without exploring our body possibilities? Is this a good or a bad thing? To what extent is body conformity forced on people? Can we think of examples of where body conformity is enforced?

Does body conformity take different forms for people who are male/female, able-bodied/disabled, young/old, gay/straight, English speaking/non-English speaking or white/black People? (Gard, 2004b, p.95).

Therefore, pupils can learn to challenge pre-conceived ideas about how they should 'be', how they should move and what they can do. Variations of these questions may also help young people to critically deconstruct the social pressures they are under to achieve and maintain a body that looks a certain way or is a certain size or shape. Further, teachers can encourage pupils to debate why they do certain activities and problematise the 'ends' that they exercise for. Movement accompanied by critical debate may also encourage young people to think more deeply about how they value their bodies and what they value their bodies for.

It could be argued that the approach above is still 'mind-focussed', with movement as an illustrative catalyst for discussion. However, physical education can also provide young people with opportunities to change the ways they perceive and appraise their bodies through a more embodied approach. To support and encourage this change in perspective, teachers can help pupils to become more consciously aware of their bodies. Leder (1990) suggests that individuals do not often notice their bodies when they are functioning effectively. During these times, their bodies almost 'disappear' and are taken-for-granted. However, they pay attention to their bodies during times of 'dysfunction' – for example, when experiencing pain or when feeling insecure and embarrassed during social interaction. Therefore, individuals become more aware of the limits, constraints and deficiencies of their bodies as opposed to being aware of their inherent possibilities. When young people learn to move their bodies in new ways, for example by learning new skills, physical educators can probe them to think about what parts of their bodies helped them to do that skill; how the various parts of their bodies worked together; and how doing that skill and being able to do that skill made them feel. The teacher therefore moves their pupils' attentions and concerns away from the surface of their bodies (their appearance) to focus instead on their internal feelings (Garrett, 2004; Satina and Hultgren, 2001). Introducing activities that centre upon increasing kinaesthetic awareness such as Yoga, Pilates or Feldenkrais movement may help with this (Wright, 2000). O' Brien et al. (2008) also exemplify how relaxation techniques and creative dance can be used to heighten pupils' awareness of internal bodily attributes and enable them to focus on how the body feels or how it can express emotion. However, as Walseth et al. (2015) argue, the extent to which pupils become more aware of their bodies depends more on how teachers endeavour to help pupils draw attention to their bodies, rather than the activities this is done through. Pupils can also become more kinaesthetically aware

through ‘traditional’ physical education activities such as basketball, badminton, swimming and athletics if the teacher makes that a core objective of their teaching.

It has been argued that physical education can further objectify bodies, adding to and compounding the objectification people experience within their everyday lives (Tinning and Glasby, 2002). When young people judge their bodies according to external standards outside of their control, they can begin to ‘hate’ and be ashamed of their bodies. Here, they disassociate themselves from their bodies and perceive their bodies as objects that need improving (Kirk and Tinning, 1994). However, as a pupil develops their internal kinaesthetic awareness, they may begin to perceive their body as being part of themselves and deserving of respect (Liimakka, 2011). Rather than relying upon outside sources such as the internet, the media, their peers and external comparison references, young people can learn to value their bodies by referencing how they feel and by acknowledging the opportunities their bodies afford them. This supports suggestions that young people should be encouraged to develop self-compassion and a non-judgemental stance towards their own bodies as they care for them and use them (Paechter, 2013). However, the reference here is to self-compassion in an authentic sense as opposed to the projection of a false arrogance or confidence that individuals often portray in online social spaces. Benview pupils explained that they often projected a confident persona to others but felt insecure beneath that front. An approach that encourages young people to value their bodies intrinsically rather than extrinsically may help young people develop genuine self-compassion. Acknowledging the nature of contemporary bodily culture outlined within this thesis, it is perhaps now more important than ever that physical educators move away from framing the body as an entity for measurement and surveillance (‘we have bodies’) to instead embracing and encouraging a ‘we are bodies’ perspective (Liimakka, 2011).

Young people, who have learnt that their bodies are objects to be looked at, evaluated and scrutinised, can also ‘re-learn’ to appreciate their bodies for the sensory experiences and feelings that their bodies afford them. For example, teachers can draw pupils’ attentions to enjoyable and satisfying sensations that accompany movement. This appreciation may also emerge as young people realise how their bodies allow them to experience the social, cultural and material world around them. Outdoor learning and outdoor adventure experiences can be particularly strong mediums for such realisations (Hennigan, 2010; Scott and Derry, 2005). Through outdoor physical activity, individuals can engage with the sights and feelings of the natural world and appreciate the awesome surroundings that their senses can absorb (Humberstone, 2015). They can also challenge

their bodies, overcome fears and perceived ‘barriers’ to movement and achieve an understanding of what the body ‘can do’ (Ewert and Sibthorp, 2014). Such challenges, experiences and learning can provide young people with lasting memories and a number of pupils may not be able to access such opportunities outside of schooling. As such, these experiences need to be protected and prioritised despite potential time and cost pressures and bureaucratic burdens around risk and safety. However, Education Scotland (2013) found that many Scottish schools have not taken full advantage of outdoor learning opportunities as a medium for nurturing and enriching pupils’ health and wellbeing.

As the above implies, learning to move can help young people become more empowered within their bodies. Authentic bodily empowerment emerges from experiences that make an individual feel powerful and in control within their own body and within their bodily relationships with their surroundings (Liimakka, 2011). However, such empowerment is not confined to the outdoors or adventurous situations. Within the traditional physical education curriculum those who have learnt that their bodies are ‘weak’, ‘inept’ and ‘inferior’ can re-learn that their bodies are strong and skilled. Therefore, physical education can also be a place where phrases such as ‘I can’t do that’, turn into, ‘I can do that’. Teachers can help pupils become more aware of their bodily potential by teaching them new ways of moving, by helping them refine and practice skills and by allowing them to experiment with movement. Of course, this already occurs on a daily basis within physical education departments. Nevertheless, this ‘bread and butter’ of physical education must be protected, especially when there are many competing pressures around the nature and purpose of the subject (Green, 2008). Pupils also must be more aware of what physical education can do for them and, as previously argued, must perceive the physical education environment to be socially ‘safe’ so that they can allow themselves to capitalise upon such opportunities. A number of Benview pupils were so concerned with their external image and other social outcomes that they did not value physical education for the learning opportunities it provided them. Image took priority over learning and ‘appearing’ took priority over being. It is crucial that learning within physical education is framed intrinsically so that it does not become learning for the sake of social approval – of ‘ends’ such as examination grades, fitness and weight loss. Bodily empowerment involves experiencing what can be achieved through the body and what it is to *feel* and *be* strong, skilled, fit and healthy.

Finally, whilst young people should be encouraged to become more aware of their bodies, ‘forgetting’ the body is also important (Duesund and Skarderud, 2003; Leder, 1990). Physical activity and movement allow individuals to become ‘lost’ in the moment, to

experience deep joy and become fully immersed within an experience without worrying about other things (Blankenship and Ayers, 2010; Koski, 2015). This can include becoming immune to feelings of surveillance and judgement, even if only momentarily. The following field note exemplifies how this may occur:

The class are particularly excited today as Mairi has told them that they are going to have a lesson focussing on a variety of fun ball and ‘tag’ games. Stephen is reluctant to take part initially. He is one of the boys who refuses to take his jumper off in PE due to his weight concerns. The games are now in full flow and there is so much laughter, smiling and shrieking from the pupils. I watch Stephen as he begins to tentatively move from the outskirts of the room to become more involved in the game, he moves self-consciously at first, his body hunched and small as he continually looks around. No one is paying attention to him though – they are too engrossed in all the fun. Stephen’s bodily movements gradually become more open and free. He is beginning to run, to laugh, to jump, to shout out. His face is bright red with exertion. He must be roasting as he still has his jumper on but his sleeves are rolled up. How rewarding it is to see him seemingly forgetting himself and becoming ‘lost’ in the moment (field note, 04/09/14).

Within classes where pupils are very concerned with bodily appearances, learning may need to be particularly engaging, and even fast paced, so that individuals do not experience pauses and moments of boredom and distraction where they may become pre-occupied with their bodily surface again (Duesund and Skarderud, 2003). Teachers like Mairi focussed on developing pupils’ movement skills but also endeavoured to make lessons were fun, challenging, engaging and enjoyable. As Duesund and Skarderud (2003) explain, it is important that young people’s movement experiences are not ‘empty’ – simply doing an activity is different from being fully immersed and involved in it. Further, encouraging pupils to experience joyful movement does not involve merely providing activities, neglecting learning. When individuals experience ‘deep joy’ in movement, their movement often ‘flows’ and feels easy and effortless (Blankenship and Ayers, 2010). Therefore, to strive towards this, movement skills do need to be developed, fitness does need to be worked upon – these things are not neglected. However, they become a means to a joyful end as opposed to being ends in themselves (Hawkins, 2008). As such, it could be argued that the traditional physical education curriculum, consisting of short, sampler blocks of activities should be replaced with something more meaningful and a curriculum where young people have the time and depth to become proficient at, and infatuated by, what they do (Hawkins, 2008; Thorburn et al., 2011).

There is a risk that through constantly deconstructing dominant body-related discourses, the practices of physical education, physical activity and any fitness or health enhancing pursuits become depicted as repressive, negative influences in young people’s

lives. Whilst such physical practices can be negative and repressive, this should not overshadow their potential to be very empowering and positive influences in the lives of young people (Scott-Dixon, 2008). Aspirations to *be* healthy and fit are not 'bad'. Therefore, teachers should not discourage pupils from wanting to become healthy and physically active but should help them to become aware of the power struggles and underlying agendas that influence their choices and actions (Heywood, 2007). However, helping young people to develop alternative ways of relating to, and engaging with, bodily practices is also extremely important. As Scott-Dixon (2008) asserts, those critical of obesity, healthism and ideal body discourses must ask themselves what form they want resistance to such discourses to take and what alternative messages they really want to convey. For example, is it positive and empowering for resistance to entail an abandonment of health concerns or to encourage people not to care about their bodies and their health at all? Could resistance instead encompass the joy-orientated, body-respecting perspective detailed above? Such is a philosophy that many physical educators will be drawn to, especially those teachers who have a love for physical activity and sport and who have witnessed the positive influence these practices have had in their own lives – positive experiences they wish to 'pass on' to their own pupils (Green and Thurston, 2002).

## **8.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided suggestions as to how young people might experience their bodies and the physical education environment more positively. Firstly, making the physical education environment socially safe may help pupils to feel more comfortable and less vulnerable as they learn. This can involve nurturing positive and empathetic relationships between pupils and teachers and pupils and pupils so that individuals learn to care for each other, feel valued and have less risk of becoming discredited. However, the chapter argued that changing young people's attitudes towards their bodies and towards dominant cultural norms and values is also crucial. Accordingly, a school-wide critical inquiry approach was suggested, particularly when this is action-focussed and integrated into pupils' everyday lives. The chapter finally argued that these critical approaches, which are about physical experience, should not become detached from physical experience itself and therefore an embodied approach to critical inquiry was advocated. As such, physical education's unique contribution to addressing contemporary body issues may lie in the opportunities it provides for young people to develop awe and respect for their bodies as they experience movement and the world around them. This authentic and intrinsic approach may be vital in counter-

acting the superficial and shallow aspects of contemporary bodily culture. Of course, a safe social environment is foundational to all that occurs within physical education, and particularly must ground the latter two suggestions for a physical education that is critical and body-focussed. Critical inquiry must be meaningful to pupils and be conducted in an environment where pupils' opinions are heard, valued and respected (Oliver and Lalik, 2004). Additionally, for pupils to fully embrace a body-focussed approach they must be in an environment where they are supportive of one another and can move freely without worries of ridicule or judgement.

## **Chapter Nine: Concluding remarks**

This study aimed to understand, interpret and explain the contemporary body-related culture amongst young people within the context of a Scottish secondary school. The study also aimed to investigate the impact of this culture on young people's experiences of, and engagements with, the physical education environment. The research was conducted by drawing upon ethnographic principles. Therefore, I immersed myself within a Scottish secondary school (Benview) for an academic year and built relationships with pupils, attempting to understand their perspectives and social actions from the inside.

Over the months, I began to piece together three over-arching tenets of pupils' informal culture (table 1). It became clear that bodies, and especially bodily appearances, were very important socially. This supported previous research in the area and was not necessarily a 'new' finding. However, there were two further tenets of pupil culture, which appeared to bolster the centrality of the body and bodily appearances within Benview. These included the omnipresence of online social interaction and, associated with this, the celebrification of self.

**Table 1.** A summary of the overarching tenets of pupil culture.

<b>The centrality and importance of the body</b>	<b>The omnipresence of online social spaces and online social interaction</b>	<b>The celebrification of self</b>
Pupils considered bodies to be highly symbolic of who they were. Their bodies and their appearances were also influential to how they were socially positioned within the school. Pupils claimed to spend much time thinking and talking about bodies.	Pupils had constant access to online social spaces and struggled to imagine life without them. These online social spaces were very important places for young people to socialise with their peers.	Through online social spaces, pupils engaged in large and complex social networks, within which people would become 'known' and be intensely scrutinised. Certain pupils acted, and were perceived and treated, like celebrities.

A growing body of sociocultural research around the body, schooling and health provided an invaluable starting point for this study. However, I was also aware that the ways young people interact with one another and construct meaning around the body are quickly evolving within contemporary societies. My findings were beginning to confirm this and were pointing to the strong influence, and rapid expansion, of online social interaction. As such, I began to investigate the following questions:

- 1. How are young people within a Scottish secondary school engaging with online social spaces, particularly in relation to their bodies and bodily appearances?**



2. **How are these engagements with online social spaces influencing young people’s perceptions of the body and their body-related actions within the school context?**
3. **What impact might online bodily culture have on young people’s experiences of, and engagements with, physical education?**

In addressing these questions, it became clear that the young people’s engagements with online social spaces were highly influential to how they perceived themselves, each other and their own and each other’s bodies. In many ways, their engagements with online social spaces were mechanisms for exaggerating, rather than changing, their perceptions and social processes. Accordingly, these pupils were negotiating hyper-risky environments where the body and the self were hyper-visible, hyper-scrutinised and hyper-controlled (table 2).

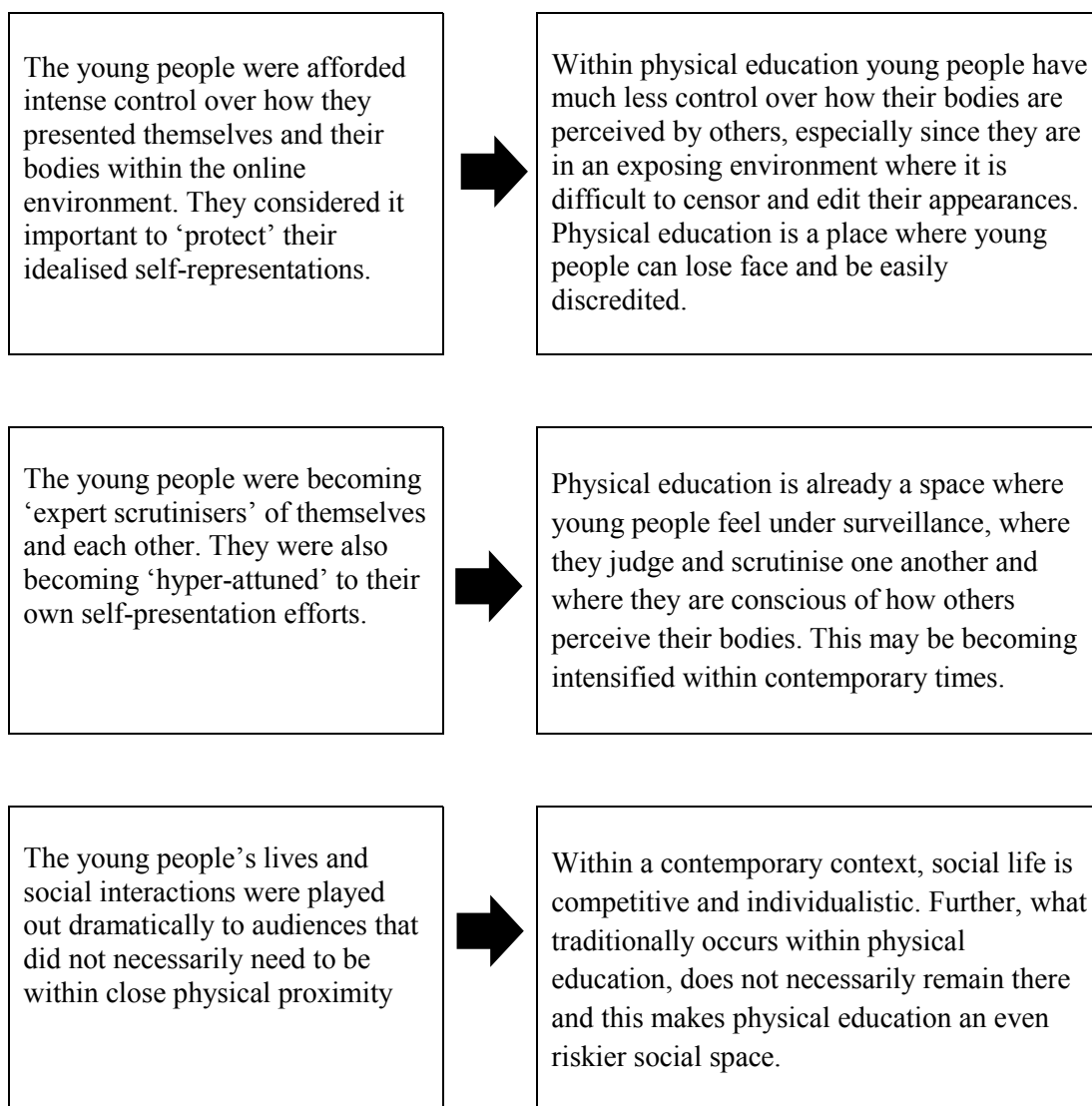
**Table 2.** A summary of key findings.

<p><b>The hyper risky social environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social life was framed ‘dramatically’ and sensationalised amongst pupils.</li> <li>• Information could instantaneously spread very quickly and widely.</li> <li>• Identities could be easily spoiled and this was a constant threat.</li> <li>• Pupils could be shamed in front of large audiences and online ‘gossip’ pages provided explicit platforms for this.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The hyper-visible body and self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils were constantly bombarded by images of celebrities, models and their peers within online social spaces (e.g. people documenting their fitness and diet successes, peers posting ‘selfies’).</li> <li>• They frequently sought out images of others but these also appeared inadvertently.</li> <li>• Pupils were especially concerned with looking ‘good’ for situations where pictures were likely to be taken and shared.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The hyper scrutinised body and self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils spent much time scrutinising other people online.</li> <li>• Body ideals were very detailed and pupils particularly admired ‘fit’ and ‘healthy’ looking bodies.</li> <li>• Pupils compared and contrasted themselves to well-known celebrities and to peers with ‘better’ bodies.</li> <li>• They also compared social actions, diet and exercise practices and popularity (e.g. comparing crude measures such as ‘likes’ for pictures).</li> <li>• They felt continually exposed and aware of being judged (appearances and actions could be ‘picked apart’ and very publically critiqued).</li> </ul>	<p><b>The hyper-controlled body and self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils made lots of comparisons against ‘unrealistic ideals’ (e.g. ‘photo-shopped’ images).</li> <li>• Pupils presented such ideals themselves - using camera angles, lighting, apps and ‘filters’ to alter their appearances.</li> <li>• Control over images was very important to pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils were aware they were comparing themselves against edited images.</li> <li>• For some pupils, edited representations were more important than ‘reality’ but pupils were also scathing of people they considered to be ‘fake’.</li> </ul>

Through theorising how the young people formed meanings, identities and social relationships around the body, it was evident that the online environment was an important and attractive medium for identity work. It was a place where these young people would become known and where they would be under intense surveillance, which had panoptic, synoptic and omnioptic elements (Bauman, 1998; Foucault, 1977; Marwick, 2012; Mathiesen, 1997). Young people were becoming ‘expert scrutinisers’ of themselves and each other but were also becoming very skilled at, and attuned to, self-presentation processes. Within the online environment, they could construct very favourable representations of themselves, using digital resources to construct virtual idealised fronts (Goffman, 1959). If successful in doing this, they could accrue virtual physical capital, which could have exchange value in the offline realm (Bourdieu, 1984). As such, online and offline identities became ‘blended’ due to the overlap between online and offline social life (Baker, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008).

Whilst some researchers have investigated how engagements with online social spaces may influence young people’s bodily perceptions and actions in general, few, if any, studies have explored how this may impact young people’s schooling or physical education experiences. As I interacted with the young people in Benview, I hypothesised that there were connections to be made here. However, attempting to explore these connections was an ambitious task. To my knowledge, this had not been previously attempted within the literature. In doing this, I took established theoretical insights of social life and adapted and altered these insights in order to authentically explain social interaction and social relationships within a contemporary context. As a result, the thesis progressed to suggest that the mutually consequential nature of online and offline social life could have a number of implications for young people’s experiences of, and engagements with, physical education (table 3).

