

# SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND THE REPRODUCTION OF MASCULINITY

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## Abstract

*Artikel ini menggali teori Bordieu tentang dominasi maskulin yang diterapkan pada kajian pendidikan jasmani dengan mempelajari, menggabungkan, dan mensintesa publikasi yang relevan. Sebagai intelektual yang berpengaruh, Bordieu memiliki teori yang luas mencakup teori sosial dan kultural. Gagasan utama Bordieu yang digunakan dalam artikel ini adalah habitus dan reproduksi kultural. Lebih lanjut lagi, untuk memahami dominasi maskulin, makalah ini dimulai dari pembahasan yang mencakup konstruksi sosial tentang tubuh. Sebagaimana Bordieu mengakui sekolah sebagai tempat yang produktif dari habitus tertentu, pendidikan jasmani muncul untuk memproduksi dan direproduksi oleh suatu ideologi dominan. Pendidikan jasmani merupakan tempat di mana nilai dari kultur dominan ditanamkan dan direproduksi. Namun, dominasi ini berlangsung sangat lembut sehingga Bordieu mengistilahkannya sebagai "kekerasan simbolik." Dominasi laki-laki dalam pendidikan jasmani dicapai dengan memainkan wacana, mengeluarkan kualitas non-dominan, mengembangkan tindakan pedagogi tertentu, dan memberi label pada penyimpangan. Artikel ini menyarankan bahwa ada agenda untuk mereformasi kebijakan, program, dan praktik pendidikan jasmani yang lebih ramah perempuan.*

**Kata Kunci:** school physical education, reproduction of masculinity, Bordieu

## INTRODUCTION

It was about almost a century ago when Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), an educator as well as a sociologist, declared that schools should be the miniature of society (Durkheim, 1961). However, in today's schools, Durkheim's idea may appear to be

too normative as, in fact, sophisticated sociological research is now able to uncover what is considered as natural and normal in society could possibly be oppressive. For example, schools tend to segregate students based on their gender by giving such limited rewards for education for girls (e.g. Mickelson, 1999), exhibiting sexism in the form of discrimination and gender domination (e.g. Lee, Marks, & Byrd, 1994), and making such gender-biased educational policies (e.g. Nitya & Anna, 2006).

This type of segregation is not merely the consequence of teacher intervention nor simply schools' creation. It comes, according to Thorne (1999), from a complex interaction of the characteristic of the family, neighborhood, school, and classroom settings that contribute to the geography of gender separation in school. By looking at the everyday social worlds of kids in elementary schools, Thorne (1999) demonstrates how school settings magnify the pattern of gender segregation among children. Thus, gender segregation occurred in classroom settings could actually be the reflection of social values and norms regarding gender relations.

At this point, this paper will discuss the idea that schools are not always good in nature. More specifically, this paper will look closely at gender segregation in school physical education (PE) as it may be perceived "natural" by society in general and those who interact in the school setting in particular (teachers and students). Nevertheless, instead of focusing on women's perspective, it is interested in masculinity as inspired by Pierre Bourdieu. Although gender has never constituted a central dimension in Bourdieu's theory (Laberge, 1995), in his book "*Masculine Domination*", Bourdieu clarifies the structures of institutions and discourses that produce

gender inequality to “contribute to the progressive withering away of masculine domination” (Bourdieu, 2001:117). Masculine domination is deeply rooted in human unconscious. By ethnographically exploring gender divisions in Kabyle society, Bourdieu’s analysis provides a potential tool for uncovering the symbolic structures of the androcentric unconscious that endures throughout history. In Bourdieu account, masculine domination is as a paradigmatic form of symbolic violence. To understand this form of domination, an analysis should be conducted to address features and historical process through which social institutions, such as school physical education, perpetuate the arbitrary at the root of men’s power. Although Bourdieu’s idea in this book is currently somewhat unfashionable (Laberge, 1995), it helps to further investigate how masculinities, as a set of durable dispositions (habitus), is shaped by and helps to shape masculine pedagogical action within the school PE. This paper suggests that school PE is an arena in which masculinities are celebrated, reinforced, and maintained so that masculine culture in PE class is simultaneously reproduced and perpetuated.

