

# “I WOULDN'T CALL IT BULLYING”

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MASCULINE  
EMBODIMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES

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EDDEBI Research Exchange Group – March 23, 2017

# **PRESENTATION OUTLINE**

POSITIONALITY

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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# **PRESENTATION OUTLINE**

## **POSITIONALITY**

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# POSITIONALITY

- Education
- Teaching experience
- Trends in health and physical education



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# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- The literature review for this project included literature pertaining to masculinity studies, critical health studies, and physical education
- This was a combination of individual areas of research
- Three areas of research:
  1. Masculinity theory and masculinity hierarchies
  2. Weight-centered health paradigm in PE
  3. Alternative approaches challenging masculinity and health in PE



# MASCULINITY THEORY AND MASCULINITY HIERARCHIES IN PE





# MASCULINITY THEORY AND MASCULINITY HIERARCHIES IN PE

- “Masculinity” is defined by Gard (2008) as, “the process of becoming and being male”
  - Simple definition
- Socially constructed, not biologically given (Swain, 2000)
- Males negotiate their masculinity from globally constructed “ideals”





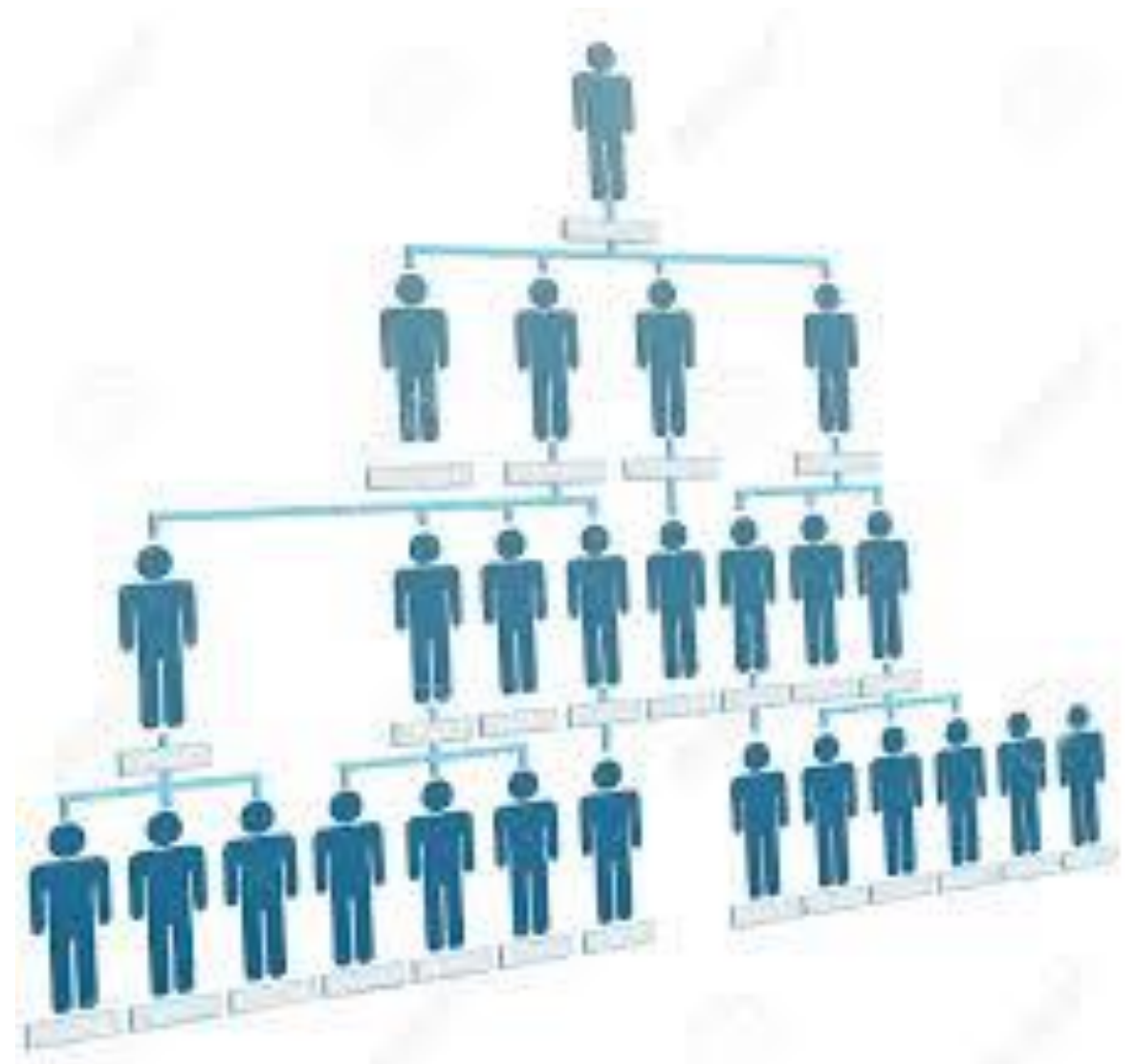
# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

- Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity has been influential in understanding how masculinity identities are constructed
- In this concept, the masculine character is said to be
  - Socially constructed (Connell, 1995)
  - Hierarchical in nature (Branham, 2003)
  - Dependent on the relations between men and women, and among men (Messerschmidt, 2012)
- **Social Capital**
  - Those that hold social capital are rewarded whilst those who don't are ostracized

# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

- After reviewing the works of Connell (1995), Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), and Messerschmidt (2012) on hegemonic theory; four main principals will be influential to this study:

1. Multiple Masculinities
2. Masculinity Hierarchies
3. Social practice and masculinity hierarchies
4. Masculinity Embodiment



# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

## Multiple Masculinities

- The process and construction of becoming and being male is contingent on the social setting and the desired traits
- There is no *one* way of being male and not something a male has or does not have

(Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011)

- Noticed as dominant or marginal



# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

## Hegemonic Hierarchies

- Hierarchies present themselves based on the most dominant and valued masculine traits within a setting
- Research has shown the existence of masculinity hierarchies in PE and the negative effects of these **hierarchies** (Atkinson, 2008; Bramham, 2003; Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Gill, Hauge & Haavind, 2011; Kehler, 2010; Norman, 2011, 2013; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011, 2014; Swain, 2001, 2003 )





# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

## Social Practice and Masculinity Hierarchies

- Schools are a key site where different masculinities are produced
- “Boys routinely organize and reorganize ways of being boys” and advocate what constitutes dominant behaviour (Kehler, 2010, p. 157)
- Hegemonic hierarchies are shaped by events and actions in different social settings (Tischler & McCaughtry, 2014).





# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

## Social Practice and Masculinity Hierarchies

- In the research of masculinity in sports-based PE, universal dominant traits (e.g. speed, strength, athleticism) have been examined classroom activities such as:
- **PE** (Bramham, 2003; Hauge & Haavind, 2011; Norman, 2011, 2013; Tischler & McCaughtry, 2011, 2014)
- **Rugby** (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Light & Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2008)
- **Football** (Swain, 2000, 2003)
- **Dance** (Gard, 2001, 2003, 2008)



# HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

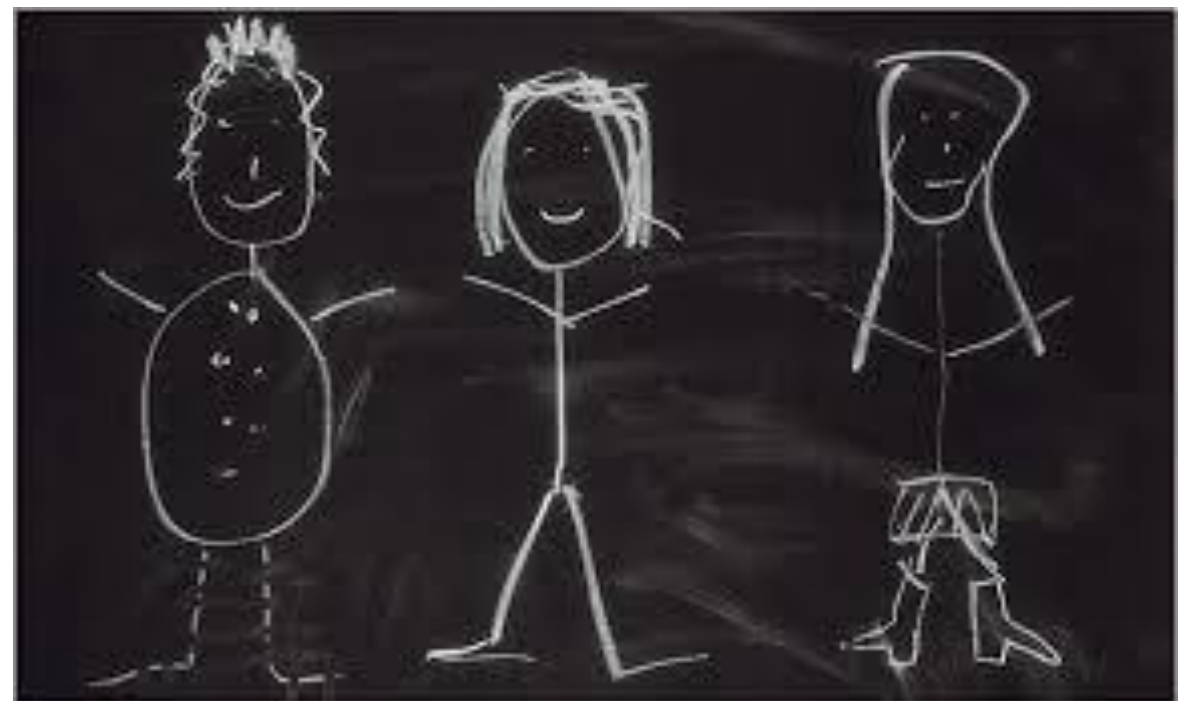
## Masculine Embodiment

- Masculinity is embodied in PE through bodily movements
- Bodies perform masculinities, thus the body and it's performance reflects self-identity (Swain, 2003)
- For example, within a PE setting, proficient body movements and body type are under constant surveillance by peers and teachers and standards of “acceptable” or “normal” determine hierarchical standing.





# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM IN PE





# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM

- Over the past 10 years, social science researchers have become interested in critical discourses surrounding obesity and youth's perception of fatness in the weight-centered health paradigm in PE (Beausoleil, 2009; Beausoleil & Petherick, 2015; Gard & Wright, 2005, 2001; MacNeill & Rail, 2010; O'Hara & Gregg, 2010; O'Reilly & Sixsmith, 2012; Rail, 2010, 2012; Rice, 2015; Sykes & McPhail, 2008; Welch, McMahon, & Wright, 2012; Wright, 2009, 2014)
- **Weight-Centered Health Paradigm**
  - Health is being wrongfully equated to one's size (O'Hara & Gregg, 2010)



# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM

## O'Reilly & Sixsmith (2012)

- “Overweight” & “obesity” have been labeled by public health officials as causes of disease and early death
- Evidence supporting this is “questionable at best” (p.98) – those not at statistical extremes have shown similar levels of health
- Assumes weight is associated with energy intake and expenditure
- “Quantifiable and controllable” is what critical obesity scholars are arguing against
- This is what is being taught in schools



# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM

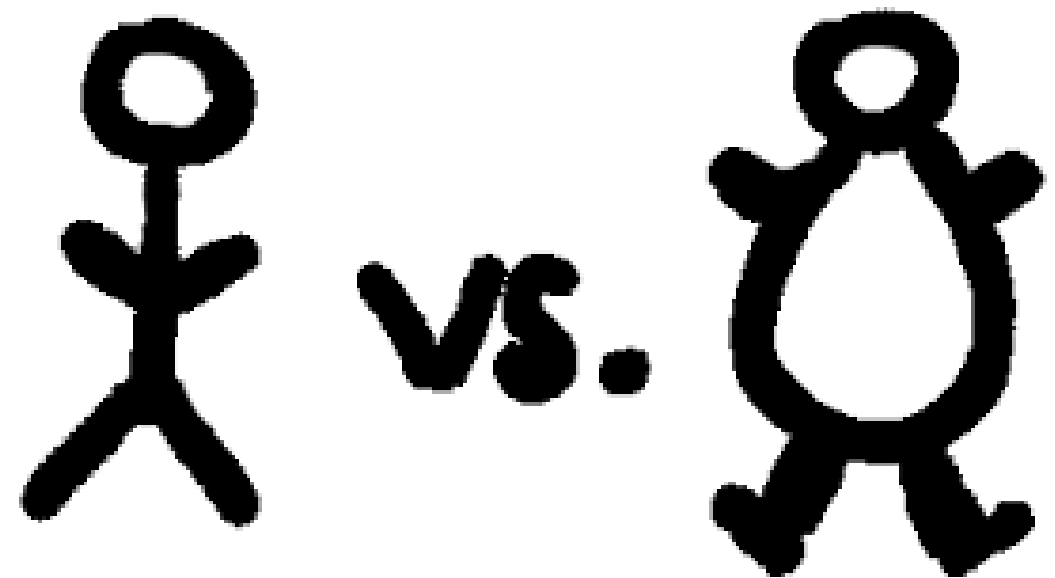
- Negative effects in PE:
  - “Obesity Epidemic” (Gard & Wright, 2005)
  - Outdated procedures – fitness tests, body weighing, BMI
  - Stigmatizing those who do not fit the body “ideal”
  - More dangerous than actual weight
  - Social and physiological harms



# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM

## Children/Adolescent Constructions of Health

- Growing literature on healthy living discourses in children/adolescents
- Youth's constructions of "health" based on messages throughout childhood
- Beausoleil and Petherick (2015)
  - Prescription of health
- Norman (2011)
  - Normalcy
  - Stylized body