**Table 3.** Implications for physical education.



Recognising the findings of this study, considerations and possible responses for teachers were critically appraised. It is perhaps now more important than ever that socially safe and critical environments are constructed in physical education and across the school curriculum. There were so many aspects of the young people's culture that could foster shallow and superficial views of the body. The young people's bodies were becoming increasingly objectified, valued for what they appeared to be, whilst seeking the approval of others was prioritised. Most saliently, these young people longed to *appear* as healthy, fit and virtuous individuals - this was "soooo fashionable." Looking physically healthy does not necessarily equate to *being* physically healthy and if we consider health to be a more holistic concept, also encompassing social, emotional and mental dimensions, we can begin to understand how 'unhealthy' some of these young people may become. However, the issues discussed

within this thesis and the contemporary culture young people negotiate are deep rooted and an embodied approach to critical inquiry may provide a strong and profound response within physical education itself. Physical education has unique potential to change young people's relationships with their bodies. Through practical and experiential learning, physical education can foster and create a refreshing culture where young people learn to value and appreciate their bodies more intrinsically. Without exaggeration, physical education has the potential to change these young people's lives. However, this cannot be done in isolation.

The data for this study was collected within an education context, and more specifically within the day-to-day environment of a school. Accordingly, the suggestions made within this thesis were mainly teacher-centred and relevant to such a context. Whilst these suggestions have potential to positively impact young people's lives, teachers should not become disappointed if they do not see a complete transformational change in young people's bodily actions and attitudes (Oliver and Kirk, 2016). The problems that young people face in relation to their bodies are complex and not contained to their micro environment. Wider power structures, struggles and messages stemming from the media, the economy and politics are all influential. Therefore, the onus cannot be placed upon teachers to address such issues alone, nor can the onus be placed upon pupils to change themselves. Teachers will need to work in partnership with, for example, allied health professionals, youth workers, charity workers, community volunteers and parents, to name but a few, in order to prioritise responses to some of the issues highlighted within this thesis. Through utilising a strategic and multi-disciplinary approach, these groups of people can create clear plans and targets relevant for the contexts they are situated within and specific to the young people within their care (Education Scotland, 2013).

The wider social and policy context within education is also important. As previously alluded, teachers need support to think about, reflect upon and address such issues. Education Scotland (2013, p.24) have highlighted the need for:

Greater resources, support and professional learning opportunities for staff to address key areas of mental, emotional and social wellbeing such as body image, bereavement counselling, suicide prevention, inappropriate sexualised behaviours and the abuse of technology and social media.

This is because teaching staff in numerous secondary schools feel "anxious," "ill-equipped," and "lack confidence" in addressing these "sensitive aspects" with pupils (pp.9-10). They feel that they needed more time for professional dialogue and training, both within their initial teacher education and on an on-going basis. Acknowledging the findings of this thesis,

it is imperative that any commitments to addressing these needs are upheld. It is also important that such support is ongoing, ‘up to date’ and relevant to teachers’ individual contexts rather than being in the form of ‘one-off’ events or superficial resource packs (Atencio et al., 2012). There is, of course, pressing need to support teachers in educating pupils around the more obvious threats to health and wellbeing within online social spaces, for example online grooming and sexual abuse or cyberbullying (Scottish Government, 2010b). However, this thesis has evidenced that it is also important to address what could be considered the ‘softer’ online risks to young people’s health and wellbeing. This thesis also has inevitable implications for initial teacher education. Student teachers need to be supported and equipped not only in terms of developing their knowledge of contemporary youth culture, but also in terms of developing their capacity to listen, interpret and relate to pupils.

Beyond the context of education, wider societal sectors and industries relating to sport, fitness, retail, fashion, media and advertising each have a large part to play in addressing some of the concerns outlined within this thesis (UK Parliament, 2012). Further, for-profit social media corporations are now extremely influential within contemporary societies and could do more in response to these issues. To provide one example, we could examine how Benview pupils were constantly exposed to images of ‘perfect’ bodies online. They claimed this exposure was very prominent within one of their favourite online social spaces – Instagram. Instagram has an ‘explore’ feature where algorithms are used to ensure that posts will appear tailored to an individual’s demographics, likes or interests. As such, these young people could easily get into a rut where they are constantly viewing pictures of others people’s bodies that are laden with ‘thinspirational’ or ‘fitspirational’ rhetoric. Instagram provides users with the option to use a ‘see fewer posts like this’ setting but it is not immediately evident how to find or use this feature. Whilst it could be argued that young people may need more education around becoming digitally aware in that sense, these sites could also be much more transparent about what they do and how content is appropriated to various users. Whilst it was beyond the scope of this study to investigate these sorts of issues, there is potential for further research here.

This study did of course have limitations and, with hindsight, a number of things could have been done differently. Additionally, as with any piece of research, many questions arose from the process as well as answers. There is great potential for future research to build upon the insights gained from this study and a number of recommendations are provided below.

Firstly, there was an over-representation of female voices within this thesis. Although previous research has focussed on the salience of body issues to adolescent girls, research is increasingly evidencing the rising social pressures boys face in relation to their bodies. Accordingly, I set out to investigate contemporary bodily culture amongst both male and female pupils. However, it was female pupils who spoke to me more extensively about issues relating to the body in general and issues relating more specifically to the body within online social spaces. Nevertheless, I cannot conclude that the issues discussed in this thesis were predominantly ‘female issues’ as it is also possible that my research methodology and influence as a female researcher led to this outcome. I admittedly struggled to notice and interpret the nuances of male pupils’ talk, behaviours and interactions in the same way that I did with females. Further, the relative stifling of male voices could have been due to how these young males perceived and related to me. Whilst I endeavoured to be mindful and reflexive of my gendered identity and habitus as I gathered and analysed my data, the study may have been strengthened had I worked with a co-researcher, perhaps a young male like Graham, to whom male pupils could relate to and feel comfortable with. A male researcher may also have been able to provide more insight whilst interpreting adolescent boys’ talk, behaviours and interactions. Accordingly, there is a need for future research specifically investigating how adolescent males’ engagements with online social spaces are influencing their perceptions of the body and their body-related actions and social relationships.

Secondly, this study was initially exploratory in nature. Broad research aims narrowed and evolved as data was collected. Whilst this research design facilitated investigations into what participants themselves considered important, it took some time for specific research questions to emerge. What resulted was a broad, yet rich, picture of young people’s perceptions, relationships and interactions around the body within a contemporary context. Situating the study within one school, over a long period of time also resulted in a depth of information. However, there is certainly scope to take some of the issues discussed within this thesis and investigate each of them in more depth. For example, future research is needed to investigate the mediating influence of demographics such as age, social class, race and gender. The influence of specific internet sites, tools and modes of interacting could also be explored, as opposed to examining the influence of online social spaces in general. Further, since this study gave voice to those who were invested fairly heavily in the dominant tenets of pupil culture previously outlined, further research exploring the perceptions of those very resistant to such culture would be extremely worthwhile. Research is also required to examine in more depth what teachers are actually doing to address such issues. Action research, which involves teachers developing responses suitable for their own

contexts, would be especially enlightening. Accordingly, research in other schools and contexts could construct a wider picture across Scotland, and the international context, as a whole.

Thirdly, there is potential for research in this area drawing upon more innovative research methods. There is especially potential for pupils themselves to become much more involved in the research process. Whilst I endeavored to give voice to pupils within the process of research, there were many ways in which I could have done this more effectively. Taking a collaborative, activist approach would have been particularly insightful (Oliver and Kirk, 2016). Here pupils can be involved in research from the very initial stages, forming research questions and deciding what is to be investigated, helping to plan the study and contributing ideas as to how data could be best collected. Within this project based approach, pupils can also become involved in data-analysis processes and there is potential for them to develop their critical capacities as they do so. As an adult ethnographer I could not fully enter the pupils' worlds or interactions and I could not become one of them. I could experience using online social spaces myself and amongst my own peer groups but I could not interact with, or 'follow', these pupils or join their online social groupings. There are currently calls for more ethnographic researchers to become fully immersed within online social environments (Hallett and Barber, 2014). However, there is a pressing need to develop clear guidelines as to how this can be done appropriately, safely and ethically as an adult researcher investigating youth culture. Perhaps one way to respond to this dilemma is by acknowledging that the best people to give an insider's account of pupil culture are pupils themselves. With support from researchers, these pupils can tell their own stories as opposed to having their stories told by someone else.

Even on a small scale, there is potential for pupils to be more active in generating research data. For example, following (Hill and Azzarito, 2012), participants could bring photographs or artifacts along to interviews or engage in pre-interview tasks such as journaling. Given the image driven nature of online social spaces, bringing along, for example, screen shots of social media content may provide researchers with a more direct insight into pupils' lives as well as relying upon their reports of what they see and do. A number of pupils did spontaneously provide me with access to such data, using their smartphones during interviews and conversations in order to provide me with examples of the things they were talking about. Again, more research and guidance is required around how to authentically, yet ethically, research through online social spaces and use these online social spaces within the research process. Further, care will always be needed to ensure

innovative methods are not introduced as gimmicks to make research 'different' for its own sake, but that they actually lead to richer data and a richer experience for participants (Punch, 2002).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that online social spaces can have both positive and negative impacts on young people's wellbeing and on their learning. Although pupils frequently use online social spaces informally, schools such as Benview use online social spaces as platforms to provide pupils with information, to share resources and to engage pupils in learning. Pupils were able to use online social spaces to gather information about the body as they had access to a wealth of information about their health, fitness and wellbeing. Some also discussed how affirmation on such sites could positively impact their self-esteem and feelings of being socially connected with their peers. Whilst this thesis has mainly focussed on more negative implications of online social spaces, it is important that future research explores how these sites for interaction can act as positive influences within a school and within young people's lives. Some researchers are currently exploring, for example, how online social spaces and digital technologies can support people in engaging in physical activity that they enjoy and which is accessible to them (Cavallo et al., 2012).

In conclusion, this research area is still in its infancy and there is much yet to be done. However, I would argue that the aims of the present study have been fulfilled. A very rich picture has been constructed of some key aspects of young people's informal bodily culture, anchored within the context of a Scottish secondary school. In doing this, the thesis has provided new contributions to knowledge around young people's engagements with online social spaces and online technologies, especially in relation to the body and bodily appearances. These insights will be of interest to teachers, academic researchers and all practitioners, stakeholders and policy makers who have a vested interest in protecting and nurturing the health and wellbeing of young people. Further, the findings of this study may be especially important for physical educators whose work with pupils is explicitly body-focussed. Hopefully teachers, and others, will be able to use the insights gained from this study to better understand the young people that they work with and the lives these young people live. Of course, the ways that young people relate to one another and learn about their bodies will continually evolve. However, this thesis explains how this is occurring at present and may inform our analyses and reflections in years to come.

On a personal level, being provided with the opportunity to engage my sociological imagination has been an honour and the process has been fascinating. I began researching in



this area because I wanted to learn more about the body within social life. I also wanted to learn how to free those feeling oppressed and constrained by dominant bodily discourse. Over the past few years as a PhD student, I have fully dedicated myself to this endeavour and I hope that this research can, in some way, make a positive difference in young people's lives - no matter how big or small that difference may be. Just as Kaylee claimed that all the "wee things make a big thing" in relation to negative bodily feelings and experiences, my belief is that all the 'wee things' can make a big thing in the positive sense. Therefore, although this process has taught me that I have so much more to learn and so much more to do, it has equipped me well for continuing on that journey.

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## **Appendix A: Approaching the school**

- **Initial correspondence with school (informal)** (pp 254-255)
- **Information for head teacher and physical education staff** (pp 260-262)
  - **Formal consent from school** (pp 263-264)

### **Initial correspondence with school (informal)**

Informal contact was initially made with the curriculum leader for Health and Wellbeing (who was also in charge of the physical education department). She became the main 'gatekeeper' and point of access for the study. A sample of initial e-mail correspondence is detailed below:

From: [REDACTED]  
To: [sarahj507@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahj507@hotmail.com)  
Subject: RE: Cross country  
Date: Wed, 12 Mar 2014 16:11:40 +0000

Hi Sarah,

Nice to hear from you! How are things going? Yes our S1s [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (twins!) both did incredibly well at the weekend. We had 3 gold medals and 1 silver from the Scottish Schools Swimming Championships the day before so it has been a great week for sport at [REDACTED]. Other than that school is very busy with all the curricular changes going on at the moment but on the whole everything is going well. I hope things are going well for you and that you are enjoying the university. Please feel free to use [REDACTED] [the school] if you ever need any pupil input for any of your work.

[REDACTED]

**From:** Sarah MacIsaac [<mailto:sarahj507@hotmail.com>]  
**Sent:** 13 March 2014 10:02  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: Cross country

Oh wow - super twins! That's great about the swimming too. I can imagine you will all be very busy at the moment with so many changes - not too long until the Easter hols though. Things are going okay here. I had a hectic few weeks as I was preparing for my PhD board examination which allows me to progress to next stage of doing research so I will now finally be able to plan how I will get out there and collect some data - feels like I have been reading and writing for ages!

I am hoping to collect data talking with teachers and observing and interviewing pupils to look at how their perceptions of the body influences how they engage with each other and with PE activities. My plans are to do this whilst volunteering somewhere as a PE



teaching/learning assistant so that I can stay in touch with everything that is happening in schools as I don't want to fall out of touch - also missing the buzz of being in a school! I have the chance within my contract to time out of my university teaching commitments to allow me to concentrate on collecting my data full-time so I am hoping I can take advantage of that over the next academic year.

I would love to come back to [REDACTED] to help out in the PE department and collect some data, although I would definitely not want to be a burden as I know you will have lots going on. If it is something you would be interested in I could give you more details and you could see what you think. It would be great to pop by and catch up with you all when you are not too busy!

Sarah

From: [REDACTED]  
To: [sarahj507@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahj507@hotmail.com)  
Subject: RE: Cross country  
Date: Thu, 13 Mar 2014 11:25:27 +0000  
Hi Sarah,

I am presuming you passed your PhD board exams – well done! I would be delighted for you to come back to [REDACTED] to assist and collect data. It might make sense for you to pop in at some point and talk me through what you think it would entail and what would be required for it to be a success. Thursday's are my quietest day at the moment so if you were available on a Thursday that would be the easiest day for me to meet you. Failing that I do have time on other days or you could always pop in at the end of the school day. I'm generally here until 5.30-6pm so just let me know when suits you.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

## Information for head teacher and physical education staff

I then approached the school more formally. An initial meeting with the Health and Wellbeing curriculum leader was arranged for the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 2014. I also met with the school head teacher on this date and shared the following information, before seeking official approval for the study by letter:

### Physical Education, Health and the Body

#### Research Overview

Many countries around the world, including Scotland have reported concerns about the health and wellbeing of their children and young people. Schools are often seen as logical sites to deal with such concerns and curriculum reform in Scotland has situated PE within the curricular area of health and wellbeing.

The way that pupils and teachers understand health and the relationship between PE and health is important as it may impact on the ways the curriculum is organised and delivered and may also impact on pupils' experiences of, and engagement with, PE and other health related practices. The research therefore investigates how young people in Scotland understand health, the body and the relationship between health and the body within the context of Physical Education and a health and wellbeing curriculum.

“Learning in health and wellbeing ensures that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future” (Scottish Government, 2009, p1).

#### Research Aims

This research aims to understand, interpret and explain the contemporary body-related culture amongst young people within the social context of a Scottish secondary school.

1. How do young people construct, interpret and negotiate shared bodily meanings, values and identities?
2. How do young people behave socially and negotiate social relationships in relation to their bodies?
3. How does the above influence young people's experiences of, and engagements with PE?

#### Research Methods

The study would involve a researcher spending time within a school and PE department, getting to know staff members and pupils before conducting a series of focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews and observations with interested participants. It would be hoped that the researcher, a qualified PE teacher, could become involved in the day to day life of the school as much as possible, perhaps taking on the role of a voluntary learning/teaching assistant over the period of one academic year.

- The researcher would become a 'participant observer' meaning they would aim to become involved in day to day school life – shadowing staff and pupils and, if possible, conducting a voluntary role within the PE department.
- The researcher would conduct both formal and informal observation within the school, the PE department and PE lessons.
- The researcher would conduct qualitative interviews with interested staff, pupils and groups of pupils.

**University of Edinburgh - Institute for Sport, Physical Education and Health Sciences**

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Bicentennial Education Fellow

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## Data Collection

### **Stage one:**

The first stage of the research will be broad and will aim to construct a general overview of pupils' and teachers' understandings and practices in relation to health and the body. This may involve:

- Participant observation of a range of classes from a variety of year groups (e.g. S1, S3, S5)



### **Stage two:**

The second stage of data collection will be more focused and may involve selecting specific pupil 'case studies' in order to address the research questions of the study. This stage may include:

- Extended observation of selected PE classes
- Semi-structured interviews with pupils

### **Researcher presence**

#### August-December 2014

The researcher would spend 1-2 days per week within the school assisting within the PE department and gathering data when appropriate.

#### January-June 2015

The researcher has been granted one semester research leave from the University of Edinburgh and would be able to spend ~ 3 days per week within the school assisting within the PE department and gathering data when appropriate.

### **Ethical considerations**

- The British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines will be adhered to throughout the study. Ethical approval has also been sought from the Moray House School of Education ethics committee and the City of Edinburgh Council. School involvement will be completely up to the discretion of the head teacher and PE department.
- Voluntary informed consent will be sought from all participants, their parent/guardians and the participating school prior to their involvement in the study. All will be informed of the research aims, the nature of their involvement and of how data will be collected, used and disseminated. Participants will be aware of their right to withdraw at any time.
- Involvement will be confidential and anonymous and no information will be detailed in the study identifying the school, teachers or pupils involved. Participants will not be harmed in anyway throughout the process and will be treated fairly, sensitively and respectfully.

**Note:** This study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education) at the University of Edinburgh.



Sarah MacIsaac  
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E-mail:  
sjohnso2@staffmail.ed.ac.uk  
Tel: 0131 651 6683

Dear [REDACTED],

As we briefly discussed, I am writing to provide you with details about a research project which will be conducted as part of my PhD studies at the University of Edinburgh. I am also writing to ask if staff and pupils at [REDACTED] High School would be interested and willing to be involved.

I have included the following documents to provide you with further information about the study and the ethics of the project:

1. A brief document summarising the research aims and methods of data collection.
2. A copy of my initial application for ethical approval from the University of Edinburgh.
3. A copy of my application for approval from the City of Edinburgh Council.
4. Examples of informed consent forms for pupils, parents and staff members.
5. An informed consent form for the school's involvement.

Once you have considered the information provided and discussed the project with [REDACTED] in the PE department, I would be very grateful if you could return the informed consent form underlined (no. 5) to indicate whether or not you would permit me to conduct my research at [REDACTED]. Please feel free to get in touch with me if you would like more details about the study or if you wish to discuss anything further. Thank you very much for considering this request.

Kind regards,

Sarah MacIsaac

## **Formal consent from school**



**Project title:** Physical Education, health, the body and a health and wellbeing curriculum

### **Research Team:**

Sarah MacIsaac (principal researcher) - The University of Edinburgh

Dr Shirley Gray (PhD supervisor) – The University of Edinburgh

Dr John Kelly (PhD supervisor) – The University of Edinburgh

### **Date:**

---

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to take part thank you for considering this request.

**Purpose:** Many countries around the world, including Scotland have reported concerns about the health and wellbeing of their children and young people. Schools are often seen as logical sites to deal with such concerns and curriculum reform in Scotland has situated PE within the curricular area of health and wellbeing. The way that teachers and other school staff members understand health and the relationship between PE and health is important as it may impact on the ways the curriculum is organised and delivered and may also impact on pupils' experiences of, and engagement with, PE and other health related practices. Consequently, the research questions that will be addressed in this investigation are:

- How do teachers and pupils understand the concept of health?
- How do teachers and pupils understand the role of PE within a health and wellbeing curriculum?
- How do teachers and pupils in Scotland engage in health related practices?
- How does the research process impact teachers' and pupils' understandings and practices?

The research will inform a PhD study being conducted at the University of Edinburgh.

### **What will the research involve?**

The research would involve the following:

1. The researcher would become a 'participant observer' meaning that they would aim to become involved in day to day school life – shadowing staff and pupils and if possible conducting a voluntary role such as teaching or learning assistant.

2. The researcher would conduct both formal and informal observation within the school, the PE department and PE lessons.
3. The researcher would conduct qualitative interviews with interested staff, pupils and groups of pupils.

### **Confidentiality**

Information received in this study is regarded as confidential both during and after the conclusion of the investigation and will only be viewed by the research team (above), who are all bound by ethical guidelines. The data collected may be used for future publications but will be anonymous so that your school, staff members and pupils will not be identifiable in any way. If you have further questions, please contact the principal investigator (details below).

By completing and returning this form to the principal investigator, you are agreeing to the following statements:

- I have read and understood the above information.
- I would like my school/PE department to be involved in the study.
- I am fully aware of all of the procedures involved.
- I understand that the results of the study may be published but that the identity of the school, staff members and pupils will not be revealed.
- I know that participation is voluntary and that the school can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

Name: ... [redacted] .....