### **HABITUS, CULTURAL REPRODUCTION, AND EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL SKETCH**

Bourdieu’s core ideas used in this paper are habitus and cultural reproduction. Habitus can simply be defined as a system of dispositions. More specifically, habitus is about the durable customs accomplished through the production of practice that in turn we perceive them as natural. Habitus is the product of history. At the same time, it produces individual and collective practices, and hence history. Habitus is also created in harmony with the system constructed by history. This historical dimension portrays the evidence that habitus as a system of dispositions survives from the past through the present. Simultaneously, the maintenance to keep habitus being presented in practices is actually a self-perpetuation for the future. To articulate habitus, field is needed as the setting in which agents and their social positions are located. For example, a field as a system of social positions such as school PE

structures internally in terms of power relationships (e.g. consider the power differential between PE teachers, male and female students). The concept of field in this paper will be defined more about a series of categorization which constitutes an objective hierarchy, produces and authorizes certain discourses and activities (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). In short, Habitus is “the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism discerns in the social world without being able to give them a rational basis” (Bourdieu, 1977:82).

Other Bourdieu’s central thoughts are cultural reproduction. Cultural reproduction can be defined as the production of the habitus itself, “that is system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice” (Bourdieu, 1999). This reproduction is not a lock step processes. Rather, it is dynamic and dialectic. Taking more critical perspective, in *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* article, Bourdieu (1999) introduces the idea of cultural reproduction as the existing disadvantages and inequalities that are inherited from one generation to the next. He argues that social institutions and especially education system have important contribution to the proces of cultural reproduction. In contrast to Durkheim’s expectation about school as a reflection of society, habitus that schools take for granted acts as a most effective filter in the reproductive processes of a hierarchical society (Harker, 1984).

Bourdieu’s theory is widely influential to educational research since he also addresses educational issues. Nash (1990), for example, has examined Bourdieu’s account to socially differentiated educational attainment, particularly issues of structure, agency and habitus, the cultural autonomy of school, and arbitrary and necessary school cultures. In addition, Mickelson (2003) also owes Bourdieu’s theory in an attempt to extend and refine her previous article: “Why Does Jane Read and Write So Well? The Anomaly of Women’s Achievement” (Mickelson 1999). In this article, Mickelson (1999) proposes five hypotheses that benefit from a theoretical elaboration of the ways in which social structural forces of gender, social class, and race influence women’s school behavior. Further, in her 2003 article, she explores

the relationship between gender and achievement by drawing on Bourdieu's theory and practice. She focuses on the way that structure and human agency generate social behavior (Mickelson, 2003).

To understand masculine domination, it should begin from what Bourdieu calls the social construction of bodies. According to Bourdieu (2001), "the social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division". This social construction creates perceptions towards body and its biological reality and then all things of the world. Furthermore, Bourdieu advocates that the social world constructs the difference between the biological sexes in conformity with the principles of a mythic vision of the world rooted in the arbitrary relationship of domination of men over women. In addition, the biological difference between the sexes can also appear as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders, and in particular of the social division of labor. For example, the body and its movement in physical education are subject to work of social construction. It is socially constructed that girls are not supposed to move their body aggressively. Therefore, school PE provides lady-like physical activities such as games with small field and ball that do not require body contact and too much movement. In contrast, for boys, body in physical activity is enacted and perceived as it is the vehicle through which masculinity is emphasized. As a result, physical activities that sound appropriate for boys are those that would be an arena in which they can be receiving pain, giving pain, and making contact (Gard & Meyenn, 2000) such as football, soccer, basketball. In school PE, the vision and division that girls should play ladylike games and boys should be on the contrary are taken for granted and therefore natural.