**'Fat' Newfoundland review prompts call for better fitness**

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## **Obesity rates rise above national average in N.L.**

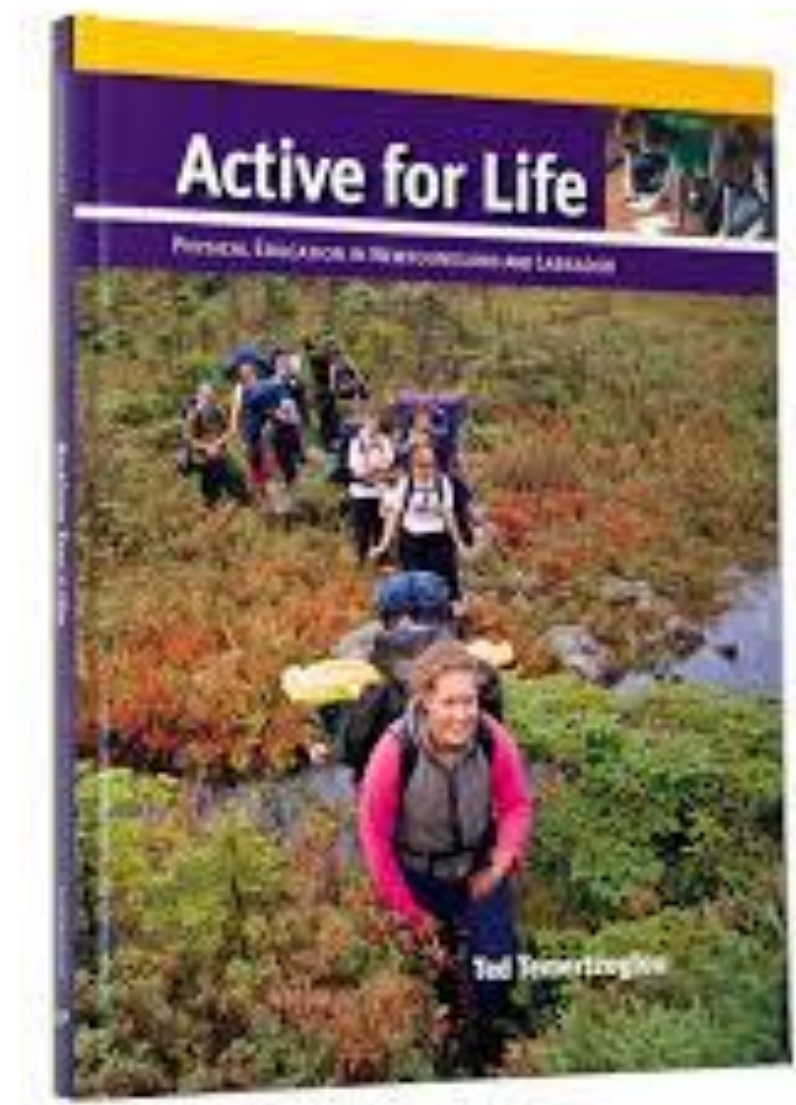
Famed Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard goes to Newfoundland, calls everybody fat

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**New York Times writer shocked at 'fat' Newfoundlanders**

# WEIGHT-BASED HEALTH PARADIGM AND NEWFOUNDLAND (NL)

- In accordance with the “obesity epidemic”, policy makers across Canada have established PE curriculums set out to counteract “obesity” across the country (Beausoleil, 2015)
- In NL particularly, the curriculum that has been implemented focuses on healthy eating and physical activity to combat obesity