Signature: [redacted] .....

Date: ...03/06/14.....

Principal investigator:  
Sarah MacIsaac

E-mail : [sjohnso2@staffmail.ed.ac.uk](mailto:sjohnso2@staffmail.ed.ac.uk)  
Tel : 0131 651 6683

## **Appendix B: Participant observation**

- **Learning assistant timetable** (p 262)
  - **Class profiles** (p 263)
- **Observation guides** (pp 264-270)





## **Class profiles**

### **Year group: S1**

I observed two S1 classes throughout the year:

**1T8** was a class of 26 pupils (14 males and 12 females). Their teacher, Sophie, was a newly qualified teacher. I typically assisted within this class once per week.

**1T3** was a class of 24 pupils (10 males and 14 females). They were taught by Mairi, the curriculum leader for Health and Wellbeing. Again, I typically assisted within this class once per week.

### **Year group: S2**

I predominantly observed two S2 classes over the course of the year. S2 PE included some option blocks and class compositions could change depending on what activities pupils had chosen to partake in. Therefore, I also observed a variety of S2 pupils from other classes.

**2A2** was a class of 20 pupils (10 males and 10 females). They were taught by Mairi. I assisted within this class once per week.

**2B3** was a class of 19 pupils (8 males and 11 females). Their teacher, Bill, was an experienced teacher who was coming towards the end of his career. The class were also taught by Sophie. I assisted within this class twice per week.

### **Year group: S3**

I assisted within one S3 class (**3H**). They had chosen to study a pathway that would prepare them for taking certificated physical education in S4. The class had 24 pupils (15 males and 9 females) and were taught by Mairi.

I also attended school on additional days to observe 'Health 4 U' sessions which were delivered to all female S3 pupils. These were funded by the NHS and led by Edinburgh Leisure staff. Sessions included practical and classroom work and typically ran for 8 weeks. Topics covered included: women in the media, body image and body confidence, stress management, fats and sugars, the energy balance and 'fad diets'.

### **Year group: S4**

The majority of S4 PE comprised of option activities. Therefore, classes and teachers changed frequently. I assisted within two 'core' S4 classes (**4BC** and **4AB**) throughout the year. These were predominantly female and taught by either Sophie or Catherine.

I also assisted within one certificated class (**4F**) who had selected to study 'National 5 Physical Education.' The class were taught by Catherine who had around 8 years teaching experience.

### **Year group: S5/6**

Again, the majority of S5 'core' PE comprised of option activities and classes and teachers varied. I assisted with S5 one period per week, mostly working with Graham who had around 10 years teaching experience.

## Observation Guides

### 1. Background information

<u>Geography</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information about Edinburgh.</li><li>• Where the school is situated.</li><li>• Social make-up of Edinburgh (wealth, health etc).</li><li>• Social make-up of catchment area.</li></ul>	Notes:
<u>Demography</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School role.</li><li>• Age range.</li><li>• Attainment of school pupils.</li><li>• School leaver destinations.</li></ul>	
<u>Whole school curriculum organisation</u>	
<u>Policies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anti-bullying.</li><li>• Homework.</li><li>• ASN.</li><li>• School improvement plan.</li><li>• Standard and quality improvement.</li><li>• HMIE reports.</li></ul>	➤ Information on school websites, leaflets handed to pupils etc.

<p><u>School PE curriculum and PE organisation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Format of PE provision (for various year groups).</li> <li>• HWB curriculum content/organisation.</li> <li>• Status of PE in the school and various aspects of PE (e.g. certificated, core etc).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ single sex/mixed.</li> <li>➤ Core/certificated.</li> <li>➤ Activities offered.</li> <li>➤ Enhanced curriculum.</li> <li>➤ Class sizes.</li> <li>➤ Ability levels.</li> <li>➤ Reasons for what is done.</li> <li>➤ how E's and O's are being addressed and targeted.</li> <li>➤ No. of periods per week of PE (timings etc).</li> <li>➤ Activity block rotation.</li> <li>➤ Documents (e.g. curriculum planning, minutes of DMs, kit/uniform policies etc).</li> </ul>
<p><u>Extra-curricular sport and physical activity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After school clubs.</li> <li>• Lunchtime clubs.</li> <li>• Competitive sport.</li> <li>• Community sport.</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Events within the school</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assemblies.</li> <li>• Health and wellbeing events.</li> <li>• Explicit health promotion sessions.</li> <li>• Extra-curricular events e.g. school talent shows, sports days, competitive sporting activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Descriptions of these events in general.</li> <li>➤ Specific observations of/within such events.</li> </ul>

## 2. The physical school environment

Include detail about:

- Appearance.
- Physical layout.
- Landscape.
- Sensory descriptions (sights, smells, noises, colours, temperature).
- Ambiance.
- Physical objects within the school (e.g. pictures, signs, posters on walls).

<p><u>PE department and PE teaching areas</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Games hall.</li> <li>➤ Gym.</li> <li>➤ Foyer.</li> <li>➤ Changing rooms.</li> <li>➤ Classroom.</li> <li>➤ Fitness suite.</li> <li>➤ Dance studio.</li> <li>➤ Staff base.</li> <li>➤ PE dept./facilities map.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Outdoor spaces</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Astro pitches.</li> <li>➤ Playing fields.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Social spaces</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Corridors.</li> <li>➤ Dinner halls.</li> <li>➤ Playground.</li> <li>➤ Concourse.</li> <li>➤ Staff room.</li> <li>➤ School entrance.</li> <li>➤ School map.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Other teaching areas within the school</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Assembly hall.</li> <li>➤ Senior management corridor.</li> <li>➤ School map.</li> </ul>

### 3. People and participants

<p><u>Pen portraits of participants (give pseudonyms)</u></p> <p>Descriptions of persons/groups of people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key gatekeepers and informants.</li> <li>• PE staff members.</li> <li>• Pupils.</li> <li>• Social groups.</li> </ul>	<p>Include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Age, gender, social class/status, profession, ethnicity.</li> <li>➤ Physical appearance (body shape/size, features, clothing, style etc).</li> <li>➤ Distinctive characteristics.</li> <li>➤ Various roles.</li> <li>➤ Attitudes, values etc.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Pen portraits of the classes I am observing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classes I observed generally.</li> <li>• How many hours I observed each class.</li> <li>• How many hours I observed in total.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Age groups.</li> <li>➤ Class social make-up.</li> <li>➤ PE timetabling (e.g. no. of lessons per week etc).</li> </ul>
<p><u>The practicalities of observation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often I observed/was present.</li> <li>• How many hours I observed each class.</li> <li>• How many hours I observed in total.</li> <li>• How/why I was granted access to particular classes.</li> <li>• How/why particular 'cases' were chosen for observation.</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Relationships between people</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and teachers.</li> <li>• Pupils and pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils and teachers.</li> <li>• Senior management.</li> <li>• Support staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Patterns evident in behaviour and relationships.</li> <li>➤ How various groups interact and relate to one another.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Specific observation episodes

Date of observation: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Type of data collection event: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Ensure to indicate what is an 'objective' description and what is an interpretation (e.g. notes analysing the situation, addressing the research question, theoretical ideas/abstractions).

<p><u>Salient occurrences</u>          Events, interactions, behaviours that 'stood out' in relation to my research focus.          Events, interaction and behaviours that stood out in general.</p>	
<p><u>Occurrences</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of the occurrences.</li> <li>• Interpretation of the occurrences:               (Why is the event occurring and occurring in the way that it is?)              (What meanings are participants attributing to what is happening?)              (What are the history, goals, values of the group in question?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is happening?</li> <li>➤ Where and when?</li> <li>➤ How long does it take?</li>   <li>➤ Who is involved? (their identities/characteristics)</li> <li>➤ How many people?</li> <li>➤ Who is not involved?</li> <li>➤ How do people become members of these groups/activities/events?</li>   <li>➤ What resources are being used?</li> <li>➤ What rules govern the social organisation of, and behaviour in, the event?</li> <li>➤ How routine/regular/patterned or irregular are the behaviours observed?</li> <li>➤ Who is making decisions and for whom?</li> </ul>

<p><u>Verbal behaviour and interactions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal conversations.</li> <li>• Informal conversations.</li> <li>• Between pupils and pupils.</li> <li>• Teachers and pupils.</li> <li>• Teachers and teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Who speaks to whom (and for how long)?</li> <li>➤ Who initiates interactions?</li> <li>➤ What is being said (talk content) and by whom?</li> <li>➤ What is being discussed frequently/infrequently? What significant issues are being discussed?</li> <li>➤ How are things being said?</li> <li>➤ Extra linguistic - Tone of voice, volume, speaking rate.</li> <li>➤ Are people interrupting/being interrupted by others – who is talking/who is listening?</li> </ul>
<p><u>Physical behaviour, gestures and body language</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Macro.</li> <li>• Micro.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What people do.</li> <li>➤ Who does what.</li> <li>➤ Who interacts with whom.</li> <li>➤ Who is not interacting.</li> <li>➤ How people are using their bodies and voices to communicate different emotions.</li> <li>➤ What people’s behaviours indicate about their feelings to one another, their social rank etc.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Spatial behaviour</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal space.</li> <li>• Social groupings.</li> <li>• Human traffic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How close people stand to one another (people’s preferences about personal space may say something about their relationships).</li> <li>➤ Who is grouped together.</li> <li>➤ Pupils’ positions in relation to each other/in relation to teachers.</li> <li>➤ Popular places to congregate.</li> </ul>
<p><u>People who ‘stand out’</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those receiving lots of attention from others.</li> <li>• Deviant cases.</li> <li>• Those well known to others.</li> <li>• Those with salience with regards to the research questions but also those who are ‘typical’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These people’s characteristics.</li> <li>• What differentiates them from others?</li> <li>• Whether people consult them or they approach other people.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Setting</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Physical surroundings.</li> <li>➤ Social context/surroundings.</li> </ul>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Context of particular actions/behaviours.</li><li>• Context of particular events.</li></ul> |  |
|---|--|

Reflexive notes

- My own feelings about the situation(s).
- Descriptions of my own feelings and actions.

Subjective elements (Participants)

- Participants' moods and attitudes, feelings and emotions (explicitly mentioned and also inferred/interpreted).
- How activities being described, justified, explained, organised and labelled by participants.

Reminders and questions for follow up



## **Appendix C: Interview sampling**

- **Profiles of participants (pp 272-275)**

## **Profiles of participants**

Details of participants involved in the interview phase of the study are provided below. There are also some details included of pupils who were not formally interviewed but who appear within this thesis based upon participant observation and informal conversation.

### **Year group: S1**

#### **Mia and Mollie (paired interview, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)**

**Mia** and **Mollie** are part of a larger peer-group of girls who seem friendly towards one another and comfortable in each other's presence. At times, these girls seem quite young, naïve and carefree in relation to their bodies. However, both Mia and Mollie are worried about being "too fat" and indicate that they wish to lose weight. Mia particularly comes across as being very self-conscious of her body. For example, she often stands with her shoulders hunched, using her arms to cover her stomach. She is much taller than the other girls (and boys) in her class and refers to herself as being "too big" and having "a belly." Mia attended a number of different primary schools and did not come to Benview with an established peer group. Mollie, on the other hand, comes across as a bubbly and cheery girl. However, she has indicated that she has endured teasing about her weight for years and this is very upsetting for her. The boys in her class continue to tease her for being 'fat'. Both girls' guidance teachers have notified the physical education department about such issues, which may be affecting their learning.

#### **Seamus, John, Ryan, Thomas (group interview, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

These boys in the same class as Mollie and Mia. Some of the boys within this class are quite disruptive within lessons, including **Josh** and **Ben**, who were not interviewed but appear within observation data. Josh is a very 'popular' pupil, who plays for the school football team. Ben is of small stature and is very interested in fitness and strength training. However, there are also a group of quieter male pupils within the class, including Ryan. **Ryan** appears to be more physically mature than the other boys and looks strong. Observations indicate that he is respected and admired for his strength. **John** is also one of the quieter boys. He seems more socially mature and diligent than the others. **Seamus** is very small in stature and spends time in the fitness suite at break times. Finally, **Thomas** appears confident at times, being fairly outspoken and misbehaving within lessons. However, at other times he can seem nervous and shy. He has indicated that he worries about being "too chubby." These boys are all interested in sport, especially football.

#### **Logan and Gregor (paired interview, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Logan** and **Gregor** are part of a different S1 class to the previous pupils. Both boys are very interested in keeping fit and developing physically. They are also very passionate about sport. Logan particularly speaks about the influence of his step father, who is in the army and his mother, who is a runner. Both boys like to spend time in the fitness suite at lunchtimes and attend the fitness club regularly.

## Year group: S2

### **Gita and Jane (paired interview, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015)**

**Gita** and **Jane** are part of a group of girls who have very strong ideas about what it means to be 'beautiful' and what the ideal bodily appearance is. This peer group also includes **Samirah**, **Charlotte**, **Robyn** and **Michelle**. These girls are very vocal about the appearance of their own bodies, often noting what they do not like and what they wish to change. As a peer group, they are not very engaged within the physical education environment - although some have indicated they want to take physical education next year. The peer group are not 'high status' pupils within their year group (apart perhaps from Samirah).

### **Seth, Freddie and Liam (group interview, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Seth** and **Freddie** and **Liam** are in the same class as Gita and Jane. These boys come across as being very mature for their age (emotionally and socially). They are not 'sporty' and are more interested in music and art. Liam is very interested in drama. Both Seth and Freddie are known as being intelligent.

### **Natalie and Summer (paired interview, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)**

**Natalie** and **Summer** identify themselves, and are identified by others in their year, as 'popular' pupils. They are especially popular with male pupils, including those who are older. They are very interested in fashion - clothing and make up. Natalie appears to be very confident, especially in relation to her appearance. She seems fairly resilient to, and unfazed by, other people's opinions of her. Summer claims to be more sensitive and, despite being popular, she states that she is insecure, self-conscious and worries about what others think of her. Both girls claim that they do not like to engage with physical education and observations confirm that they, along with their close friends, apply themselves minimally within the subject.

### **Ruth and Tilda (paired interview, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015)**

**Ruth** and **Tilda** are very sporty pupils and are involved in high performance athletics programmes and training outwith school. These girls are quiet but appear to be very popular. They are also involved in the school hockey team.

### **Jett and Angus (paired interview, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Jett** and **Angus** are in the same class as Ruth and Tilda. They are both in the school rugby team. These pupils are quiet and come across as being 'shy' but also appear well integrated within their peer groups. Whilst Jett is very 'sporty' and engaged with physical education, he is very self-conscious. His teacher has indicated that he and two other boys in the class (**Stephen** and **Dale**) refuse to remove their jumpers within physical education due to worries around their bodies.

### **Year group: S3**

I did not interview any pupils in S3. However, I did observe two S3 classes – one of which were going through the H4U unit of work (see appendix B). This class included pupils like Danielle. **Danielle** is an outgoing person who appears happy to speak her mind. She likes to play hockey and has chosen to study a pathway that will lead to certificated physical education next year.

### **Year group: S4**

#### **Courtney, Maddie, Fiona, Ashley and Jess (group interview, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Courtney, Maddie, Fiona, Ashley** and **Jess** are a group of friends who come from a relatively deprived area of the school catchment region. They initially come across as being quite 'defensive' but are quick to open up and speak their minds. They are very close as a peer group and are scathing of other groups within their year, who they claim are "posh" and "stuck-up." Some of the girls indicate that they want to lose weight. They tease Maddie for eating lots of food but managing to be the "skinny" girl of the group. None of the girls are engaged with physical education, as indicated by observations. They participate minimally in lessons and often defy teacher instructions.

#### **Harry and Justin (paired interview, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Harry** and **Justin** both take certificated physical education. Harry is a very popular pupil, especially amongst the girls. Both pupils achieve highly within academic and sporting realms. They are also very musical. They appear to be diligent and hardworking, whilst also being very respected amongst their peers.

#### **Max, Brendan and Peter (group interview, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

**Max, Brendan** and **Peter** are not within the typically 'popular' groups of S4 boys and appear to be on the social margins. They engage minimally with physical education. Peter has endured some bullying and teasing within school, particularly in relation to his weight. He is quieter than the other two boys and, at times, comes across as being unhappy.

#### **Others**

There are also a number of S4 pupils who appear within this thesis but were not interviewed. These include, Kaylee. **Kaylee** is in the same class as Courtney and friends. Kaylee comes across as being friendly with everyone but not quite being fully part of any social group. She is a keen dancer and is also interested in fashion. Paris also appears within the body of this thesis. **Paris** is an outspoken pupil, who appears not to be afraid to say what she thinks. She is keen to lose weight and has asked members of the physical education department for help with this.

### **Year group: S5 and S6**

**Reece, Connor and Kristoffer (group interview, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

Reece, Connor and Kristoffer are all in their final year at Benview. All three are interested in sport. Connor and Kristoffer play football but Reece is more into skateboarding. They are probably in the 'middle' of the social hierarchy of boys within their year group. Kristoffer's family moved to Scotland from Poland. Connor has truanted from school but claims to be much more settled now. Reece speaks about being bullied in relation to his body as a younger pupil.

**Cara, Emma and Lucy (group interview, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015)**

Cara, Emma and Lucy claim not to enjoy physical education, which they consider to be a "chore." They exert minimal effort within the physical education environment and say they would rather use the time to revise for other subjects. They are, however, very interested in going to the gym and maintaining a fit and healthy image. They are all in S6 and hope to go to University once they leave school. They all come from middle-class backgrounds. They are friendly with Jasmine and Daisy, who also appear within this thesis.

**Tegan, Eilish, Katie, Jennifer and Ava (group interview, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015)**

Tegan, Eilish, Katie, Jennifer, and Ava are in a similar social grouping to the girls above. They are all in their final year and very keen to go to University once finishing school. They come across as being ambitious and are studying hard for their examinations. Tegan is the loudest of the group, with most of the other girls following her lead. Again, these girls come from middle class backgrounds.

## **Appendix D: Interviews**

- **Interview guide** (pp 277-284)
- **Photo elicitation** (pp 285-297)

## Interview Guide

### Theme one: Physical Education, exercise and physical activity

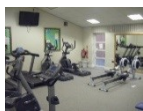
#### Question one: what comes to mind when you think of PE?

##### Prompts (what I want to find out):

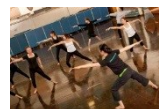
- What are your experiences of PE? What is PE like for you?
- How does PE make you feel? (Before, during, after).
- How comfortable do you feel within PE?
- What are the best and worst parts of/things about PE?
- Have your perceptions of PE changed over time or since you have gotten older?

**Possible vignettes:** The following pictures of PE spaces and activities could be used as prompts (for example, how do you feel when you are here or doing this...?).

##### PE spaces:



##### PE activities:



##### PE Kit:

- What are your thoughts about PE kit and the clothing you wear in PE?
- Are you happy with the clothing you wear for PE? Does this affect your engagement in the lesson?
- How does your PE clothing make you feel?
- How comfortable are you in PE kit?



#### Question two: Why do you think you do PE?

**Follow up question:** How does PE help you to be healthy?

##### Prompts (what I want to find out):

- Do you think you should have to do PE?
- What is PE for? What are they trying to teach you in PE; why?
- What do you learn in PE?
- How do you learn about health in PE?
- How does PE make you healthy? How do PE teachers help you to be healthy?

**Question three: What makes someone good at PE?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Describe someone (who is good at PE)? What makes them good?
- How are they treated by the teacher? By other pupils?
- What does someone who is good at PE look like?
- Would you like to be good at PE? Why?
- How can someone become better at PE?
- What sort of pupils struggle in PE or don't like PE? What is PE like for them?

**Question four: what does it mean for someone to be an active/sporty person? Would you consider yourselves to be active/sporty?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What counts as physical activity? Give examples of how people can be active?
- What types of people are sporty and active or enjoy sports and exercise?
- Would you want to be an active person? Be seen as an active person?
- In what ways are you active outwith/within school?

**Question five: Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of doing physical activity? How important is sport, exercise or physical activity to you?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Do you like doing physical activity (why or why not)?
- Why do you think some people do (not) enjoy doing sport and physical activity?
- How does physical activity make you feel about yourself, your health, your body?
- How do you feel during and after exercising?
- How do you feel if you don't exercise or when you have not been active?
- Why do you think you should exercise?
- How do you know if you are doing enough exercise? Can you exercise too much or too little?

**Question six: What helps you to be active? What stops you from being active?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What do you do with your free time out with school? (e.g. activities, clubs?)
- Why do you do them? How did you start doing them?
- Are there any you would like to do but feel you can't? why?
- Who or what encourages/discourages you to be active?
- Where would you be most likely to be active out with school (and why)? Who with?
- Where do you feel most and least comfortable exercising (and why)?

**Question four: What would make PE better?**

**Possible follow up task:** If you could design your own PE, what would it be like; why?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- If you could suggest changes to PE or your PE classes, what would these be?
- What would you change about what/how you learn in PE? What would you keep the same?
- What would you change about PE spaces or the PE environment?
- What would make you feel happier and more comfortable within PE?