### **FROM MUSCULAR TO SISSIES: AN EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL PE**

As Bourdieu acknowledges the school as the productive venue of a particular habitus, school PE appears to produce and to be produced by such a dominant ideology. Because the relationship between PE and sport is just given, PE tends to maintain the domination of masculine ideology as sport does.

Hunter (2004) has conducted important research regarding this relationship. She found that many students regarded PE to be synonymous with sport demonstrated by such student's statement as '[PE is] running and swimming and playing like soccer or something' (Hunter, 2004). As a result, school PE will generally ignore the habitus of children of non-dominance, which is femininity. Both masculinity and femininity are cultural capitals that children learn through education. Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002) emphasize that cultural capital plays a crucial role in the reproduction of dominant social relations and structures. In the case of PE, students deal with the knowledge related to how to do sports involving rules, strategy, and tactic. Since cultural capital of such knowledge related to sports and games is inequitably distributed, PE tends to favor who occupy positions and dispositions that provide access to these socially legitimated ways of knowing and doing in PE class, that is male. In PE class, therefore, boys become symbolically distinct and occupy social privilege. As this paper tries to answer how masculinity continues to maintain its domination in the school PE, it will employ Bourdieu's conceptual tools such as educational habitus, social and cultural capital, discourse, symbolic violence, pedagogic action, and deviance.

In school PE, there is such "habit" maintained as culture that would be considered as educational habitus. When considering PE as an educational habitus, we will then regard school PE as an agent of social reproduction. School PE is a venue in which the value of dominant culture are instilled and reproduced. All involved in PE practices such as students, teachers, content, and materials contribute to this reproduction. Inspired by the work of Bourdieu and his notion of the habitus, Gorely et al. (2003) attempt to find the concept of gender-relevant physical education by drawing on data generated from a study of young people's articulation of the relationships between muscularity, physicality and gender. Regarding masculinities, the data that were generated through group interviews and interviews with individual pupils suggest that students in PE class articulate the relationships between body shape and size, gender and physical activity. The social construction

of the body focused on issues of muscularity and physicality is central importance in PE class. In addition, physical activities that require physical prowess, competition, courage, and aggression are the means through which boys construct the relationships between masculinities and their appropriate physical activities.

These relationships are obtained from resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support. Bourdieu (1986) calls these sources as social capital. The relationships between gender and physical activity also inform student understanding of masculine-appropriate physical activities (Gard & Meyenn, 2000). In other words, to become involved and engaged in PE, one should have capital as an enabling resource, such as masculine qualities. Furthermore, this information is part of what Bourdieu's terms as cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital is forms of knowledge, skill, education and any advantages of persons. This capital gives them a higher status in society, including high expectations. In school setting, PE class dominantly provides boys with masculine cultural capital, that is the attitudes and knowledge that makes the PE practices a comfortable and familiar place in which boys can succeed more easily than girls.

As masculine cultural capital continues to dominate, it becomes hegemonic in nature. For example, many would assume that such physical activities as football, rugby, baseball, basketball, and wrestling belong to males. In these sports, males are the doers: they make decisions, play the games, and get rewards for their skills. Whereas females are the viewers: they become part of the competition by standing on the side line as pieces of the exhibition. Male athletes are portrayed as the real one, whereas cheerleaders and umbrella girls are the sideshow. This assumption is based on the fact that those physical activities have been developed to reinforce masculine qualities such as competition, efficiency, and ranking system. Indeed, dominated by sports related activities, PE class remains a masculine domain in which boys compete and girls should be excluded. For example, Ennis (1999) draws that boys believed that to be selected for future teams and respected by their male peers, they had to demonstrate their aggression and

cool moves, regardless of the impact on less able classmates: "you gotta be in there fighting for the ball or the other guys won't want you. If you don't they be saying stuff like, "you be sorry...you play like a mother..." I try to drive around the girls and not bit or hurt them, but some time they are in my way. I can't be backing down to no girl...no matter what. I would never be allowed to play on Sean's team again. And you know that's real important to me".