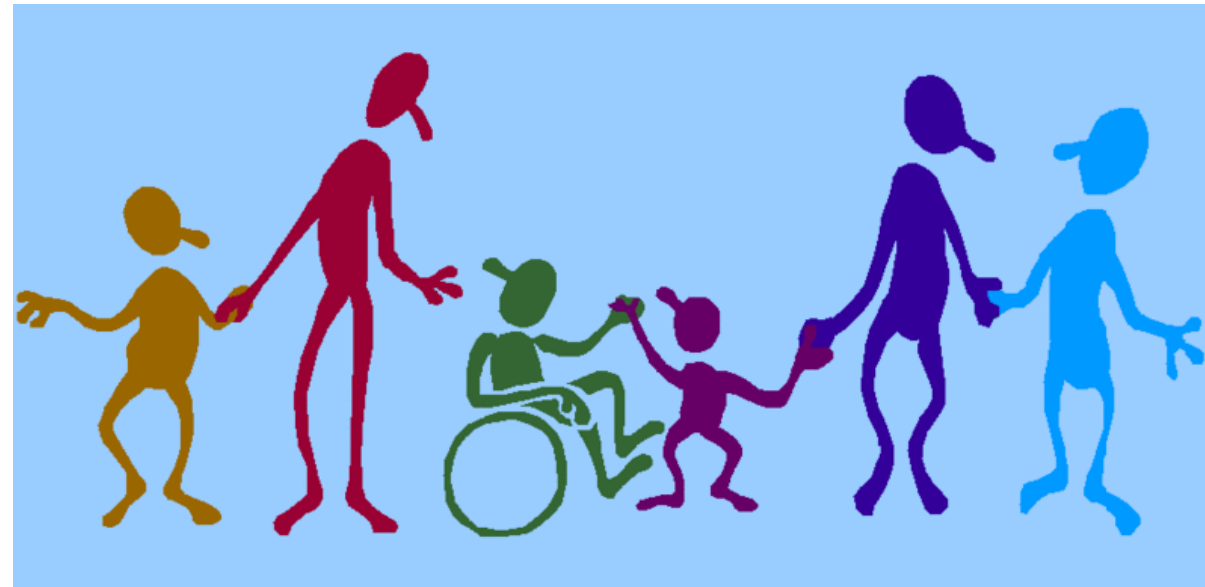


# WEIGHT-CENTERED HEALTH PARADIGM

- Issue is being addressed in Newfoundland
  - Body Image Network
  - Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
- Next step schools







# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES CHALLENGING MASCULINITY AND HEALTH IN PE



# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES CHALLENGING MASCULINITY AND HEALTH

- There is a void in the experiences of male youth and body weight
- Alternative approaches challenging masculinity will help aid in the development of approaches challenging body weight issues in the classroom



# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES CHALLENGING MASCULINITY AND HEALTH

Norman (2013)

- Examined youth from two distinct research sites of different economic status
- Results found that race and socioeconomic status had dramatic sense on embodiment
- Both groups emphasized “normalcy”





# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES CHALLENGING MASCULINITY AND HEALTH

## Gard (2008)

- Deconstructs masculinity hierarchies by using dance as a medium
- Dance is associated with feminine and homophobic stereotypes
- Tries to break down the preconceived notions of how males are supposed to move their body
- Males are all doing an activity that challenges the sport model of PE and in turn deconstructs masculinities and provides a more inclusive environment



# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES CHALLENGING MASCULINITY AND HEALTH

## Tischler & McCaughtry (2014)

- Examined masculinity hierarchies and perceptions of males in traditional and adventure PE (AdvPE)
- When students were introduced to AdvPE a drastic differential was seen in the hierarchy of males
- Masculinities “narrowed” and “shifted” based on no prior exposure making it more inclusive





POSITIONALITY

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# RESEARCH DIRECTION

- Several gaps in the research have been found in the literature and have influenced my research direction.
  1. Examining the relationship between masculinity embodiment health discourses
    - How male students of varying body shapes are viewed in the social male hierarchy of PE
    - What constitutes as “acceptable” bodies in male PE and which are marginalized
  2. Examining how students take up and act on their ideas of health and how this is influenced by PE teachers
  3. Investigating how students think that their classrooms can be made more inclusive

# RESEARCH QUESTION

- The aim of this study is to analyze how male students in NL are embodying masculinity and health, and how this influences the position males hold in the social hierarchy in PE
- In order to achieve the aim of this study, the objectives are to explore:
  1. The embodied experiences of male students in PE
  2. The influences of masculine and health ideals in PE
  3. How to create body-safe inclusive PE classrooms from the perceptions of young male students

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# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Qualitative Study
- Critical poststructural lens
  - Makes connections between language, social organization, subjectivity, and power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)
  - Language produces meaning and social reality
  - Language is how “social organization and power are defines and contested” (p. 961) and how subjectivity is identified (Richardson & Pierre, 2005).
  - Lived experience of males, language is both verbal and physical

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# METHODOLOGY/METHODS

- **Critical Ethnography**

- The purpose of an ethnographic study is to describe the cultural and social interactions of a group through extensive immersion (Lichtman, 2010).
- Critical ethnography aims to expose power relationships through sustained involvement (Fitzpatrick, 2010)
- Attempts to gain a deeper understanding of social hierarchies and inequalities that arise
- This critical ethnography attempted to address the ongoing and shifting workings of power related to masculinity and health in PE classrooms

# PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

- **Setting**
  - Rural school outside the inter-city of St. John's
  - Grade 7/9 physical education classrooms (mixed)
- **Participants**
  - Grade 7/9
  - Male students
  - Engaged teacher