## Theme two: School and Social Life

### **Question one: what comes to mind when you think of school?**

#### **Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Do you enjoy school? Why or why not?
- What do you like best and least about school?
- How comfortable do you feel within school?
- What are your main worries or concerns about school?
- What is important to you within school? How important is school to you?
- How important is it for you to perform well in school; in PE? Why?
- If you could change anything about school what would it be?

**Possible vignettes:** The following pictures of school spaces could be used as prompts (for example, how do you feel when you are here...?).



### **Question two: How important are friends within school?**

#### **Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How important is it to have friends in school? What would it be like not to have many friends?
- How important are friends within PE? Why?
- How do people make friends in school?
- Can you describe the different peer groups in your classes and how people become part of these?
- What parts of school are more difficult for people without many friends?

### **Question three: How important is it to be popular within school?**

#### **Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Who is popular in your school/PE class etc; why? What makes them popular?
- How important is it to be seen as popular? What does that allow you to do?
- Are there people who are looked up to in school; why/what are they valued for?
- What do you admire other people for in school? Is there anyone you would like to be more like?
- What makes people more likely to be excluded in school? Who is excluded and why?
- What makes bullying more likely in school/PE? What does it involve?
- How do you think people who are being bullied feel?

### **Question four: To what extent do you (or others) worry about what people think of you in school?**

#### **Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- To what extent do you think people judge each other?
- Do you ever feel judged in school?
- Are there any places in school where people get judged more than others?
- Do you think other people watch what you do and say?

- To what extent would you say people talk or gossip about each other in school? How does that affect you?
- To what extent do you worry what people think about you in PE?
- Does this change what you do or the way you act?

### Theme three: The Body

**Question one:** How important is your body to you?

**Follow up** – how the body looks (appearance), how the body feels, what the body can do?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- In what ways do you (not) care about your body?
- What is the most important thing to you about your body? (appearance, ability, health?) Why?
- How do you feel about your body?
- If you had to describe your body to someone how would you describe it?
- Have you ever thought you needed to change your body; why?
- Is body image an issue for you, for your friends?

**Question two:** Is there anything inside/outside of school that makes you think about your body? What makes you think about your body?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How does PE make you think about your body?
- How do friends or family make you think about your body?
- How do magazines, TV etc make you feel about your body?
- How does social media (Facebook, Instagram etc) make you feel about your body? About yourself?

**Possible vignettes:** The following pictures could be used as prompts to begin a discussion around the influence of (social) media and images on the body.



- How often do you use social media or the internet? How much time do you spend in it?
- Which social media sites do you use the most/like the most? Why?
- What do you use social media for? What do you spend most of your time doing on these sites?
- In what ways do you learn about your body or health using the internet?
- What does social media tell you about yourself/your body?
- What image do you want to portray of yourself online? Why?
- How important is your appearance to your image on these sites?
- What style of pictures/profiles do you try to create? Why?
- How important are pictures of the body to people your age?
- Do you or your friends ever post 'selfies' online? (how often? Why? Are these pictures of yourself or of a group of you?)
- How much time would you spend selecting pictures?
- Would you spend any time altering pictures? In what way/what specifically do you alter? Why?

- Are your selfies more likely to be of your face or of your entire body? Why?
- Do you think that people look at each other's pictures in much detail? What do they look at most?
- What do you think of other people's pictures?
- What do you admire about other people's pictures?
- Can you think of anyone who has pictures that look really good? What makes them look good?
- What sorts of pictures/posts are you most likely to 'like' or comment on?
- Whose pictures/posts do you like on comment on?
- Do some people get more positive responses than others? Why? How does that make you feel?
- How do you feel when you get positive comments/likes? How do you feel if you don't?
- Are there any people who are known for the pictures they post? In what ways?
- Would you ever compare yourself to your friends? To celebrities? Who would you be most likely to compare yourself too? How does that make you feel?
- If someone looked really good online but not in real life would that still bother you?
- Is image on social media as important as image in real life? (how or how not?)
- Do you think using social media is a positive or negative thing in your life?
- How do you feel about your body when/after using social media or looking at other people's pictures?

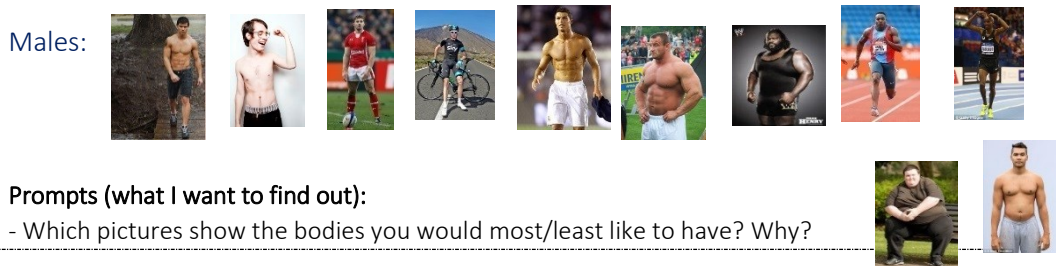
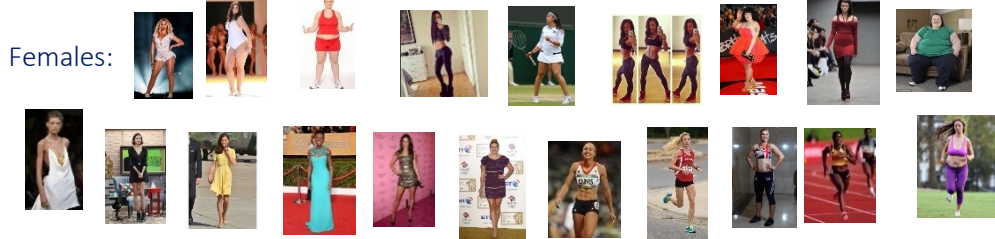
**Question three:** How would you describe the ideal body? How would you describe the ideal appearance?

**Follow up task:** List key words that define the ideal body? Which ideas are important (or not)?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What would you most like your body to be like?
- Is there such a thing as the perfect body? If so, can you describe it?
- Are certain shapes/sizes preferable/acceptable? Why? In PE? In school?
- Which body types are admired in school, PE and wider life? By who, why? Why are certain bodies (not) valued?
- What are the benefits of having an ideal body? Or disadvantages of not having an ideal body?
- Are there bodies which are encouraged in school or PE? Are there any that are not?

**Possible vignettes:** which are what you would consider the ideal body type for men/women? Why?



**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Which pictures show the bodies you would most/least like to have? Why?



- How important is becoming like this person in the picture for you?
- Why would people want body x? How does a person with body x feel? What would it be like to be them?
- Is there anything wrong with (not) looking like that?

**Question four: How much does it matter what someone looks like?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Does it matter what you or other people look like (e.g. your peers, family or teachers)? Or look like in PE? Why or why not?
- Does it matter if someone is fat or thin?
- Would you be friends with someone who didn't look good; was fat etc? If not, why not?
- Have you ever noticed someone being excluded or bullied due to their size/appearance; why was this? What was this like; how do you think they felt?

**Question five: How much do you think other people notice or judge how you look? (In school, PE, wider life)?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How do you think others perceive you/your body in PE/school?
- Do you hear people in your family talking about shapes or about people's shapes and weight? If so, what sort of things might they talk about?
- Do you think your peers/family/teachers expect you to develop your ideal body?
- Are there any pressures on young people about their bodies – e.g. to have a certain body/be a certain way? In your opinion, have young people always felt like that or is this more recent?
- Would you rather hide or show off your body; Why? In PE?

**Question six: To what extent do you think people can (or should) change (or work on) their bodies?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How can or do people change their bodies?
- How much do you think people are in control of their size/appearance?
- How do you think it would feel not to be able to control your body? Have you ever felt that way?
- How important is body improvement (to you)?
- What do you do to work on/improve your body; Why?
- What advice would you give to a friend unhappy with their body?
- Do you hope to achieve a certain kind of body when you engage in PA or PE?
- Are there certain activities you would think are appropriate to develop your ideal body?

**Question seven: How does PE/PA make you feel about your body?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- When do you notice your body in PE?
- Would you say PE has influenced the way you feel about your body? In what ways?
- How does your body feel when you take part in PA/PE, Before/during/after?
- When you are doing PE, does the way your body feels/looks have any influence on the way you do it, what you do, how you enjoy it?
- Does your ideal body influence your choice to engage in certain physical activities?

- Do you think you need to have a specific body type to be active, give examples?
- Does anything that you do in school/PE make you feel positive or make you feel better about your body or health?

**Question eight:** How do you think people could be helped to overcome body worries?

**Prompts (What I want to find out):**

- Are there people who do not worry about their body? Does this include you? Why or why not?
- Is it easy to talk about any worries that you have around your body? Who could you talk to about it?
- Do you think people ever hide their body concerns?
- Do people take your concerns seriously?
- What would it be like if you did not have to care about your body?
- What makes it easier not to worry about your body?

### Theme four – Health

**Question one:** Can you tell me what comes to mind when you see or hear the word 'health'?

**Possible task:** List the key words or ideas that you think define health (which are most and least important)?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What is health?
- What is important in relation to health?
- What is classed as unhealthy or does not come under the definition of health?
- Why is x,y,z (un)healthy?

**Question two:** Can you tell me what it means to be healthy?

**Possible task:** List or draw some of the things that someone being healthy will do or feel?

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What does healthy living mean?
- How can you keep healthy in school and out with School?
- Are there things that people might need to have or do in their lives in order to be healthy?
- How can you 'get healthier?' What are the most important things that someone could do to keep healthy? How do these things make a person healthier?
- How do you keep healthy?
- How do your family and friends keep healthy?
- Is there anything that helps or stops people from being healthy?
- How does it feel to be really healthy or unhealthy?

**Question three:** How do you know if you are healthy? How do you know if someone else is healthy?

**Possible task:** I can tell a person is (or I am) healthy because... I can tell a person (or I am) unhealthy because...

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- Would you say you are healthy? How healthy do you think you are?

- How is health assessed/monitored?
- How do you think other people judge your health?
- Do you mind if someone else is healthy or unhealthy?
- Can you describe a healthy person? What makes them healthy?
- In what ways are your family/friends/teachers/neighbours etc healthy or unhealthy?

**Question four: What makes a body healthy or unhealthy?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- What makes a body healthy?
- Is health related to body size? Do you think that a person's shape/size has anything to do with their health? Can people be healthy at different sizes?
- Can you tell me what comes to mind when you see/hear the words obesity, fat, thin, skinny etc?
- What makes a fit body, a sporty body, an active body etc?

**Question five: How important is it (to you) to be healthy?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How much do you want to be healthy? Why would you want to be healthy?
- Why do you do certain things to be healthy? How do you feel when you do (not) do these things?
- How do you feel when you think you are (not) healthy?
- What would happen if you were unhealthy?
- How often or when do you think about your health?
- What makes you think about your health?
- Is being healthy or doing healthy things always seen as a good thing by people in school?
- Is there anything bad about being (seen as) healthy or doing healthy things?

**Question six: Where and how do you learn about health and being healthy?**

**Prompts (what I want to find out):**

- How did you come to learn about health in this way?
- Where do you get most of your information from?
- How do you know these things you have talked about? Who/what has taught you about them?
- Which school subjects give you information about health?
- How do you learn about health in school?
- is there anything outside of school that makes you think about health?
- How do you think your (PE) teachers view health?
- What are your thoughts about health and wellbeing as an activity block?
- Do you find it useful learning about health in the classroom?

Examples of photographs used for photo elicitation:

**PE spaces**



PE activities





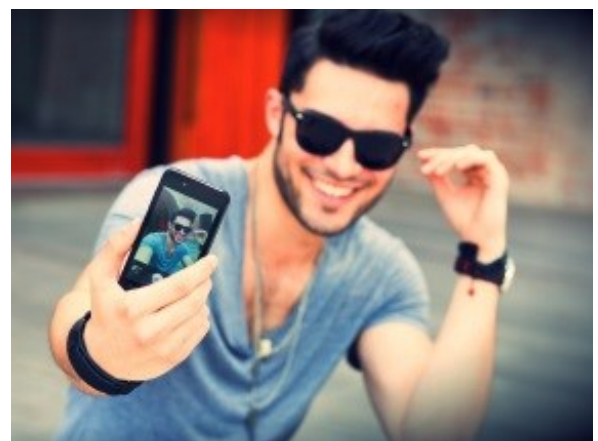
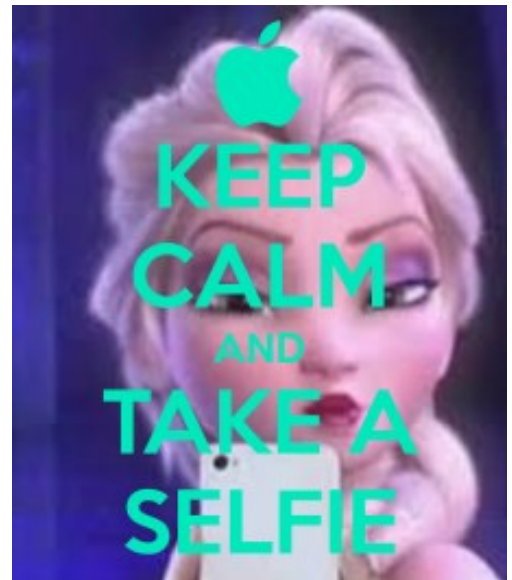
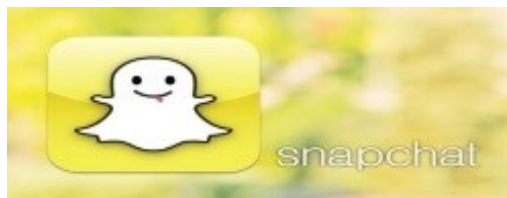
**PE kit**



**School social spaces**



Media and online social spaces:

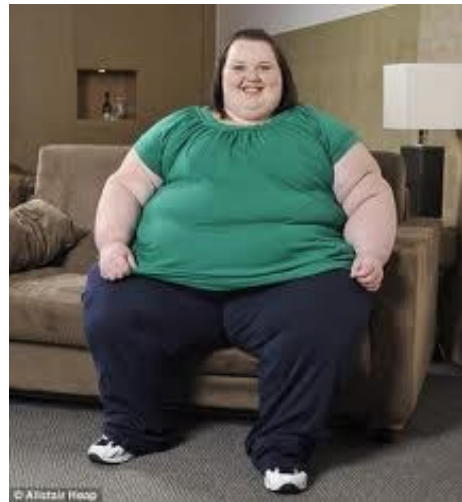
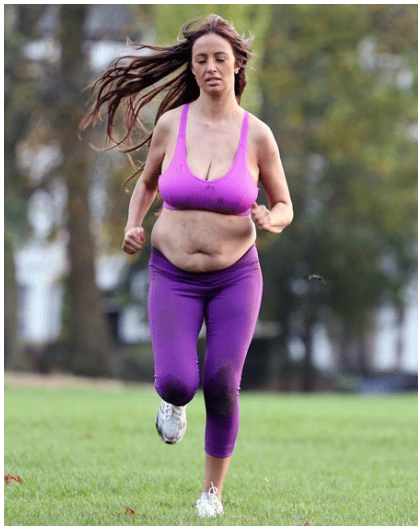


**Bodies**

















## **Appendix E: Observation data and analysis**

- **Raw field notes (sample)** (pp 297-298)
- **Annotated field notes (sample)** (pp 299-301)
- **Observation themes with excerpts** (pp 302-307)

Let's call ourselves 'fat club' (whispered a few times)  
we can't call ourselves that,  
~~the fact~~ that would be offensive to ~~the gym~~ ... ohhhhh  
(giggles) Repeated calls to call themselves fat club.  
The gym kids. Group laughing



N. looking at self in the mirror - pulling top  
tight across stomach - look you can see my  
belly. ~~my~~ jabs low - looking at hips standing  
front on + side on at mirror - pulling at top

N. Suck in stomach in + puffs out chest.  
putting hands round stomach. later in lesson,  
putting hands pressing stomach in.

Group challenges set eg. 150 sit ups, over 3h etc.

N - I want to do all the sit ups for my  
group - hey I will do all the sit ups  
(I ask why → It gets rid of your stomach).

Plank - feeling it in stomach - stomach shaking  
→ wanting to do more of that  
did you enjoy

N - Did you enjoy that?  
Yeah I wish it could be longer.  
I worked harder than everyone in the group.  
I did ...

PSD

T. begins to talk for the class and I feel slightly frustrated as our convo is ~~also~~ stopped. Kates during a 'break' in instructions she begins to talk to me again. 'So do you think cycling makes your butt flatter' she asks. 'I say no, well it will make those muscles stronger'. Yeah she says, 'I do feel it there when I am doing it. So it makes it smaller?'. Again frustration as our convo is halted. ~~At the~~ At the next opportunity I ask her if she cycles mostly for fitness? She smiles and nods, 'yeah to <sup>keep</sup> make me fitter' she says, as she says this she motions her arms down her body showing it. The teacher tells the class to get started. I can't hear she says, 'it's all about practice, getting side on, she smiles at me again and says 'side on', then moves to the court.

The class really are more engaged this week + so much more confident - Some of the more timid girls are moving forward (in groups) and are much more animated. They boys are not as dominant today (absence of ~~alpha~~ <sup>alpha</sup> male - always 'top' etc)

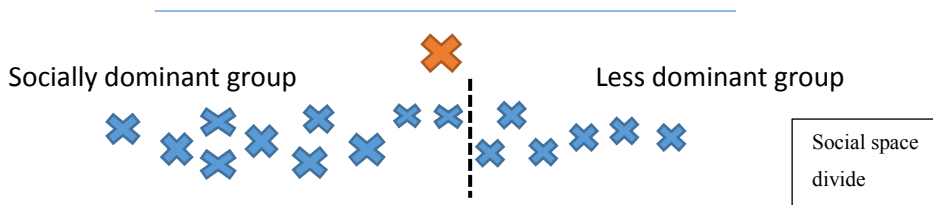
Date of observation: 20/08/14 Place: Dance studio

Time of observation: period 4 Type of data collection event: participant observation

### **Salient occurrences**

#### **Events, interactions, behaviours that 'stood out' in relation to my research focus**

As soon as pupils begin to enter the dance studio I notice that the social dynamics of this class are going to be very interesting (the teacher had already alluded to me that this may be the case). There are some very loud and confident girls within the group (Samantha, Becca and crew), who are very excitable, bubbly and chatty. Immediately, **Samantha becomes the centre of attention as she enters the room waving her arms and chasseeing over to the rest of the class, "Hiiii guys!!!" she says, as if announcing her entrance.** The girls seem fairly chatty as the register is taken. A group of pupils are sitting on the bench along the wall of the studio facing the mirrors, whilst some of the louder pupils sit and **lie almost on top of each other in a circle.** The teacher tells the class to get ready for a warm up to music – **to stand in their own space facing the mirrors.** Immediately the girls position themselves in a straight line and a very clear social divide is evident spatially:



Without being asked, **the class have divided themselves into two very distinct social groups,** evident in how they are using the physical space of the dance studio. To the right there are a group of slim, seemingly confident and loud pupils and to the left another group of larger, quieter and more timid pupils. Pupils on the left mostly have **highlighted or carefully straightened/curled hair and lots of make-up on (eye liner, lip gloss, blusher)** and all are white. A number of them are chewing gum, for which they are told off by the teacher before activity starts. Pupils on the right, in the less dominant group, are larger or 'overweight' and most have their hair tied back in a simple ponytail. Again, **most pupils are white except one black and one Asian pupil.** All pupils within the class are wearing the PE uniform – a plain white t-shirt and navy/black shorts or jogging bottoms (all have opted for trousers). One girl is also wearing a headscarf. **There are slight variations in kit – most of the girls on the left are wearing tight fitting t-shirts with flared jogging bottoms, which they have rolled over at the waist so that their midriffs are slightly visible. On the right, the girls are mostly wearing loose fitting, long, t-shirts with jogging trousers that are elasticated at the ankles.**

The music begins and the teacher leads an aerobic warm up. Pupils on the right do this quietly whilst there is some laughter and 'messaging about' from pupils on the left. The class then do a run through of the dance segment they were taught last week. Most class members look embarrassed when performing the dance, **not exaggerating the movements they are doing,** particularly those on the right more so than those on the left. However, two pupils in centre of the row appear happy to shake hips and perform movements fully are exceptions to this (Samantha and Becca – with Becca almost imitating Samantha). These two pupils remain the

Socially dominant pupils  
Space and presence

Attitudes to learning, social capital

Mirrors, surveillance

Social divisions based on personality, appearance

Influence of race/ethnicity?

Customising kit, make-up, clothing and

Displaying and hiding the body

Dominant, popular pupils?

centre of attention throughout the lesson and seem happy to be so. They appear eager to 'show off' not so much with their physical skills but more just with their presence and with their loudness. The rest of the pupils to the right seem to be tagging along with them or hanging on to them as leaders of their social clique.

The teacher now instructs the class to split up into groups or pairs and come up with ideas for a new section of the dance. Immediately Becca and Samantha get to work and command the centre of the room. However, all other pupils huddle in groups edging towards the edge of the room and do not engage in the task. They look very self-conscious – their arms hugging their chests, slouching, making themselves small, and gravitating towards the wall. After about 5-10 minutes the teacher decides to change the task and instructs the two ringleaders to teach everyone else the section of the dance that they have come up with. At various points the dance is put together for the whole class to perform. Some of the movements include a jumping action. At one point the teacher stops the class. "Girls, you sound like a herd of elephants! Try to land softly..." the teacher begins. This phrase causes quite a 'stir' with the rest of the group. "Miss you saying we are fat? She's saying we are fat!" Becca exclaims jokingly. Immediately more of the 'populars' jump on this, "yeah miss you calling us fat!?" a number of them exclaim whilst repeating the question numerous times in a funny accent. They do this in a 'jokey' way as opposed to sounding accusatory or angry. However, at the same time the less dominant group stand back and appear to look on very self-consciously - hugging their bodies and almost looking ashamed. One larger pupil is looking straight at the floor blushing, her face red.

Towards the end of the lesson the class perform their dance so far as the teacher films it for them to watch back. The girls look embarrassed watching the performance with lots of giggles. Despite the social divide in the class, all pupils have participated in the lesson. The teacher finishes the lesson by telling the girls how well they have done. The teacher seems to be friendly and approachable and although there has been a marked social divide in the class the overall tone of the lesson is friendly. When discussing the lesson later the teacher talks about how she wishes she was a dancer so that she would be able to help the pupils feel more comfortable and states that as dance is not 'her thing' she struggles to come up with ideas.

#### Interpretative notes/ideas

It was interesting that the smaller pupils (with big personalities) were taking up all of the physical space (making themselves bigger with their presence and even with their actions and movements), whilst the larger overweight pupils were almost covering as if trying to make themselves smaller.

#### Tags

Social hierarchies, social divides/power relations, comments about body size, surveillance in PE, appearing self-conscious.

Self-conscious  
body  
language

Symbolic  
violence?  
Comments  
about body  
size/fat.

Shame  
related to  
the body

Teacher's  
character  
Teacher friendly  
and  
approachable but  
space still not  
'safe?'

### **Reminders and questions for follow up**

Focus group interviews – may be interesting to interview both sides/friendship groups of this class in separate focus groups (e.g Samantha, Becca, Hannah, Cherise etc) in one interview and then Violet and co. in another. This might allow Violet and co. to actually speak and feel comfortable enough to give their opinion.

May be interesting to speak to Violet alone – looks like the excitable nature of the other girls may frustrate her. It may also be interesting to talk to girls like Lydia who seem desperate to be in the popular group but don't seem to be quite there.

Note for next observation – check to reaffirm what I saw (e.g. check to discount opposite – were some of dominant group acting more self-conscious in body language than non-dominant group – could I have missed that?). Check social groupings and positioning is the same in consequent weeks – is it just coincidence that overweight pupils were grouped together today?

Can I at some point try to see these pupils in a different setting/activity or in a class with different people to see how they react?

## **Initial observation themes**

A working document was created, detailing key themes emerging from observation data. This document included field note excerpts. Key observation themes are listed below, followed by an example of some pages from the document (relating to themes under 1c).

### 1. Health, the body and the social culture of the school

#### **a) Appearances and the body matter**

- Detailed scrutiny of appearances (body surveillance of self and others)
- The desired and good body
- The regulated body (body work)
- Perceptions of different bodies
- Hiding and exposing the body
- Resilience and the body

#### **b) Social status and social acceptance matter**

- Desires for social acceptance and inclusion
- Fears of social rejection, isolation and exclusion.
- Social treatment around the body
- Efforts to gain and maintain status: self-protection and subtle put downs

#### **c) The celebrity culture of the school**

- Becoming famous (and infamous)
- The influence of (social) media
- The selfie culture
- Recorded and immortalised images
- The virtual self
- The dramatic social life

#### **d) The health culture within the school**

- Meanings of health
- Health concerns
- (un)healthy and (un)cool practices
- Appearance concerns versus health concerns

### 2. Learning about health and the body

#### **a) Messages transmitted around health, wellbeing and the body**

- Teacher perceptions about and attitudes to teaching and learning in relation to health and the body
- Learning norms (the normal body, the healthy body, the fit body)
- Learning how to make 'good choices' (health recommendations)



- The binary approach (healthy and unhealthy)
- The holistic message and the balanced life
- Learning in the classroom

**b) Learning about the gendered body**

- Body image as a 'girl thing'
- Messages about the male/female body
- The feminine and masculine body
- The (fe)male gaze

**c) Health, the body and physical education**

- PE teachers as body experts
- PE as being for sporty and able bodies
- The purpose of PE in relation to health
- Body work and physical education and physical activity

**d) The effects of social and appearance worries on learning**

- Being self-conscious of the body in a PE setting
- Kit and clothing worries in PE
- Efforts to limit body exposure
- Withdrawing from the learning environment
- The safe learning environment

**e) The potential for addressing body issues within the school and PE**

- Pupils as critical inquirers
- The influence of structural barriers
- Developing empathy
- Teacher workload/time constraints

3. The process of data collection

- Issues/difficulties with ethnographic methods
- Progress in role negotiation

## Theme three: the celebrity culture of the school

### Becoming famous (and infamous)

#### **Example one (mirroring celebrity culture):**

[When talking about social acceptance within school]: "It's like when people go on xfactor auditions they normally don't wear a lot of make-up but when they get to the live auditions they get their hair and make-up done so they look prettier and so that people will accept them."

#### **Example two (well-known pupils):**

"Like the girls on my year, they look up to all the popular ones on the year above or 6<sup>th</sup> year, you know Jenny Gilbert and that and copy them and it passes on down. Cause Jenny and that they always look amazing in their photos."

[At school Christmas dance]: At one point Rhiannon, who has been standing alone, asks Jenny to pose in a selfie with her as she walks past. Jenny quickly obliges. Rhiannon holds out her phone and both pose in front of the camera, hands on hips. After quickly checking the picture Jenny rushes off and Rhiannon is left on her own, she quickly starts typing into her phone.

#### **Example three (well-known pupils):**

"But some of the girls in our school, like the popular ones, they are really well known in other schools. I dunno if that is a good thing. But say they go to the boys' football games on Saturdays and people know them, everyone knows them. Everyone's wanting to speak to them."

#### **Example four (desire to be known):**

They explain that "The main social media we use is Instagram for photos," Samirah tells me. I ask if they put pictures up a lot and Samirah says yes but she would like to have more followers, "like Charlotte, she has like 4000 followers!" she tells me. I gasp, "really? 4000?" I ask. "Yeah but she just has wierdos follow her," I am told. Charlotte agrees, "yeah well I just follow people and then they follow me back. You can put hashtags like #likeforlike and then you get more followers."

#### **Example five (well-known pupils):**

The staff talk about the latest S1 'embarrassing' defeat in the school football league. "How were they afterwards?" I ask. The teacher responds: "Well, Gowan was crying, it means a lot to him, that's his level, some of the others were not fussed but Kevin, he was all in a huff, he was all, I am not playing again, this is embarrassing. It's gonna be all over Facebook," the teacher says in a 'huffy' voice and mimics his body language (chest puffed out, head going from side to side, disgruntled look on face). "But then Kevin is like a mini celebrity, you know, he plays for Lee Valley, has the hairstyle, is well known amongst the boys. For him it is not worth the investment, you know the social fallout. It's a hassle, more than it is worth."

## The influence of (social) media

### **Example one (omnipresence of social media):**

"I think the problem is that people don't want to look stupid. You know, if you fall over or do something stupid it will be all over Twitter!" "What, like people making comments?" I ask. She responds, "yeah there could be something about it or it could be all over it. I think now it has become all about social media and what people say on it. It's all anyone every talks about. All the time... it's like have you seen what so and so posted last night. It's all about what's said online"

### **Example two (omnipresence of social media):**

At one point one of the girls ask me, "do you feel under pressure to look a certain way?... because you are a PE teacher?" Did you feel under pressure when you were at school and our age?" I explain to them that yes, perhaps I did feel some pressure too. However, I also mention that when I was at school there was no social media, few people had picture phones and people did not really post pictures of themselves. The girls gasp and say, "really? No way! But what did you have instead?" I think about it and reply, "I don't think we had anything like that at all." The girls are thoughtful for a moment and one comments, "oh actually, maybe it would be different if we didn't have all that. Imagine if we didn't."

### **Example three (concerns about social media)**

School health and wellbeing working group meeting minutes identified areas for improvement/development (social wellbeing):

- Parents: raising awareness of school policies (use of mobiles and social networking etc).
- Raising awareness of parental role in responsible use of social networking
- Social networking: pupil and parent education.

## The selfie culture

### **Example one:**

I ask what they post on these picture sites and they tell me that about 50-75% of their posts are pictures of themselves. Samirah says most of her pictures are pictures of her.

### **Example two:**

As I leave the classroom, I pass a group of three girls walking along the corridor – one takes her phone out of her bag and stretches out her arm so that she is holding the phone in front of the group. Without a word spoken or any pauses, all three girls 'pout' to the screen before the first girl checks the resulting photo and they seamlessly continue walking to their next class. This process seems very natural to them.

### **Example three:**

The group begin by brainstorming around the title 'body image.' They write down the following words: boney, skinny, fat, obese, anorexic, muscley, selfies. They then write a title saying body issues and include the following: jaw line, over -obese, toned butt, not having a flat stomach. As I go over one girl has her mobile phone with a picture of a girl posing for a selfie (the shot only shows her body and cuts off her head). They begin to tease Samirah and Charlotte about how many selfies they take, calling Samirah 'queen of the selfies.' She smirks and protests, "no I am not!" YEEES you are!!!!" they all exclaim.

**Example four:**

As the teacher leaves the class to get pens Lyndsey gets out her phone and holds it out in front of her. She pouts at the camera and sticks her middle finger up as she takes a picture. She looks at the shot and decides to re-take it, not entirely happy with the result. This time she changes her pose slightly, still putting her middle finger up to the camera but this time pulling a surprised face rather than pouting. The other 3 girls in her group clock what she is doing and flock to the camera and Lyndsey prepares to take a shot with all of them, struggling to reach her arm out far enough. However, the teacher enters the room again and Lyndsey quickly slips her phone back into her pocket.

Recorded and immortalised images

**Example one (documenting social life, identity construction):**

[At Christmas party]: I look over to one group where a girl has just got out her phone. She holds it out in front of her and as she does this around 3-4 other pupils gather around her facing the camera. They all hold various poses (e.g. hands on hips, heads to side, 'pouty' facial expressions or 'silly' faces/hand gestures). A few of the boys pile into the photo. She takes the picture and they all look over her shoulder. She may not have been happy with it as she quickly motions to the group to gather round again and they hold similar poses. She seems happy with the result this time and the phone goes away. Similar things are happening in various groups around the hall. Throughout the evening there seems to be a desire not just to have fun and be in that moment but to also make sure these moments are documented.

**Example two (the scrutiny of images):**

"Why are you worried about prom?" I ask. "All the photos!" Jasmine exclaims in response, "there will be so many!" The group continue to chat as we stretch and do some core exercises on the mats. "If I work on these exercises everyday till prom, will it make a difference?" Daisy asks me. The other girls contribute to the discussion by asking if the exercises will get rid of their "muffin tops" or "bingo wings" as they grab the 'flab' on their 'problem' areas. I ask them when the prom is and they tell me it is in April (it is only the beginning of October now). "That is a long way off!" I tell them with a smile. "No! It is sooooo soon!" they respond.

### The virtual self

**Example one (altering image):**

“Yeah but Louisa and Joanne use perfect 365, and there is always filters on their pictures. It doesn’t even look like them. I ask them what Perfect365 is and they explain to me that it is an app which they can get on their phones which digitally alters and enhances any pictures they take of themselves (like Photoshop).

**Example two (altering image):**

‘People constantly edit their photos so people don’t know what they really look like.’ Danielle complains, ‘It becomes not real.’

### The dramatic social life

**Example one (drama):**

“These girls are always falling out... everything is made into such a drama,” their teacher tells me as the lesson ends and the class head away to get changed. A while later two girls come out of the changing rooms in tears, lots of their peers begin flocking around them... “we are getting framed!” they accuse.

**Example two (drama):**

“I think maybe because I have had things that have made me stop trusting everyone [friends]. So I don’t need to worry as much cause I don’t put my trust in one person. I think though if someone says something behind my back or if I tell them something and they go and tell everyone else I wouldn’t pull them up for it. I am quite soft like that though.”

## **Appendix F: Interview data and analysis**

- **Annotated transcript (sample)** (pp 309-333)
  - **Analysis spreadsheet** (pp 334-341)
- **Interview themes with excerpts** (pp 342-352)

1 **S6 girls**  
2 **Chloe, Emma and Lucy**  
3 **Time: Period 3**  
4 **Date: 18/03/15**

5 Int: do you quite enjoy PE or?

6 All: **No, no not really.**

Note: this was an interview with a group of girls not engaged within PE but engaged with exercise and physical activity out with school.

7 Int: No? What do you not enjoy about it?

8 Chloe: I don't like the fact that **we're like almost 18 and people are**  
9 **forcing us to do exercise when we can like take that into our own**  
10 **hands if that makes sense? So like I'm like a member of the gym, I**  
11 **exercise quite regularly and I think at this age we are able to know**  
12 **about exercise and stuff and we could spend this hour so much more**  
13 **productivity like doing stuff for ourselves.**

Equating PE with exercise, not seeing it as something broader.  
  
Not seeing value of PE.

14 Int: hm, so do you see PE about mostly learning about exercise and  
15 stuff and things like that or do you see it as...

16 Lucy: I feel like **we never really get a full hour anyway, like you know**  
17 **how you are supposed to get a full hour of exercise?** Cause it takes  
18 quite a while to get changed and then plan what you are wanting to do  
19 and then at the end as well **so you don't even get a full hour** so by the  
20 time you actually get down to it you're only doing like half an hour at  
21 a push.

22 Int: Yeah. Is exercise important to people your age?

23 All: yeah, yeah definitely.

Valuing 'exercise'

24 Emma: I think it's really important, I think I would probably prefer it  
25 if there was better options.

26 Chloe: yeah.

Preferring/valuing more 'fitness' based activities.

27 Emma: Like say **if there was like a fitness class or something I would**  
28 **prefer that** to like table tennis.

29 Chloe: If it wasn't made into such **like a chore** as well and if it was  
30 optional or if it was like, I dunno, like a big game between the whole  
31 year like a game or something. But I feel like it is made into **such a**  
32 **chore and it's like you have to go so if you had like a test you can't opt**  
33 **not to do it that week and revise you have to go to it.**

PE as a 'chore', PE as forced.  
  
Desires for choice/agency.

34 Int: So see when you exercise out with school, is that less of a chore?

35 Chloe: yeah, cause I really enjoy doing it.

Other academic subjects/revision more important.

36 Lucy: yeah, like **cause you are doing what you want**, yeah.

37 Int: And what do you enjoy about exercising outside of school  
38 compared to in school, like what's the difference... Importance of showering/hygiene/ changing time.

39 Chloe: You can have like a shower and like you do what you want to  
40 do and when you want to do it. Choice/agency

41 Lucy: And like you can go with friends as well, like I know you  
42 would get to do that in school but you can go to fitness classes with  
43 your friends and its good. Importance of friendships

44 Int: So one thing that's a kinda barrier to doing exercise in school is  
45 not having a shower, getting changed after... Is there anything else  
46 that's a bit of a barrier... like say you had the hour to go and do your  
47 own thing in the fitness suite would you put as much effort in there as  
48 you do when you go to the gym say?

49 Lucy: No.

50 Chloe: No cause we're not like getting to choose when we are doing it,  
51 we are just getting forced to do it if that makes sense? Choice/agency

52 Int: Okay, okay. So you said that exercise would be important to you  
53 all, why would that be?

54 Chloe: To be healthy. Importance of being healthy Health = diet/exercise = appearance

55 Int: So what makes someone healthy then? Healthism discourse.

56 Chloe: Like their diet, and like the way they exercise like if they are  
57 like muscley or like skinny or something.

58 Int: uh hu. Would like your bodies be important to you at your age?

59 All: yeah.

60 Int: What about your bodies would be important?

61 All: [laugh/giggle]

62 Int: Don't be shy! Like honestly...

63 Lucy: Not to be chubby. Fat/chubby as undesirable Toned/fit looking body as ideal

64 All: [laugh]

65 Chloe: yeah to be like really toned, like not to be really skinny but to  
66 be like toned and like lean. Really 'skinny' as undesirable

67 Others: Yeah.

68 Int: So you're saying like toned, lean... is looking fit important then?



69 All: yeah.

70 Int: Okay, in a bit more depth then, what would be like the ideal  
71 appearance, if I had like pictures and stuff with different bodies which  
72 I can get out just to give you a bit of a discussion focus... if I can find  
73 them... em... what what would be like your ideal appearance do you  
74 think?

75 Chloe: like a flat stomach.

76 Int: So I have loads of pictures here...

77 Chloe: Hm...

78 Int: ...Are there any which would be particularly ideal or particularly  
79 far from ideal or...

80 Lucy: [laughs] It's shan but that would be far from ideal [points to  
81 pictures of 'overweight' bodies]

Fat/overweight as undesirable

82 Chloe: All these ones ['overweight'] would be far from ideal.

83 Int: The overweight ones...

84 Lucy: But then that's far ideal as well [points to thin model]

85 Emma: yeah that's far from ideal.

Thin as  
undesirable

86 Chloe: Way too skinny yeah.

Pointing out  
toned/lean/muscular/shapely  
bodies as ideal (fit-looking and  
active)

87 Lucy: I don't want to look like that.

88 Chloe: I like this one [picture of runner].

89 Lucy: I like that one [Instagram pic, toned abs/muscular thighs].

90 Int: So these kind of pictures of people that are kinda lean and toned...

91 Lucy: Like they are skinny but it is not skinny like they have been  
92 starving themselves.

Fit/healthy look as  
important

93 Chloe: Yeah, it's like they have been like working.

Bodies evidencing hard  
work/dedication

94 Lucy: Working out, yeah, like they have worked to get that way.

95 Emma: Yeah and she's still got a good arse!

96 All: [laugh]

97 Int: So, is it important to be curvy as well as thin?

98 Chloe: yeah.

99 Emma: yeah

Curves within reason

100 Lucy: yeah, I still wanna have curves but I don't want to be like that  
101 [overweight]

102 Int: You don't want to be overweight...

103 Lucy: yeah

104 Int: So are some of these, do you find that these ideals that you have,  
105 are these things that are easy to get to or...

106 Chloe: No! I wish!

107 Lucy: No, not really [laughs]

Bodywork

Hard work

108 Chloe: Like you have to like work hard.

109 Emma: yeah.

110 Int: Hm, in what sort of ways?

111 Chloe: Like eating healthy.

Importance of  
diet and exercise

112 Emma: Like not eating loads of crap.

113 Chloe: And like doing exercise, like I think they go hand in hand.

114 Int: Like see when you say exercise would be important to people  
115 your age and like you don't want to get chubby, would... what... would  
116 that be the main reasons for exercising or would you have other  
117 reasons?

118 Chloe: I think so.

Exercise for appearance  
reasons

119 Emma: Yeah.

120 Int: you think it would be the main... like appearance?

121 Chloe: I think so, yeah.

122 Int: Em okay... and how important is appearance in school like in a  
123 school environment? The way that you look and the way that your  
124 body looks, is that...

125 Lucy: yeah pretty important.

Importance of  
appearance in schools.

126 Chloe: yeah, really important I would say.

127 Emma: uh hu.

128 Int: Why's that?

Feeling under judgement/scrutiny in school

129 Chloe: cause you feel like everyone's judging you, I think it's  
130 probably down to the person like how much they care.

131 Lucy: I feel like I used to care more like when I was younger but now  
132 that I am in 6th year I don't really care as much.

Changing perceptions with age.

133 Chloe: Yeah I'm the same probably.

Not caring, resilience?

134 Lucy: Cause like no one really cares.

135 Int: Ah okay, so maybe you could talk about that a wee bit more...

Feeling more comfortable with appearance when older in school

136 Lucy: I don't know like say in the morning you put more effort, I felt  
137 like I put more effort like when I was younger like more make-up and  
138 everything.

139 Chloe: So did I yeah.

140 Lucy: But now that I'm in 6th year...

141 Chloe: Now that I'm friends with everyone it's like I don't even care.

142 Lucy: Yeah, yeah.

Feeling more comfortable once in established relationships/friendships

143 Int: You're quite comfortable?

144 Both: yeah.

145 Int: Do you think that's maybe cause you've like established you  
146 identity and things like that?

147 Lucy: Maybe more so but...

148 Emma: I think also cause of the fact that there was people older than  
149 us and I didn't like and when I was younger I didn't like older people  
150 judging me where as now that I'm the oldest, I'd like, I don't really  
151 care.

Worried about judgement from older/high status pupils

152 Chloe: I don't really care what they're...

153 Emma: But like I don't think I've stopped caring about my body I feel  
154 like I have stopped caring about like hair and make-up.