# DATA COLLECTION

- **Ethics**
- **Data collection from May-June 2016**
  - Spending three days per week for 8 weeks in the classroom (36 observations)
  - Each observation is one class period (75 min) accounting for a minimum of 30 hours
- **Data collection in this study will include:**
  1. Active observations and field notes
  2. Semi-structured one-on-one/two-on-one interviews

# OBSERVATIONS

## Active participation (Lichtman, 2010)

- Immersion/Development of Rapport
- First 4 weeks

## Field Notes

- After session reflective notes
- Participants' interactions with peers/teacher, participation in activities, pedagogy, verbal/non-verbal



# INTERVIEWS

- **Semi-structured one-on-one interviews**
  - 15 students; 30-45 minutes
  - Audiotaped and transcribed verbatim
  - One-on-one/two-on-one to ensure no presence of other masculinities and to reduce anxiety
- **Safe Guarding**
  - Time/place convenient for teachers/students
  - Child protection - Visible spaces of other staff members
  - Reduction of my own influence of masculinity
  - Risks

# TRUSTWORTHINESS

- To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies have been implemented to provide rigor:
  - Credibility – prolonged engagement, trust with participants, triangulation of data sources, debriefing with supervisor (Shenton, 2004)
  - Transferability
  - Dependability





# DATA ANALYSIS

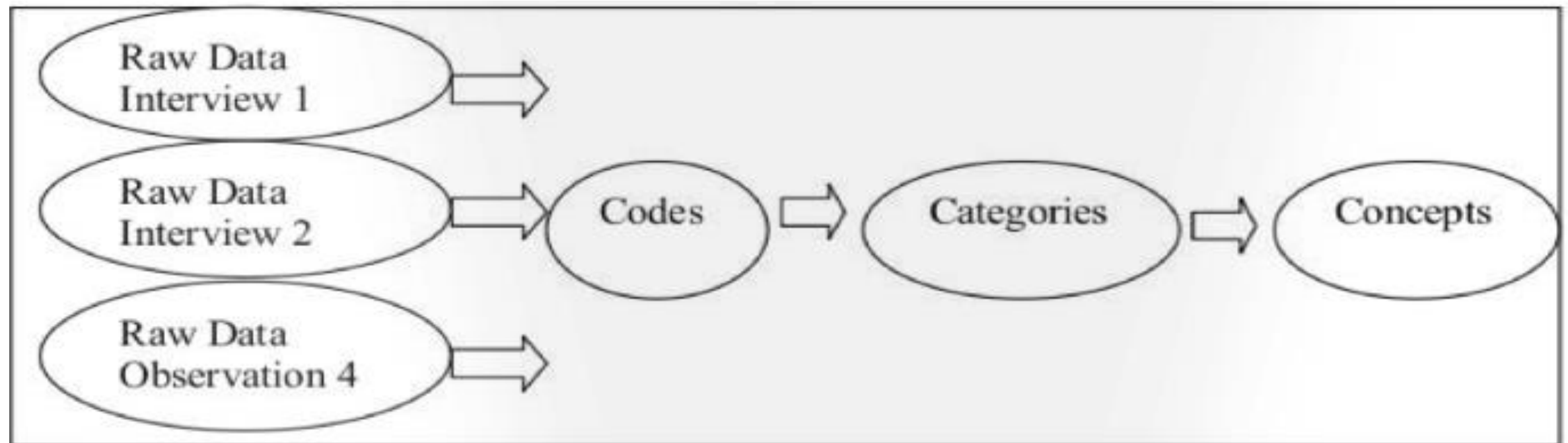
- **Poststructural Data Analysis**

- Identify patterns found in language to construct the social world of PE
- Examine how participants stratify into social positions based on health and the effects of being in this position (Norman, 2011,2013; Wright, 2004)

- **Transcription**

- All data will be transcribed and uploaded to Atlas.ti
- Coded data will be places into thematic categories to identify themes and patterns
- Three Cs – coding, categories, concepts (Lichtman, 2010)
- Pseudonyms for anonymity

# DATA ANALYSIS



- Data analysis consisted of 95 pages of detailed field notes and 103 pages of interview data
- Thematic Analysis
- 160 Codes → 9 Categories → 3 Concepts