155 Int: Ah... okay

Body still important (Size, shape etc) – these concerns increasing. Other concerns (hair/make-up etc) lowering

156 Chloe: yeah I'm the same.

157 Emma: Like I still care about my body, I probably care more about my  
158 body now.

159 Chloe: More about my body.

160 Emma: than when I was younger.

161 Lucy: yeah.

162 Chloe: yeah. But less about...

163 Emma: But less about hair and make-up and stuff... in school anyway.

164 Int: And why do you think you care more about your body now?

165 Chloe: Because there's no excuses really, if that makes sense.

No excuses for  
not having a  
'good' body.

166 Lucy: yeah.

167 Chloe: Like when you are younger I think you still have the excuse of  
168 like oh I am young.

169 Lucy: still got baby fat.

The 'ageing' body

170 Emma: like puppy fat.

Feeling the need for tighter regulation with age.

171 Chloe: yeah, still got baby fat, yeah but now there are no excuses.

172 Int: Okay, that makes sense.

173 Lucy: I feel like the food I used to eat, cause I used to eat so bad, like  
174 it's catching up on me. Like I used to get away with it when I was  
175 younger but now I don't get away with it. So, yeah.

176 Int: Ah okay, okay. Where do you get your information about like  
177 your, like you're saying the food you eat, the exercise you do, where  
178 would you get your kinda information?

179 Lucy: everywhere, I don't...

Influence of  
parents/family

180 Emma: Like parents have told me and stuff.

181 Chloe: Yeah my mum's quite into it and like things like online there's  
182 loadsa stuff.

Influence of  
internet

183 Emma: yeah

184 Chloe: About how to be healthy and stuff... and even like adverts and  
185 programmes on tv when it's like, like my fat children or something.

Influence of  
traditional media

186 Others: [laugh]

187 Chloe: Like, I think that's such motivation, like I never ever want to  
 188 look like that in my life.

Fear of looking fat – disaster!

189 Lucy: Yeah.

190 Int: Okay, and you said like online, do you think things like social  
 191 media make you think about your body?

192 Chloe: Hm, so much.

Influence of social media

193 Int: In what ways?

194 Chloe: Like seeing people, like especially on Instagram you always  
 195 see people.

196 Lucy: You always see people.

197 Emma: Seeing people, like on Instagram if you follow like famous  
 198 people.

199 Lucy: and like famous people have all these like personal trainers.

200 Chloe: Trainers and stuff.

'Unrealistic' ideals

201 Lucy: So it's so unrealistic.

202 Emma: But like you think it's realistic cause like you're just on  
 203 Instagram. Like you are looking at pictures of your friends on  
 204 Instagram and you just think it's realistic but it's not really cause they  
 205 get loads of help.

Knowledge that ideals are unrealistic but still getting sucked in

206 Int: So would you look more at pictures of celebrities than people your  
 207 age, like peers?

208 All: hm... eh...

209 Int: like would you compare yourself against celebrities and peers?

210 Chloe: yeah probably both.

211 Lucy: Yeah.

212 Emma: Both.

213 Int; would there be one that you would compare more than the other  
 214 or...

215 Lucy: Hm...

216 Chloe: I think it depends like.

Seeing overweight people as motivation (not to look like that)

Visibility of body on social media – increased exposure to other people's bodies.

Influence of celebrities/famous people.  
Following other people's lives/activities.

217 Lucy: Well maybe your peers if you are around them all the time but...

218 Chloe: I dunno I think it depends

219 Emma: I don't know, like I don't really compare myself to peers cause  
220 like I know that I'm not going to look exactly like them so... I dunno.

Not comparing

221 Chloe: but like other people my age, other people our age, I'd be like  
222 oh I wish I had their body.

223 Lucy: yeah so much.

Comparisons with peers or  
'people like us'

224 Emma: yeah, like you know from different schools.

225 Int: Okay, so people from different schools would that be people you  
226 follow on social media?

227 All: yeah

228 Int: Oh, so how do you get to like know them and follow them and  
229 stuff?

230 Chloe: friends of friends.

Large social networks – extending out with school

231 Lucy: friends of friends like you kinda know, like you would smile at  
232 them if you saw them but you don't really know them but you will see  
233 their pictures all the time.

Knowing people  
online but not really  
in 'real life.'

Recognising others –  
micro-celebrity

234 Int: Ah, okay... so would that be like pictures of themselves basically,  
235 their bodies and that?

236 All: yeah, uh hu.

237 Int: So how does that make you feel when you see their bodies and  
238 you are like oh I want to look like them?

239 Chloe: How do they do it, like what's their secret?

How can I be like that? How am I not like that?

240 Lucy: You're like that's shan.

Wanting to have other people's bodies - Envy.

241 Chloe: You think like what is it that they're doing that I'm not doing if  
242 that makes sense.

243 Emma: yeah, it kinda gives me like oh like I want to look like that, it  
244 kind of gives you motivation for like 5 minutes and then you are like  
245 urgh no, give me the food [laughs].

Jokes around  
bodily  
practices

246 Int: Do you think other people would look at you in that way?

247 All: No! [laugh]

248 Int: Not at all?  
249 All: No!  
250 Int: Okay so you would more compare yourself to people you think  
251 look better than you?  
252 Chloe: yeah.  
253 Int: than people you think look worse than you?  
254 All: yeah.  
255 Chloe: yeah, definitely.  
256 Int: And mostly people from other schools you are saying?  
257 Emma: uh hu.  
258 Chloe: yeah.  
259 Lucy: but like there are some people...  
260 Emma: there are still people from our school but like I dunno.  
261 Int: Okay, so a mixture of both. And do people do things like posting  
262 pictures of themselves a lot?  
263 All: yeah, uh hu.  
264 Int: So like their whole bodies or just faces or...  
265 Chloe: Especially in summertime like bikini pictures  
266 Lucy + Emma: Summertime, yeah  
267 Chloe: It's so like depressing!  
268 Int: Is there pressure to look a certain way for photos in particularly?  
269 Chloe: Yes  
270 Lucy: yeah.  
271 Int: For specific occasions or just like in general?  
272 Lucy: I suppose for special occasions.  
273 Chloe: special occasions, yeah  
274 Emma: Cause you never really take photos

Upward v downward  
social comparisons

Pressure to look a certain  
way for photos/occasions  
  
Places/times when photos  
more likely to be taken?

275 Chloe: Like chilling in the house with your pyjamas

276 Emma: yeah we don't post photos if we are just with each other

277 Chloe: You have to be like done up. Self-presentation for photos

278 Emma: for special occasions yeah.

279 Int: So for like nights out and things like that?

280 All: uh hu, yeah

281 Int: Okay, and em... would that be quite a lot of the time that people  
282 would do that?

283 Chloe: yeah

284 Lucy: Weekends.

285 Emma: Like weekends, people are going out at weekends and they  
286 will post pictures.

287 Chloe: weekends yeah

288 Emma: And then they go on holiday

289 Chloe: yeah holidays, yeah

290 Int: How much effort goes in to these photos? Would people edit  
291 them?

292 All: yeah

293 Int: In what sort of ways? The virtual  
self/body  
(editing etc).

294 Chloe: Like putting a filter on a photo.

295 Emma: Like on Instagram you can edit.

296 Int: Would you be happy putting pictures up without filters and  
297 things?

298 Chloe: No! [Laughs]

299 All: [laugh] Hiding the 'real'  
body/image/self

300 Emma: Probably not!

301 Lucy: It's too like real...

302 Chloe: But they make your skin look more tanned everything.



303 Lucy: Yeah you just want to look better.

304 Int: So how does it feel when you look at a picture of yourself and  
305 you've put filters and things on it?

306 Chloe: You're like oh like I look better in this picture yeah.

Using technology  
to make the body  
look 'better'

307 Int: So how much time would you spend altering these sorts of  
308 photos?

309 Lucy: Not that long.

310 Chloe: yeah like just a wee while.

Editing that can be  
done quickly and  
easily

311 Lucy: Like a minute.

312 Chloe: just looking through the filters yeah.

313 Lucy: Like I will always get them to choose what filter cause I never  
314 can decide so always get them to do it.

315 Int: Ah, you get your friends to choose.

316 Lucy: yeah.

317 Int: Ah okay, and what sort of things when you say like you look at  
318 social media do you follow certain accounts or like hashtags or  
319 anything?

Accounts followed - fitspiration

320 Chloe: Well there's accounts which are like fitness motivation and  
321 stuff... I follow some of them and they all have like loads of pictures.

Visibility of body,  
exposure to images  
Images of perfection  
Images of 'fit'/toned  
bodies

322 Lucy: yeah they just upload like constant pictures of girls that are  
323 literally just like perfect.

324 Emma: but then scrolling through your feed you always see pictures  
325 of girls with like abs and stuff like that.

Images sought and  
images appearing  
inadvertently (liked,  
shared, tweeted etc)

326 Chloe: And I follow a person that's like a healthy eating blog and they  
327 post like recipes and stuff.

328 Lucy: yeah

329 Emma: is that the person with the book?

330 Chloe: uh hu

Diet and exercise,  
virtuous 'clean'  
lifestyle

331 Int: Oh, what's her name?

332 Chloe: Ella.

333 Int: yeah okay, I know who you are talking about.

334 Emma: I know the one but I can't remember the recipes.

335 Int: So it is quite a lot of raw foods, vegan type things?

336 Chloe: yeah

337 Int: So would there be certain trends around appearance and fashions  
338 and things?

339 Chloe: Yeah, I think it's fashionable to be like really healthy and really  
340 fit

341 Lucy: I feel like in the past it was more fashionable to be like skinny

342 Chloe: And now it's like to be fit

343 Emma: Now it's like to be healthy

344 Lucy: Like it's sooooo fashionable to be like really healthy

345 Chloe: Like muscles.

346 Emma: Like all the pictures that are like really amazing are like  
347 people at the gym in like gym stuff.

348 Chloe: They are like so toned.

349 Emma: they are proper like fit.

350 Int: Hm

351 Chloe: Not someone who is like really really skinny.

352 Int: yeah. So can you tell how healthy a person is by looking at them?

353 Chloe: yeah, definitely.

354 Emma: yeah, I suppose because sometimes skinny people...

355 Chloe: Like how muscley they are and even the way their skin glows  
356 like I dunno like if someone eats healthy they have like a certain look  
357 about them where as if someone eats really badly they look more like  
358 kinda dead.

359 Int: yeah, okay. So now it's not so much, skinny is not so much  
360 desired.

361 Chloe: uh hu.

Healthy as fashionable –  
being/looking and  
appearing healthy as  
trendy

Fit/healthy looking bodies admired  
  
Awe at/admiration for other  
people's bodies

Skinny as 'out'  
(undesirable),  
lean/toned/fit as 'in.'

Looking 'alive' and  
healthy (radiant, vitality,  
glowing)  
  
Desiring a healthy 'look'

362 Int: You're saying it's more kind of toned and...

363 All: yeah

364 Int: Okay and that would drive people to do a lot of things in the gym  
365 and fitness and stuff?

366 Lucy: yeah like do more exercise.

367 Chloe: yeah.

368 Int: Okay, yeah... and like how often would you lot go to the gym and  
369 do that sort of thing?

370 Chloe: Like two or three times a week

371 Lucy: Like ideally I would like to go three times a week

372 Chloe: Three yeah

373 Emma: yeah

Need to be better/have  
more perfect lifestyle

374 Lucy: **But I don't always**

Wanting to engage in bodywork/motivated but do  
not always go through with it (cycle of  
disappointment)

Wanting it but not always willing to work for it?

375 Emma: At the moment I only go weekly but... **I'd prefer to go more.**

376 Int: And do you feel after you have been at the gym?

377 Chloe: really good

378 Emma: really good

379 Lucy: I think the thought of it you are like urgh I can't be bothered but  
380 when you are there, **like I really enjoy it when I am there.**

Enjoying exercise

381 Int: So what do you mean by like really good?

382 Chloe: I dunno like you have a bounce in your step.

383 Lucy: You feel better for going.

Feelings of virtue, success, achievement

384 Emma: **you feel better for yourself that you have done something and**  
385 **like, like you have been productive kinda.**

386 Int: And on the opposite side... how do you feel when you have not  
387 done it?

388 Chloe: **Like so guilty like oh my gosh I need to be there.**

Self-regulation  
and guilt

Interesting paradox: not  
liking to be forced to do  
PE yet seeing own  
exercise as a choice but  
although governed by  
guilt, body pressures etc?

389 Int: okay, is that guilty for what reasons do you think?

390 Chloe: Cause you are like if I'd, if I'd actually had the energy to go  
391 and gone then that would be like one step closer

392 Lucy: Closer yeah.

Aiming to edge closer to ideal, desire to build towards it

393 Int: Hm... to?

Exercise as a route towards ideal (appearance)

394 Chloe: like what you ideally want to look like.

395 Int: Oh okay, that makes sense. So you feel a wee bit rubbish when  
396 you've not done exercise and things and then you would kinda think  
397 oh I wish I'd gone.

398 Chloe: uh hu

399 Int: okay, yeah. But it's different in PE, you wouldn't see PE as an  
400 opportunity to...

401 Chloe: Nah, cause PE is like a chore.

PE as a chore

PE vs exercise out with school

402 Emma: I never work that hard in PE though cause I know that I am  
403 going to be sweaty and I know that I am going to have to go back into  
404 my school uniform so like I know that I am not going to get a good  
405 workout at PE anyway so like I never really mind when I don't do it.

Shower/hygiene issues

Changing time

Self-presentational concerns  
after PE

406 Chloe: I really enjoy PE when we do like big team games and stuff  
407 and it's more like banter and its like fun.

408 Emma: I'd prefer PE if you did it more as like a year bonding thing.

PE pointless if you cannot get a  
good 'workout'?

409 Chloe: Yeah, like a year activity.

Valuing social aspects of PE

School not the place for it?

410 Emma: Instead of fitness cause like no one want to get that sweaty at  
411 this, like 2nd and 3rd period.

412 Chloe: Like if it was last 2 periods on a Wednesday and if you did like  
413 a whole year big game or something then I think people would be  
414 more into it.

415 Emma: People would be more into it yeah.

416 Int: What if you had like your PE lesson and you had like, say I  
417 dunno, 20 minutes, half an hour to shower, like if there were showers  
418 and things, would that make a difference?

419 Chloe: yeah, definitely.

Shower/hygiene issues

420 Emma: yeah I think so.

Changing time

421 Lucy: yeah cause it's just like the thought of going back into your  
422 school uniform like all sweaty.

423 Chloe: It's minging yeah.

424 Int: And would you learn more about health, exercise and things  
425 through school, PE and things or more through like other avenues?

426 Chloe: Probably more online I think.

427 Lucy: Yeah.

Online as influential site for  
learning re. health and the body

428 Emma: uh hu.

429 Int: like what infor... like say you were to get information online then  
430 in school or things, what would you be more like to listen to or take  
431 in?

432 All: probably online.

433 Int: And would that be mostly through, what sort of mediums would it  
434 be through?

435 Chloe: Probably like photos and stuff.

'Go to' places for health information –  
blogs, photos (short and bitesize?)

436 Lucy: I suppose also like blogs though.

437 Chloe: yeah.

438 Int: Okay and how does PE then make you feel about you bodies, like  
439 we already talked a bit about exercise out of school, how does PE  
440 make you feel about your bodies?

441 Chloe: I dunno

PE as a chore  
Lack of motivation in PE  
environment

442 Lucy: Like I am just so lazy in PE and I know that's not the question  
443 but...like I just find it such a chore.

444 Chloe: like I dunno, like our PE kit like I think is the most unflattering  
445 kit ever.

446 Lucy: yeah like you have to wear this [pulls on baggy t-shirt], oh my  
447 God.

Issues with  
PE kit

448 Emma: Yeah like I have to wear this [pulls on t-shirt] then I look at  
449 myself in the mirror and I am like oh my God.

450 Lucy: I look obese [laughs]

451 Chloe: I'm like this is awful, like I actually look like a whale.

452 Int: is that just because of the...

453 Chloe: Like the kit, like because we're not allowed... like at the gym I  
454 wear like gym leggings and like, em... like a sports top and like I have  
455 wore gym leggings here before and I have been told not to wear them.

Clothing and  
image (clothing in  
relation to health  
and fitness image)

456 Emma: I just feel more comfortable in gym clothes than in this stuff  
457 [pulls at PE kit].

458 Int: So it's not that you would feel, like you are saying you would feel  
459 self-conscious in the kit but it's not cause its like exposing...

460 All: its just unflattering, yeah.

461 Int: Okay so I suppose there is a difference between feeling exposed  
462 but then feeling exposed not because you are not covered up but just  
463 because it's not flattering.

464 Lucy: yeah.

465 Chloe: yeah.

466 Emma: I think also because we all have to wear the same it just makes  
467 it more seem like we are just being made to do it.

Clothing and lack  
of identity?

Clothing as  
symbolic?

468 Chloe: yeah, such a chore.

469 Emma: Like prisoners like we go to PE and we are all in the same  
470 matching uniforms like it's just horrible like.

471 Chloe: yeah, I agree with that [laughs]

Choice and agency

472 Int: Where as when you go to the gym do you think about what you  
473 are wearing to the gym to look fashionable?

474 Emma: yeah.

475 Chloe: yeah, yeah.

476 Emma: She always gets angry with me cause when I go to the gym I  
477 am like aw I look horrible.

478 Chloe: Yeah she is like so conscious of it and I am like Emma nobody  
479 cares what you look like all they are concentrating on is their fitness.

480 Int: yeah.

Awareness of audience

481 Emma: She gets angry with me [whispers].

482 Chloe: And Emma's like oh no but like I just need to, and I am like no  
483 one is looking at you

484 Lucy: Yeah, I don't really put much thought into what I'm going to  
485 wear.

486 Chloe: Me neither.

487 Lucy: But I just have gym clothes that I like.

488 Int: In school do you feel like people are watching you a lot?

489 Chloe: Yeah, cause like you past people and like if you were like, if  
490 you looked nice they probably wouldn't turn an eyelid but if you were  
491 like, I dunno say like quite fat, people would be like.

492 Emma: yeah people would turn an eyelid.

493 Chloe: And like talk about you.

494 Emma: People turn an eyelid more if you look bad than if you look  
495 good.

496 Int: Okay and would it be horrendous if people were talking about you  
497 cause of the way you looked? Like in a bad way?

498 Lucy: yeah, God yeah, yeah I would hate it.

499 Chloe: I would be like, I would be so humiliated, like if I ever heard  
500 somebody like I dunno, like oh she has put on lots of weight, I would  
501 be like so upset... I don't think I could come back into school.

502 Emma: yeah

503 Chloe: More so than if they said oh she's quite ugly if that makes  
504 sense?

505 Int: yeah, okay. So would the worst comments be...

506 Emma: Like you're fat

507 Chloe: like to call me fat, yeah

508 Emma: That would be like the worst thing that someone could call me  
509 would be fat

510 Chloe: The worst thing that someone could say, uh hu.

511 Int: So would weight and fat be the main thing you would worry  
512 about?

513 All: yeah.

514 Chloe: definitely.

Feelings of judgement, fear of being talked about

Worse to look bad than it is good to look good?

Feelings of judgement, fear of being talked about

Fear of fat  
Fat and stigma

Appearance and humiliation

Fat v ugly

Fat as a derogatory term

515 Lucy: Like I think if you asked any girl, like every girl would say that  
516 the worst thing to say to you would be something about your weight.

Influence of comments  
about weight

517 Int: And what if someone commented like oh she's too skinny or  
518 something? Would that not be so bad?

519 Emma: Well like I'd know it wasn't true [laughs] I'd be like what!

520 Chloe: I would just be like what are you talking about!

Paradox from earlier –  
skinny still desired?  
Skinny as a  
compliment?

521 Emma: But like if I had one of these figures like one of our friends is  
522 like really skinny and

523 Chloe: She hates being called skinny

Tension – skinny  
undesirable

524 Emma: She hates being called skinny, yeah. So like I understand for  
525 people who are really skinny like it wouldn't be nice to be called really  
526 skinny but like if someone called me really skinny I would be like  
527 yeah right

528 Chloe: It's the same for us

529 Lucy: Like it is just different figures I think

530 Int: what about if someone was maybe a bit heavier, a bit more weight  
531 but were quite curvy with it, would that be different or...

532 Chloe: I think they would still get upset, I dunno.

533 Lucy: Yeah I think they would.

534 Emma: I think... I dunno

535 Lucy: It depends like the way they carry themselves

536 Emma: I think it depends who they are as well. Some people are just  
537 really confident with the way they look and stuff

538 Lucy: Which is like so good I think.

539 Int: Would you like to be confident with the way you looked?

540 All: yeah

541 Int: What would make you confident?

542 Chloe: If I had a flatter tummy

543 Int: So changing your appearance?

544 Lucy: yeah

Wanting to be happy and  
not care about appearance  
  
Wanting to resist. ideals

Changing/bettering  
appearance as solution  
to body issues.



545 Chloe: **And if I had more toned arms** Desire for 'tight',  
'controlled' bodies

546 Emma: **If I would jiggle less**

547 Int: yeah

548 All: [laugh]

549 Int: Okay... so is there anything apart from actually changing your  
550 body, is there anything else that would help?