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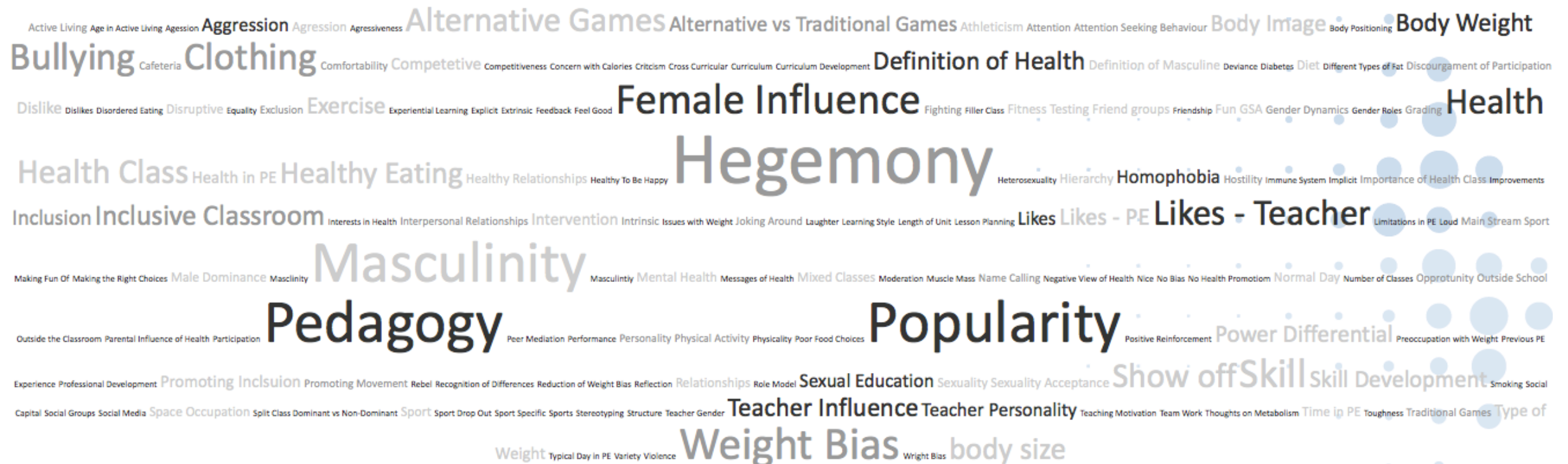
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# CODE CLOUD





# RESULTS

- In the findings, I investigate how the ways that boys in PE classrooms are experiencing and embodying masculinity and health:
  1. How male youth in the classroom are influenced and and enacting upon dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity and health
  2. Bring attention to the alternative approaches that teachers and students are conveying to challenge the dominant discourse and how this effects pleasure and participation
  3. Highlight the advancement of student-driven curricula for the promotion of positive realities in PE

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

## 1. ‘Health’ Presented as Weight

- Health was seen as controllable through eating and exercise
  - Presented as biopedagogies
  - “Desired” body attained through vigorous exercise and “healthy” eating
  - Restricted eating practices and regulated physical activity
  - Bias and oppression towards those who do not fit “desired aesthetic”
  - Messages from TV, internet, social media, and teachers

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

Interviewer: Do you have your own ideas of what it means to be healthy?

Sebastian – Just like eating well and exercising

Perry – Ya that is the main thing really

Rick – I eat good I guess, not eating McDonalds everyday

Julian – Eating good and staying active pretty much

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

Jared - people aren't respecting towards other people, whereas sometimes (pause). Sometimes people that are overweight get treated differently; get made fun of for the way they look

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

Interviewer –What kind of things do you hear about your body weight, is body weight important?

Jordan – Yes definitely, totally is, like I said when I was younger I was always lean, I didn't like the way my body looked and I wanted something to change, so losing weight was probably the biggest thing for that, like gaining muscle mass is the other thing that makes a big difference, so like not quite losing weight as much as gaining the weight in muscle instead of gaining fat makes a big difference

Andy – I have always been generally skinny, it rots me but still, people say I am skinny but people think I am weak but it is a far cry from what I actually am, I've proved enough people wrong

Jordan – And there are people like that too, there is a balance too, you need to be in that area where you are not too heavy, if you're not as heavy you aren't going to be as active, or you're not too light because if you are too light then well you start having eating problems and you are not going to be, how do I say it, you're not going to be able to grow up a 100% healthy because you know you are going to be a little bit less healthier, a little bit less muscle mass and bone strength

As well, another group of students said,

Ricky: like it depends, if you are 200 pounds I would think that you are overweight but you know if you are like 100-130

Julian: well it depends on what kind of weight that you have, if you have muscle weight or it is like fat weight



# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

## 2. The Hegemonic Masculine

- Being and performing masculine was adjacent to the dominant discourses of masculinity
  - Perceptions of masculine attributes (e.g. aggression, toughness, athletic, strong)
  - Status differentials between males

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

Andy: Attention, attentions seems to be everything, the more attention that you get the more people are going to look at you and going to hang out with you

Interviewer: How would one get attention?