551 Chloe: **I think fake tan makes me more confident**, like I dunno.

552 Lucy: **Fake tan always makes you look better** Still focussing  
on appearance

553 Chloe: **I think it makes you look, it makes me more confident**

554 Int: Why's that?

555 Emma: I dunno, **I feel it makes you look skinnier** Desire for skinny

556 Chloe: **Like really dark, I think it makes you look skinnier and it**  
557 **makes colours look nicer on you**

558 Lucy: I dunno, **it makes you look more toned cause it kinda sticks to**  
559 **some patches and emphasises some parts**

560 Emma: I just feel like when you are pale you just look like... Making body look  
more toned, fit, healthy

561 Chloe: Ill

562 Emma: yeah, just horrible

563 Int: So having, what you are saying is a nice colour on you, makes you  
564 fit that kind of healthy, fit ideal?

565 All: yeah Influence of models/images  
of 'perfection'

566 Chloe: **Cause all the models are always like so tanned**

567 Emma: **Cause that's like an easy thing to do to yourself to make you**  
568 **look a bit more better, like exercise is a bit hard!** [laughs] Easy v difficult things to  
change/body work  
  
Quick solutions/less effort

569 Int: Okay, yeah. Okay, you've talked a bit about like any girl would  
570 find that horrendous, do you think the pressures are the same for boys  
571 your age as they are for girls?

572 Chloe: yeah **to be like bulk**, yeah I think so Female's perceptions of  
male's body concerns  
  
Perceptions of male ideal

573 Lucy: Yeah

574 Chloe: I think probably girls are the worst culprit for like I am really  
575 guilty of going on saying oh boys with 6 packs they are like so hot

Expectations  
of males

576 Emma: Yeah, I don't think they get that offended if like boys slag  
577 them off but I think they get more offended if a girl was like oh my  
578 God either you are really fat or you're really skinny they'd be like  
579 okay.

580 C: yeah but I am really guilty of going like oh my God you have  
581 skinnier legs than me kinda thing and that's probably really offensive  
582 to them

583 Emma: But I don't think they get as affected as girls like I might just  
584 be being like... but I feel they don't

585 Lucy: Yeah I feel they don't

586 Chloe: I feel they don't get as affected as girls yeah.

587 Int: What about then... do you worry more about what girls think of  
588 you or what boys think of you?

589 Chloe: Both probably, both for different reasons

590 Emma: I would say it would be equal

591 Lucy: I was going to say girls but I suppose it is equal

592 Chloe: Probably equal, yeah, I'd say equal

Fat as an  
insult

593 Emma: Like I would, it would hurt just as much if a boy or a girl said  
594 that I was fat

595 Chloe: yeah it would hurt the exact same

596 Emma: Like it wouldn't hurt any more if it was a boy or a girl

597 Int: So you're saying you think it would hurt, are there some people  
598 your age who do get called various names or do get kinda isolated and  
599 things cause of the way they look?

600 Chloe: yeah definitely

Perceptions of self-  
conscious people and body  
language

601 Emma: uh hu

602 Int: And do you see, do you ever see that affecting people?

603 Chloe: yeah like people being really self-conscious after having a  
604 comment or something or people going like crazy and doing like a  
605 mad diet because they've had like a comment.

606 Int: hm

607 Lucy: yeah

608 Int: Would comments be face to face or behind peoples backs or like  
609 online and stuff?

610 Lucy: probably everything

611 Chloe: Everything

612 Lucy: Yeah like all of them

613 Emma: Like you can tell like people who are really self-conscious of  
614 themselves like you can tell like even when you look at them like they  
615 look like on edge, do you know what I mean.

616 Others: uh hu, yeah

617 Emma: like they are always like this [puts arm across chest]

618 Int: Like hunched up

619 Emma: and like if you touch them they are like oh and sort of like  
620 [motions jumping away] you can kinda tell when someone is like  
621 extremely self-conscious.

622 Int: You talked a bit about negative comments, how does it feel when  
623 people make positive comments about your appearance?

624 Chloe: I just like I don't believe them I am just like no, like shut up

625 Lucy: Like we are so sarcastic we are like oh yes, I look so nice!

626 Emma: yeah, we never take it as like oh thanks

627 Chloe: Sometimes I would just be like oh they are joking, like I  
628 dunno, I couldn't take it

629 Emma: I would never be like oh thanks

630 Lucy: Like when people say thanks I am like I dunno!

631 Emma: Yeah it is weird to hear someone say like thanks!

632 Lucy: I never really know what to say

633 Emma: We're just really sarcastic like our friendship groups are just  
634 like aw shut up

635 Int: Would you ever agree but then feel you had to say, oh no no?

<p>Downplaying compliments</p> <p>Genuinely? For further affirmation? Social norm to do so?</p>
---

636 Chloe: No cause I am not like comfortable enough.

637 Lucy: [laughs] to be like yeah I know!

638 Int: But when you make comments to your friends, like oh you look  
639 amazing, are you genuine?

Complimenting  
others

640 Lucy: yeah, yeah!

641 Chloe: Yeah and I get annoyed when they don't accept I am like I am  
642 being serious just take it.

643 Emma: yeah but like none of us can take it.

Social norms re.  
compliments

644 Lucy: We are all just like nooooo.

645 Chloe: But that's like any girl, you go up to someone and you are like  
646 oh my gosh you look so good today and they are like shut up.

647 Lucy: No Chloe's always like thank you!

648 All: [laugh]

649 Emma: There are only like a select few that like take them all the rest  
650 are just like shut up.

651 Lucy: yeah, my dad get's really annoyed, my dad's like you should  
652 accept a compliment, you should just say thank you, that's like all you  
653 need to say but it's just awkward, I dunno.

654 Emma: I don't like compliments!

Compliments  
as awkward

655 Lucy: I don't like it!

656 Int: But you would be quite happy to give compliments just not...

657 Lucy: Yeah dish out the compliments!

658 Int: Would you ever get jealous of people getting compliments?

659 Chloe: Nah, I'd be like it's true they look so good.

660 Lucy: I wouldn't get jealous of them.

661 Int: But are there some people who you would be like I wish I looked  
662 like them?

663 Chloe: Yeah definitely

664 Int: Like what sort of people, like you don't need to say names but...

665 Chloe: Like I dunno there is a girl who I am really good friends with  
666 who works like so hard to get a good figure and she's got like such a  
667 good body and I am like I wish I had the determination... you're like  
668 oh why don't I have that determination? Determination as a virtue

669 Lucy: Yeah like she goes to the gym like 5 times a week, she's got  
670 such a good body, literally. Comparing practices/actions against others as well as bodies

671 Emma: Yeah like when we asked her how many times she went to the  
672 gym, cause we had never spoken to her about it, and then she told us  
673 that I was like oh God, I should probably go a bit more, like it makes  
674 you feel bad that you don't go as much I suppose

675 Lucy: And she eats so healthy as well though, like she's just like, she's  
676 got her health like on point but it's like hard work. Working for health Health and perfection  
Is it her health that is on point or her body?

677 Emma: I know.

678 Int: So how much would you think about these things? Cause we are  
679 obviously talking specifically about them now but...

680 Chloe: Like a lot, like daily basis. Body issues and thought space

681 Lucy: Like I always feel like I want to go to the gym but then I just  
682 don't. I always make plans like I'll try and go the gym tonight but I  
683 never actually go Disappointment in/frustration with self

684 Int: What makes you think about it the most?

685 Lucy: Mirrors. Pressure to look good for certain events/occasions

686 Emma: Like events and that. Photo occasions?

687 Chloe: Yeah, like events coming up.

688 Lucy: And like... oh God, prom.

689 Emma: Yeah we are thinking about like prom, birthdays, Malia, like  
690 our holiday, you will think about all of them and you will be like oh  
691 God.

692 Lucy: Saturdays.

693 Chloe: yeah, I need to do stuff.

694 Emma: So like they make you think about it

695 Lucy: Yeah

696 Int: And for the events is it specific reasons?

697 Chloe: To like look good in a dress

698 Lucy: To look better in a dress

699 Emma: yeah

700 Chloe: And like going on holiday, like a bikini, like oh God.

701 Emma: Don't want to look awful in a bikini

702 Chloe: Like you have to have a flat stomach

703 Emma: And like prom, like you are always going to look at those

704 photos

705 Chloe: Yeah

706 Emma: So like you wanna look good, you don't wanna look

707 Chloe: fat

708 Emma: Like a fatty [sighs]

709 Int: So what sort of specific things would you to do work, like you say

710 you go to the gym but what sort of specific things would you do

711 mostly?

712 Chloe: Em... like I dunno I go to a class once a week but I dunno I

713 think I prefer doing my own workout like I know the specific things

714 that I want to work on and what I want to target

715 Emma: Yeah, I prefer to do my own

716 Lucy: I go for classes

717 Chloe: But yeah but then as well I feel I eat quite healthy in general so

718 I feel that bit like I'm not, I'm not as worried about that. It's partly

719 because my mum is very healthy and she like feeds me so I feel like

720 that I am not as worried about, it is more like the exercise and making

721 sure that I am getting benefit out of going like not just doing like loads

722 of cardio but doing like a balance of everything

723 Int: Yeah, so here's a question, if you were told, like that this is totally

724 hypothetical but you can have this body, it's healthy but it doesn't look

725 how you quite want to look or you can have this body, it's not healthy

726 but it looks ideal, what would you choose?

727 Chloe: Probably the ideal body

728 Lucy: Yeah

Looking good for clothing/fashions

Enduring images

Fat as undesirable

Targeted bodywork

729 Int: The one that looks better?

730 Lucy: yeah

731 Int: So is it more important to look healthy or to be healthy?

732 Chloe: To look healthy

Looking/appearing  
healthy v being healthy

733 Lucy: To look healthy

734 Emma: It depends like how unhealthy the body was, like if you were  
735 literally about to keel over then I probably wouldn't choose that and it  
736 depends how bad the really healthy body was like if it was really far  
737 off what I want to look like then I wouldn't choose it.

738 Others: yeah

739 Int: So you wouldn't see your health concerns at the moment as very  
740 urgent, do you see them as more...

741 Lucy: No

742 Chloe: No

743 Emma: I don't really think about, like when I go to the gym I don't  
744 really think about it because of health concerns I think about more  
745 appearance

Exercising for health  
v exercising for  
appearance

746 Chloe: Like I want to be toned, yeah

747 **END OF INTERVIEW**

<b>Note</b> – the numbers here will not correspond to the line numbers on the sample transcript provided due to the margin sizes of this thesis.	<b>Mollie Mia</b>	<b>Logan Gregor</b>	<b>Seamus John Ryan Thomas</b>	<b>Natalie Summer</b>	<b>Gita Jane</b>	<b>Ruth Tilda</b>	<b>Jett Angus</b>	<b>Seth Freddie Liam</b>	<b>Courtney Maddie Fiona Ashley Jess</b>	<b>Harry Justin</b>	<b>Max Brendan Peter</b>	<b>Tegan Eilish Jennifer Ava Katie</b>	<b>Cara Emma Lucy</b>	<b>Reece Kristoffer Conor</b>
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## **Interview themes with excerpts**

A working document was created, detailing key themes emerging from interview (and observation) data. This document included excerpts from interview transcriptions. Themes are listed below, followed by exemplar pages from the document (relating to themes under ‘the centrality of the body and bodily appearances’).

### The centrality of the body and bodily appearances

- Body objectification and the body representative of self and social worth
- Defining value (desirable bodies)
- Undesirable bodies
- Normalisation and boundaries of acceptability
- Fear of fat and fat empathy

### Projects of the self

- The virtuous, successful and perfect self
- A distinct yet acceptable self
- Policing the body and body work
- Body work successes and failures
- Self-regulation and positive/negative emotions
- Body dissatisfaction
- Age and gender issues

### Virtual social worlds

- Omnipresence of social media
- (Self)ie culture and publicised images
- Enhanced body visibility and scrutiny
- Social (and online) comparisons
- Unrealistic ideals and the virtual self
- Young people as media (re)producers
- Seeking affirmation online
- Interaction norms and frustrations with social media
- Face destruction and infamy
- Learning about health and the body online

### Undercurrents of healthism:

- A narrow conception of health
- The toned lean and fit body
- The healthy lifestyle
- Constructing the healthy/fit image and identity
- Healthy as fashionable
- Individual responsibility - Making good, right and admirable choices
- Risk protection and future-proofing the self

### Social power struggles

- The competitive social life
- Capital conversion
- Social hierarchies and groupings
- Social inclusion and exclusion
- Desire for affirmation
- Social treatment

### The celebrification of self

- Becoming known within fame networks
- The celebrity identity
- Surveillance and scrutiny
- Spread-ability of social information
- The dramatic social life



### The physical education environment

- The influence of school and PE in constructing health and body knowledge
- Health in theory: the PE classroom
- Reasons for valuing PE and physical activity
- Disengagement from PE
- PE inside v physical activity outside school
- The socially unsafe PE environment
- PE, identity construction and self-presentation concerns
- The socially safe PE environment

### Resistance

- Desires for body freedom
- Resilience to dominant discourse:
- Internal battles:
- Inevitability
- The deficit approach
- Body acceptance
- Wider definitions of health
- Acknowledging and breaking down barriers

## **Example pages from the document:**

### The centrality of the body and bodily appearances

The body was very central within school culture and to pupils' identity constructions. Bodies were intensely scrutinised (or at least perceived to be intensely scrutinised) and considered to represent an individual, their social status and their 'image'.

#### **Subtheme 1 (body objectification and the body representative of self and social worth)**

Pupil talk indicated that the body was very symbolic. Certain bodies could gain respect or conversely lead a person to be considered weak, making them the target of unpleasant social treatment.

#### *Examples from the data (interviews):*

Mollie: ...cause sometimes people just look at your appearance and make judgements they don't actually see the person that you actually are.

Int: Do you think that people your age spend a lot of time thinking about the way that they look and all these sorts of things?

Both: Yeah.

Mia: People kinda copy what other people look like.

Mollie: Cause that's pretty much what people judge you on.

Int: Ah okay, d'you think? Like mostly on appearances?

Mia: Yeah they judge you on the way like the clothes you wear now.

Int: Does that affect like whose friends with who?

[pause]

Mollow: Not really sure... I think people are trying, em, to be people that they are not to impress others.

.....  
Int: So if you weren't wearing make-up how would you feel? Would you feel different?

Both: yeah

Natalie: less confident.

Int: In all sort of situations?

Natalie: Well people might think, oh she has got a lot of spots or uneven skin tone and stuff, just like that

Summer: Yeah

Int: So your image is quite important?

Natalie: Yeah cause people judge you

Summer: I would feel like people were talking about me

Natalie: Cause people judge you first on the way you look before you meet them, before you start talking to them.

Int: Ah okay. Would you say that you would do that as well? Would you judge people first on the way they look?

Natalie: Yeah I would.

Summer: Yeah.

Int: What sort of judgements would you make about different people?

Natalie: Just depends what they wear and what they look like and stuff.

.....  
Ryan: If you are more broad then you are seen as like, I dunno like, you are seen as not weak.

Seamus: Yeah

Int: Okay

Ryan: Em, if you're like really strong no one will try and push you and stuff like that but if you are not really, I dunno, I don't know the word, but people will push you and stuff like that.

Seamus: ... like people expect you to be strong, like, if you like see a boy who is like really weak you just think he's not that confident, you just wouldn't see him as strong.

Ryan: ... Well if you have put on weight you will obviously see that or lost weight or if you've gained weight but in muscle you are going to see that. A lot of people like shove you in the corridors and that but if you are able to stand and not like fall or even bash into them you will know that you are getting stronger

Seamus: It's quite physical

Ryan: Because at the start of S1 it was always us that were getting pushed over but now it's all, it's all sort of calmed down a bit, we don't really fall over, like we are not pushovers because we have got like older and stronger.

.....  
Int: Okay, but do some people use it [social media] for posting pictures?

Jane: yeah, a lot of people.

Gita: A lot

Int: like pictures of themselves or...

Gita: Yeah, like sometimes it's like...

Jane: Without... it's like in their underwear

Gita: Not always though. Sometimes it's just like of their face and sometimes it's them on holidays and stuff like that.

.....  
Int: What would people judge each other most on?

Ellis: What you wear.

Kristoffer: Yeah

Ellis: Like how you are dressed, if you are fat, if you have nice hair, if you've got a lot of friends, if you're a slag

Kristoffer: yeah

Reece: All that stuff

Conor: Yeah, yeah

Int: Okay so what do you mean by if you are a slag?

Kristoffer: [laughs]

Int: [pause] I mean, like would you judge certain girls and things like that?

Kristoffer: Oh yeah

Reece: Definitely

Kristoffer: Definitely

Reece: A lot yeah

Int: Like for what though? [pause]... Don't be embarrassed just say whatever...

Reece: Just for minging things that they've done

Kristoffer: Yeah, cause like how many people they've slept with and stuff like that

Reece: It's just like what minging things they have done. Cause like when one person knows, everyone knows. It's like we are living on a farm like

Kristoffer: [laughs]

Int: So, right, you are saying girls get judged in that way, do boys get judged in that way?

Reece: No boys get respect for that, like that's the difference between boys and girls like girls can go around doing that they get slagged but if it's a guy you get a wee high five at the end of the day... unless she's a minor

Kristoffer + Conor: Oooh! [laugh]

Int: Okay, so how do you feel about that sort of divide there, do you think that's okay or...?

Reece: It's just the way it always is, that's the way it's always been in a way, like obviously not when I was like nine or anything but growing up girls are judged on that and it's not like they are seen as objects, like girls are girls but some are judged a lot more than others

Kristoffer: Yeah

Reece: But everyone's judged

Int: So what would boys judge girls mostly on, would it be that sort of thing, like would you judge on looks...

Reece: Aye, yeah

Kristoffer: Probably the looks

Reece: Looks, that's the main thing guys talk about

Int: So what expectations would you have on girls?

Kristoffer: Dunno... [laughs]... dunno...! [red face] I actually have no idea like.

Reece: Yeah you do! [laughs]

Reece: We have had many a chats about this!

Kristoffer: [Laughs]

Int: Pretend I'm not here! [laughs]

Kristoffer: No cause you just like see a girl and you think oh she's like pretty

Reece: Nah, you don't think she's pretty, you think she's hot like!

Conor: [Laughs]

Kristoffer: But then she's got like a different figure to another girl.

Reece: No she's butherface.

Kristoffer: But you still think the two girls are hot like.

Reece: You heard of butherface?

Int: No?

Reece: Like nice body... nice legs... BUT HER FACE.

Int: Oh I see, okay, so would her figure be important?

Kristoffer: I dunno like.  
 Reece: It seems really shallow but yeah.  
 Kristoffer: Nah, I wouldn't say just her figure but obviously like how she looks.  
 Reece: You are making me sound like a bad person!  
 All: [laugh]  
 Conor: ...I think people like, I dunno like, I don't think I think differently about people according to their weight, like I wouldn't like to think that I do but I think definitely, I think girls particularly are obsessed with it, like I think they judge each other about it. Like I think boys are quite guilty of objectifying girls.  
 Reece: yeah.  
 Conor: a lot.  
 Int: uh hu.  
 Conor: Em, a lot a lot.

## Subtheme 2 - Defining value (desirable and undesirable bodies)

A body that looked healthy, fit, lean and toned was very much valued. Strength was particularly desired amongst boys (e.g. a 'six pack' and muscular biceps) but a number of girls also expressed a desire for a muscular physique. Girls also valued 'curvy' bodies. 'Skinny' was highlighted as undesirable by some but others expressed an explicit desire to be thin. Pupils' descriptions of the ideal body were very specific and detailed. Fat or big bodies were classed undesirable by pupils (unless these were muscular).

### *Examples from the data (interviews):*

Seth: Yeah, I agree like, it's usually like the gym comments that I hear most of the time, I don't get them from my friends because my friends are actually good people but, you know, it's...eh... you hear them, you hear them a lot.  
 Int: So what's the gym comments, what's that?  
 Seth: Ah you're putting on too much, you need to hit the gym.  
 Freddie: Yeah. I don't see a six pack, urgh urgh.  
 Int: Oh okay.  
 Seth: yeah that's true and also, eh I dunno if we mentioned this before but it's also expectations from girls that guys aspire to.  
 Int: Ah, okay, that's interesting.  
 Seth: And to, to exercise more and look more appealing.  
 Int: So what sort of expectations would that be?  
 Seth: Em, like to, I mean because, girls they see all of their favourite celebrities with, you know, six packs and things like that and they want somebody to be with who is like that.  
 .....  
 Int: So, when you go to the gym outside of school, what are the reasons that you would go there?  
 Fiona: To get skinny  
 All: laugh  
 Int: To get skinny?  
 Maddie: summer bod! [laughs]  
 .....  
 Int: So you keep saying skinny, is skinny the main thing?  
 All: yeah, uh hu, aye  
 Int: is there anything else though apart from skinny?  
 Fiona: Bums and boobs  
 Ashley: I don't want boobs, nah.