Jordan: Sports for sure

Andy: Ya I feel like attention goes to those say if someone plays AAA hockey will get more attention than if someone plays a lower level

Jordan: ya hockey seems to be a big thing for attention, I find that where I do something different, that they would get more attention than I would

# DOMINANT DISCOURSE IS ALIVE AND WELL

Perry: You just need to not be an idiot and just hold your own

Sebastian: Don't be a douche bag

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Perry: Well not making like random comments and not being a bully or making stupid arguments

Sebastian: A man just needs to be able to hold his own and not back down

# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES INFLUENCE POSITIVE SPACES

The boys in this study made clear distinctions about the teachers' approach to the PE experience

- Unique preoccupation with the production of creating an inclusive space
- Taking away from a “sport model” of PE
- Traditional vs. Non-traditional sport
- Assessment

# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES INFLUENCE POSITIVE SPACES

Rudy – Mr. Smith wants us to be more diverse in PE, and not just play the same things over and over again; I don't think that we have played the same thing twice all year and he will change all of the rules in sports so that like people who obviously play something like hockey a whole bunch are better at it than everyone else he can make it a more balanced game

Sebastian – He is always trying to do things to get everyone to participate, he won't be like you're not trying hard enough that's a zero, he will say go have fun. He like if you try and have a laugh he will give you a good mark, where most teachers are like if you aren't good at sport you wont get as good of marks



# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES INFLUENCE POSITIVE SPACES

Jay – I think that he makes it really fair and marks you on your effort, it doesn't matter if you are a terrible hockey player, it depends on how much effort you put in.

Sebastian – he says it's not about what you can do compared to what other people can do, its about what you can do

Alex – ya like trying hard, you are not graded on if you can do ten pull-ups its about trying the best that you can

# STUDENT DRIVEN CURRICULA CREATES EVERYDAY REALITIES

- The participants spoke enthusiastically about having the opportunity to discuss young people's health and the multiple ways that they have or would intervene in curricula and pedagogy
- The students wanted to have the opportunity to let teachers and administration know what was happening in their school and the problems that young people are seeing in health and physical education.
- While health discourses presented as biopedagogies are problematic, the students were able to see issues within schools of following through with messages of physical activity.

# STUDENT DRIVEN CURRICULA CREATES EVERYDAY REALITIES

Jay – I have one thing to say, I find our school is brutal for this, they say that we are supposed to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity but we get 45 minutes of gym twice in a cycle (every 7 school days), it makes no sense why they would even say this if they aren't going to go through with it

Rick – ya definitely not enough, they are complaining that we need to get more physical activity but they need to give use the opportunities because we don't have all the time in the world outside of school.

Bryan – We don't get enough physical activity at school, adolescents are supposed to have 60 minutes of physical activity a day but in school we get 45 minutes every two or three days of school which is not enough

# STUDENT DRIVEN CURRICULA CREATES EVERYDAY REALITIES

- One of the most surprising aspects of this research project was the student-led approach to inclusivity in their PE classes.
- Students challenged aspects of hegemonic masculinity; particularly in the acceptance of sexuality

Interviewer – do you think that people judge one another based on their sexuality at your school?

Sebastian – not as much as it used to, the GSA has really helped in educating people about sexuality

# STUDENT DRIVEN CURRICULA CREATES EVERYDAY REALITIES

Rudy – I mean we are both members of our school GSA which is like supporting and making everyone feel equal and right in the world and apparently principal wrote a letter to the English school district and they applauded us for being such a forward and accepting school

Andy – we had a day where we signed a petition saying that we would not talk for a day because some people who are gay feel like they can't tell anyone and they keep it to themselves and so it was kind of symbolic of that, and to show our support, I think that everyone in the GSA club did this and didn't talk all day to show support



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# RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- This research helps build on the limited research in masculinity and health in PE
- Helps to explore how dominant discourses of health are being reinforced and/or resisted in PE classrooms in NL with the pressure of current health initiatives
  - The Way Forward (2016) and Safe and Caring Schools Policy (2013)
- Address gap in literature in the research of safe and inclusive classrooms
- Will also help address the positive influence of student led curricula within schools

# KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

- Benefit local schools, teachers, PESIC (Physical education special interest counsel)
- Research will be presented at academic conferences:
  - International Weight Stigma Conference in Prague, June 2017
  - PriFor Conference, June 2017
- Research will be published in academic journals
  - (e.g. *Men and Masculinities*, *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *Sport Education and Society*)

# THANK-YOU FOR LISTENING

## Questions?

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