Courtney: No but you actually see like...  
Fiona: it's not like, I think you think about what boys like so if you're like a size 6 and you're just thin  
Ashley: Like girls on Instagram put up bikini photos, like I would never ever do that  
Courtney: No but you know like people actually have like no like features like a big bum or big boobs or something but boys like seem to like it cause they're skinny  
Int: Okay  
Maddie: Oh I know who you are talking about I've got someone in mind  
Int: So you think boys prefer skinny?  
Fiona: Nah, I think boys prefer... curvy?  
Ashley: I think boys prefer skinny.  
Courtney: yeah, like stick thin.  
Int: Or a mixture of both?  
Fiona: Aye if you've got a skinny tummy and nice legs and if you've got boobs, I think that's the ideal  
Ashley: Yeah.

.....  
Mia: I wish I was like Alexis and Violet and all that, and they've got like skinny legs and all that and... em... yeah and they have small body frames.

.....  
Natalie: Not too muscley like that, toned belly but not muscley though, I would not do that!  
Int: These aren't necessarily celebrities but are there any you would most likely to compare yourself against and think oh I would like to look like...  
Both: That one [both point to Instagram shot]  
Summer: She's got a nice body  
Natalie: Yeah she has got a really nice body  
Int: What makes her...  
Natalie: Well she has got a flat belly...  
Summer: A flat belly.  
Natalie: ...and she has got a good bum, so.  
Int: So what's a good bum?  
Natalie: Round.  
Summer: yeah.  
Natalie: Round and big but if you don't have one then you just gotta do squats but people are too lazy sometimes, so... [pause]. Yeah but Beyonce isn't like that but she has still got a good figure.  
Int: So there is kinda a range?  
Natalie: Like she is curvy but it's still nice

.....  
Mia: I got weighed yesterday as well but I wasn't really happy with my... my weight, so...  
Int: No? Why not?  
Mia: Cause it was quite shocking what it was ... cause I was weighed and I was like 11 stone... so I was... tha... that's quite big...  
Int: Do you worry about your weight?  
Mia: No... I wonder... it was quite shocking when I got weighed, it came up 11 stone, it was weird.  
Int: hm... how did that make you feel? Were you... like cause your saying that it was weird did that...  
Mia: I thought maybe that was really fat, 11 stone  
Int: Did that worry you?  
Mia: Yeah

.....  
Logan: Cause you see some people on like bodybuilding shows and they proper get like that [flexes biceps] but then like, have you ever seen these programmes and it's like world's biggest bodies, you just, what would you rather, would you rather have the world's biggest body like that [flexes muscles] or the world's biggest body like that [brings arms out from belly]?

.....  
Chloe: And like going on holiday, like bikini, like oh God.

Emma: Don't want to look awful in a bikini  
 Chloe: Like you have to have a flat stomach  
 Emma: And like prom, like you are always going to look at those photos  
 Chloe: Yeah  
 Emma: So like you wanna look good, you don't wanna look  
 Chloe: fat  
 Emma: Like a fatty [sighs]

.....

Int: Okay and would it be horrendous if people were talking about you cause of the way you looked?  
 Like in a bad way?  
 Lucy: yeah, God yeah, yeah I would hate it  
 Chloe: I would be like, I would be so humiliated, like if I ever heard somebody like I dunno, like oh she  
 has put on lots of weight, I would be like so upset... I don't think I could come back into school.  
 Emma: yeah.  
 Chloe: More so than if they said oh she's quite ugly if that makes sense?  
 Int: yeah, okay. So would the worst comments be...  
 Emma: Like you're fat.  
 Chloe: like to call me fat, yeah.  
 Emma: That would be like the worst thing that someone could call me would be fat.  
 Cara: The worst thing that someone could say, uh hu.  
 Int: So would weight and fat be the main thing you would worry about?  
 All: yeah.  
 Chloe: definitely.  
 Lucy: Like I think if you asked any girl, like every girl would say that the worst thing to say to you would  
 be something about your weight

.....

Natalie Well if you look bigger like it will be harder to find someone.  
 Summer: But then if you are like really skinny cause you've like wanted to be skinny.  
 Natalie: They won't like it either.  
 Summer: If you're like too skinny like you can see your bones and that.  
 Int: When you mean find someone do you mean boyfriend or something like that?  
 Summer: yeah and sometimes your friends.  
 Natalie: yeah or husband or something like when someone's at the right age, a man will probably have  
 a perfect, ideal woman in their brain but it might not be a bigger lady.

.....

Tegan: Yeah, definitely wouldn't want to look like that [points to thin model as others agree, no]  
 Int: Why is that?  
 Katie: Well I think that looks unhealthy  
 Tegan: Yeah for health reasons  
 Eilish: Cause I think they look just as unhealthy as the people who are overweight, it's just as bad  
 Tegan: It's just that one looks like so bad [again pointing to thin model]  
 Eilish: It's quite scary  
 Tegan: Cause her bones are like out and everything  
 Katie: I know that's not nice

.....

Gita: I think it looks a bit bad because they look a bit anorexic  
 Jane: That looks a bit bad ... I would hate to be like that... that's just anorexic [thin model]  
 Gita: Yeah, that's, I think that's quite bad  
 Int: Okay, but there is a bit of a range but what you are saying you wouldn't want bodies that were too  
 skinny but that you would like them to be skinny, yeah? Is that what you are saying?  
 Both: yeah.  
 Jane: Like not anorexic like that, it's just you can see her ribcage and...

Gita: Yeah I know, it's not nice to be that skinny

.....  
Ashley: See I wouldn't want to be skinny, I'd rather have a healthy body like fair enough to be skinny but also to have like muscle on you and to be a nice weight. Not to have a thigh gap cause I think thigh gaps are absolutely disgusting.

Fiona: Oh yeah, there was like a big craze about the thigh gaps, remember.

Ashley: And I think that's absolutely, absolutely minging...

Int: Where would these crazes, like would these crazes mostly be on...

Fiona: Twitter... and like all these websites.

### Subtheme 3 - normalisation and boundaries of acceptability

Bodies 'too fat' or 'too thin' (i.e. extreme) were considered 'abnormal', 'unacceptable' and 'unhealthy'. However, the boundaries for too fat and too thin were different. For example, very slim bodies were not always considered too thin whilst some slightly 'overweight' bodies were considered too fat. There were also glimpses of an acceptance at any size discourse breaking through pupil talk.

#### *Examples from the data (interviews):*

Mia: ... Cause when I was 10 I was like so skinny. Like I was just normal.

Int: Uh hu

Mia: But now I am just like, I know I am quite big, that I need to cut down on obviously the junk food ... Like all the other girls they have like small like body frames and all that and I've got like a... like a big one and I always feel like cause I'm the tallest I'm the biggest as well.

.....  
Gita: Well healthy would be like you're not too skinny but not too fat but like you have some fat on you but not a lot

Jane: Yeah, I'd be happy with that body [Rebecca Addlington] I mean it's not too fat and it's not too skinny and its nice ... If I was to choose a body out of all of them, I'd actually have that one, not because she is like the Duchess of Cambridge but just because her body is nice.

Gita: Because she is like skinny and stuff

Jane: yeah. Not too skinny but not too fat.

.....  
Int: Okay and so what also makes a body healthy, you have talked about health in general but what makes a body healthy?

Tegan: I would say it is like not being too fat! [laughs] or too skinny. Just like being in the middle, you can have like some meat on you.

.....  
Harry: ... like I just want to not be on any of the extreme sides...

Harry: ... I reckon it is quite nice to, I dunno, kind of take a pause and appreciate the fact that you are not doing anything in excess that kind of leads to you being overweight or anything and that, em, you're kind of controlling what you do which leads to the way that you look.

Harry: Em well I think a boy probably does tend to, again it varies with different people but, I dunno, if a boy was, if there was like, obviously in a hypothetical situation, but if there was a girl who was, em, anorexic and a girl who was overweight and a girl who was neither, just middle, the boy probably would

tend to, I dunno maybe tend to look more at the fact that the girl who has got nothing wrong with her... but personally I wouldn't like focus on that.

.....  
Gita: Em... some people can't because some people have like different body shapes so like some people can't actually have that cause their body is bigger.

Jane: Yeah, cause if you, if all people had different shapes which we have and they're all the same like skinniness and that well it would look bad, I think it would look bad. Like different shapes because one probably might have huge hips and then the others might have no hips at all.

Gita: So yeah, it depends on like your body shape on how much like fat and like how skinny you should be. Like it depends on your body shape.

.....  
Courtney: yeah! like it sorta puts you on a downer and like being in a class with really skinny people as well it sort of makes you feel really down about yourself in a way... But I suppose everyone's built differently but still...

#### **Subtheme 4 - fear of fat and fat empathy**

Becoming fat was considered a terrible thing to happen to a person. Pupils expressed empathy for those they considered to be fat or overweight. Although a 'skinny' body was frequently categorised as undesirable, pupils did not express a fear of becoming too thin, nor claimed to feel sorry for those considered too thin.

#### *Examples from the data (interviews):*

Int: So why is fitness so important to you do you think?

Logan: I think because mainly like, you don't want to, I know this is quite offensive but you don't really wanna look ugly.

Gregor: Bigger

Logan: Bigger

Int: hm

Logan: I am trying to say it without a harsh word

Int: No, that's okay, say whatever you think it doesn't matter

Gregor: And also I say it would probably make you live longer cause say if you are just sitting around doing nothing you get fat and it will probably give you a disease like...

Logan: It's more attractive

Gregor: ...I dunno, diabetes or something but if you are active all the time then that will be alright.

Logan: You get more chance of a heart attack

Int: So would it be quite a bad thing to become overweight?

Gregor: Yeah, I would be, that would be quite em, for some people I don't think they realise how important it is and its quite an important thing cause like you don't wanna die when you are really young

Int: Yeah. And how do you think you would feel if that happened, if you became overweight or something?

Gregor: I think I would try and fix it right away

Logan: Yeah, I think it would be... like a lot of people nowadays don't really care about your feelings and how this is going to upset you so they will take the mick outta you and call you fatso and that and, em, like you just wanna put yourself right where you are and like mainly like its more attractive when you're not fat and it's a bit offensive when people will call you fat cause you just feel like horrible but you just gotta get yourself into PE and it's the funnest thing to do



Gregor: Also like even if, I have a couple a' friends who are maybe bigger than me [motions with arms] but yeah, you know what I mean, and I don't call them fat cause it makes them feel bad about themself  
Int: yeah

Gregor: and then, and then you feel guilty about it cause they get upset and you feel real guilty so it's kinda up to you and up to your friends what they do but I think it's a safer option for your life to be healthy and stuff

Int: And more attractive, would that be for other people or...

Logan: Mainly to myself because like if anyone ever called me fat, I'd like, I'd like hate it but like I can imagine some people around the world how they must feel when people call them fat cause it just feel like no one likes you.

.....  
Int: So you talked a bit about being called names and things... what would be the worst thing someone could be called in school?

Gregor: Well it depends all on...

Logan: Fat

Int: fat?

Logan: Just fat, yeah

Gregor: Depending on like appearance, like cause see if you were fat and someone called you fat you would take that really...

Logan: I'd be, I'd be devastated

Gregor: offensive and if someone maybe said something about your family or something.

Logan: Yeah I think that's the worst. Like if one of your family members is fat and say they are picking you up from school and they are all like who was that chubby in the car and what if it was like one of your family members or one of your best friend's mams who was picking you up, imagine like, you wouldn't want to tell them cause then they would feel rubbish..

.....  
Int: So is doing exercise quite important to boys of your age?

Harry: Yeah, I think boys wouldn't really want to be seen as, well nowadays, boys wouldn't really want to be seen as the fat kind of guy

Justin: Em, I think I agree with Harry about the fat kind of thing, like you don't want to be seen as fat cause that can lead to like bullying and stuff as well, even just feeling bad about yourself like that would make it worse.

.....  
Int: would it be an issue in school if you were say too fat or too thin?

Tegan: Not really too thin. I would probably say more if you were more fat then you would probably get bullied

Katie: Yeah or like people would talk about you more

Int: Would that be behind your back or to your face?

Tegan: Behind your back

Katie: No one really gets slagged off to their face as such.

.....  
Int: Ah okay, okay. Where do you get your information about like your, like you're saying the food you eat, the exercise you do, where would you get your kinda information?

Cara: ...my mum's quite into it and like things like online there's loadsa stuff about how to be healthy and stuff... and even like adverts and programmes on TV when it's like, like my fat children or something. Like, I think that's such motivation, like I never ever want to look like that in my life.

*Some examples from the data (observations):*

Each group is given an area of the room to sit in and are told to come up with a team name. I stand near a group who cannot decide on a name and who are discussing the possibilities animatedly. All of a sudden one Alexis exclaims, "let's be called fat club!" The others in the group laugh, "haha... fat club." Ben responds with a 'joke', "we can't call ourselves fat club, that would be offensive to Jacob." Violet gasps as Ben says this and some of the other pupils go, "ooooooh," followed by some more giggles. "Come on then, let's think of a name," Violet says, trying to get the group back on track. Alexis responds again, "we are called fat club!"

.....

Logan puts his hand up to answer, "if you do exercise then you won't be fat and then that's good because if you are fat you might be all sad and stuff and not really have friends." Another boy puts up his hand, "exercise will stop you getting fat because if you are fat you might not feel good about yourself." The girl beside him, Mollie, interrupts him and nudges him, "you're not meant to say fat," she says, "you are meant to say big." As this goes on, Logan turns to the pair behind him and whispers loudly in a funny accent, "I don't wanna be fat." He says this three times. As this is going on I look over to Malcolm, who has been teased about his weight in the past and who is sitting beside the largest boy in the class, Blake. Both are looking down at the table and not making eye contact with at anyone else.

.....

Malcolm is struggling with his serve and co-ordination as he tries to play badminton. There are too many pupils for the number of courts so some are off umpiring. Dana is umpiring this game and Helen, who is injured, is chatting quietly to her. Helen quietly says to Dana (almost in a whisper), "I feel sorry for him [Malcolm] though." "Why?" Dana responds. Helen pauses for a moment, "well because he is so big."

## **Appendix G: Ethical Approval**

- **University of Edinburgh** (p 354)
- **City of Edinburgh Council** (p 355)

## Ethical approval (University of Edinburgh)

Approval for this study from the University of Edinburgh was granted in two phases. The first phase of research (participant observation only) was deemed to be a 'level one' application and therefore was not commented upon by the ethics committee but was kept for tracking purposes. Ethical approval for the second phase of research (including interviews) was granted following the submission of a separate ethics application:



Research & Knowledge Exchange  
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Email [rke-education@ed.ac.uk](mailto:rke-education@ed.ac.uk)  
<http://www.ed.ac.uk>

Sarah Maclsaac  
SPEHS  
Room 4.28  
St Leonard's Land

18 February 2015

Dear Sarah

*Physical Education, Healthism and the Ideal Body: An ethnographic study*

The School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee has now considered your request for ethical approval for the studies detailed in the your application.

This is to confirm that the Sub-Committee is happy to approve the application and that the research meets the School Ethics Level 2 criterion. This is defined as "covering novel procedures or the use of atypical participant groups – usually projects in which ethical issues might require more detailed consideration but were unlikely to prove problematic".

A standard condition of this ethical approval is that you are required to notify the Committee, of any significant proposed deviation from the original protocol. The Committee also needs to be notified if there are any unexpected results or events once the research is underway that raise questions about the safety of the research.

Yours sincerely

Dr S Bayne  
Convener, School Ethics Sub-Committee

pp

**Ethical approval (City of Edinburgh Council)**

• EDINBURGH •  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Sarah MacIsaac  
1 Beech Terrace  
PENCAITLAND  
Tranent  
EH34 5DG

**Date** 14 April 2014

**Your ref**

**Our ref** SCS/JAI

**Direct dial** 0131 469 3162

Dear Ms MacIsaac

I am writing in response to your application requesting permission to undertake research in schools in The City of Edinburgh.

Your request has been considered, and I am pleased to inform you that you have been given permission in principle to undertake your research. I must stress that it is the policy of this Authority to leave the final decision about participation in research projects of this kind to Head Teachers and their staff, so that approval in principle does not oblige any particular establishment to take part.

I request that you forward a copy of your completed findings to me when they become available. In this case an electronic summary of your thesis would be preferred. Your work may be of interest to a number of staff in the Children and Families Department.

I would like to thank you for contacting the Children and Families Department about your work, and wish you every success in the completion of your project.

Yours sincerely



JULIE INNES  
Administrative Officer

**Business Support, Schools and Community Services, Children and Families**  
Level 1.2, Waverley Court, 4 East Market Street, Edinburgh, EH8 8BG  
Tel 0131 469 3162 Fax 0131 529 6213 E-mail [julie.innes@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:julie.innes@edinburgh.gov.uk)



## **Appendix H: Informed consent**

- **Participants** (pp 357-360)
  - **Parents** (p 361)



## Project - PE, Health and the Body

My name is Sarah MacIsaac and I am doing a project at the University of Edinburgh. My project will investigate what young people think about PE, health and the body. As part of this, I would like to find out what you think it means to be healthy and how important health is to you. My project will also consider what school pupils do in their PE lessons. Therefore, I would also like to watch some of your PE lessons.

If you become involved in the research:

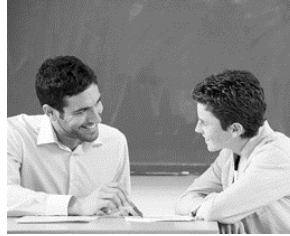
- I will talk to you in a group of 4-6 people about various issues related to PE, health and the body. This will probably take the time of one PE lesson and will be audio recorded.



- I may observe you in some of your PE classes and take written notes.



- I may talk to you again by yourself to find out more of your thoughts about PE, health and the body. Our conversation may be audio recorded.



Anything that you tell me or anything that I see in PE lessons will be treated as confidential. Your real name will not be used in my report and no one will be able to identify you from anything that you say or do.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

It is completely up to you whether you take part or not and you can say yes or no. If you say yes, you will also be free to change your mind and to stop being involved in the project any time that you wish.

**If you would like to take part, please sign the attached form and return it either to me or to your class PE teacher**

Thank you for reading this letter and for your help.

Regards,

Sarah MacIsaac



Here are some of the issues we may talk about:

Health:

We may discuss what you think it means to be healthy, how it feels to be healthy and how important health is to you. We may also talk about how you can tell if someone is healthy and how you learn about health.

Exercise and physical activity:

We may talk about your thoughts about exercise and physical activity – what you think it means to be active and how important being active is to you. We may also discuss the things that help you or stop you from being active and the ways that you feel when you do exercise.

Physical Education:

We may talk about your PE experiences, what PE is like for you and how it makes you feel. We might discuss the best and worst parts of PE and will talk about the different ways you learn in PE. You will also be given the opportunity to suggest ways in which PE can be made better.

School and social wellbeing:

We may discuss various social issues within school. For example how important friends are, what it means and feels like to be included or excluded from friendship groups and how different people form opinions of each other within school.

The body and appearances:

We will also talk about the body and how important the body is to you. We may discuss some of the concerns that people your age have about the body and may also talk about how people form opinions of different bodies. As part of this we might talk about the influence that social media sites have on the way that you view your body and will also talk about how people feel about their bodies within the PE environment.



## Project - PE, Health and the Body

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to take part. It is completely up to you whether you would like to take part or not. If you would like to be part of the research project, you may be selected to take part in a group discussion with some of your friends and I will let you know when and where this will be. It is likely to be during your PE time.

Please make sure that you have read all of the information about the project before signing and returning this form. By returning the form you are stating the following:

- I have read and understood the information given to me about the project
- I am fully aware of what is involved in the study.
- I understand that the results of the project may be published but that my name or identity will not be made known.
- I know I can stop being involved in the project at any stage.

If you would like to take part, please tick the box saying yes. If you would not like to take part, please tick the box saying no. Once you have done this, sign and print your name in the space below.

YES, I would like to take part

NO, I would not like to take part

Signed.....

Please print your name.....



Sarah MacIsaac  
Bicentennial Education Fellow  
Institute for Sport, Physical  
Education and Health Sciences  
Moray House School of Education  
E-mail:  
sjohnso2@staffmail.ed.ac.uk  
Tel: 0131 651 6683

Dear parent/guardian,

Your child has been asked if they would like to partake in a research project which is being conducted by the University of Edinburgh. The research will be looking at how young people in Scotland understand health, the body and the relationship between health and the body within the context of Physical Education and a health and wellbeing curriculum. Your child's involvement in the study would consist of the following:

- Taking part in a group discussion along with approximately 4-6 of their peers where they would be asked to discuss various issues related to health, the body and Physical Education.
- Having some of their PE lessons observed by a researcher.
- In some cases, being selected to take part in a one-to-one interview with a researcher where they would be asked to discuss in more depth their understandings of health, the body and Physical Education.

All findings would remain completely confidential and your child's participation would be anonymous. Your child could also withdraw from the study at any time.

Please return the slip below if you **do not** consent to your child's involvement in this study. If you would like further information about this study, please get in touch using the details at the top of this letter. Thank you for taking time to consider this request.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sarah L. MacIsaac'.

Sarah MacIsaac (University of Edinburgh)

---

I have read the information above information and have come to the following decision:

No, I do not wish my child to take part in the study

Signed.....date.....