The most common PE based games activities is football. In Western schools especially American schools, football occupies a central place in many of the strategies aimed at counteracting boys' underachievement. Through her publication in 2000, Skelton (2000) provides an overview of the literature which identifies how football in schools is more than 'just a game' but is often inscribed with broader structural issues. That article then goes on to illustrate, through data collected in an ethnographic study of a middle-class primary school, how football was central to the gender regime of the school, particularly in relation to the construction of a dominant mode of masculinity.

By employing qualitative methods in exploring British school PE, Bramham (2003) shows boy's perceptions on PE as exclusively a male activity. This boy contends, "I'm not trying to be sexist, I don't think girls like the physical side of PE; netball is non-contact and football is quite a lot more physical. I just think how they are brought up and how school sort of segregates their sexes ... lads are more dominating and they will take control. They will refer to girls' physiques and to girls' looks. Then a girl might say, 'Oh, well you're thick', whilst a boy might say, 'Well you're ugly'" (individual interview). These perceptions and experiences of school PE expose how masculinity occupies its hegemonic position.

The male domination within school PE, in Bourdieu's account, is acquired by playing discourse. Discourse acts in such a way by which school PE habitus marginalizes characteristic other than masculinities (femininities). In Bourdieu's work, the process of marginalization works through misrecognition which means partial and distorted understandings of things in the world that are systematically distributed through habitus (Webb,

Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). For example, in PE class female bodies are read as having significance which demonstrates inferiority showed by the powerlessness to take pressure and the poor condition for rigorous activities. Having such weak, soft, and fragile bodies for girls is the cultural capital for being the real woman. Often time, the feminine cultural capital obscures the oppressive nature of gender unequal relationship. Bourdieu conceptualize it as misrecognition. As a concept, misrecognition helps to understand that masculine domination finds its privilege position because girls misrecognize the symbolic violence to which they are subjected as something that is natural, simply “the way of the world” (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). Based on this concept, Gorely et al. (2003) reveals misrecognition in PE class when generating question like ‘what is it about football that makes it a boys’ sport?’. One girl replied, ‘there is a lot of roughness. Because girls are weaker than boys sometimes, it means that boys can take the pain if they break their leg or something’. These discourses reflect domination of male ideology.

In achieving misrecognition, language takes a critical role. Language functions as a system of relations that “helps to reproduce dominant and dominated positions” (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 2002). Using a multi-method approach for data generation in an attempt to include as many perspectives as possible over the 18 months of fieldwork, Hunter (2004) reveals that PE teachers, for example, refer to students as boys and girls in a particular order such as ‘OK, let’s make a start. Boys and girls walk up to the other end behind a block’. This evidence shows the power of language to segregate girls from boys in PE class.

Furthermore, Bourdieu also considers the language use to exclude femininity as what he terms as symbolic violence. As symbolic violence will be explored later in this paper, it is the kind of gentle, invisible, pervasive violence which is exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge and sentiment, often with unwitting consent of the dominated. Symbolic violence is ‘the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the school PE, the violence is symbolic because it is not directly

physical, but according to Webb, Schirato, Danaher (2002), its effect is significant because it enables certain groups occupying privileged positions to maintain dominance over others. Jay Coakley (2004), a sport sociologist, illustrates common language use in physical activity setting such as “doing it like a man” or “don’t play like a bunch of girls”. Another example is the usage of language to emphasize masculinity. Based on the research in American urban schools, Ennis (1999) concludes that boys intensify level of competition and eagerness to prove themselves on the course or field. For girls, their intense leads to the feeling of exclusion. Girls explained that the boys saw girls as a problem on their team and intimidated them by criticizing their efforts and yelling at them: “They call us lame...they saw we’re not trying, but we are. I don’t need boys yelling at me when I make a mistake. I would rather sit out and take my F than have to play in the same games with them” (Ennis, 1999). These discourses are usually directed towards a person who does not show masculine qualities. It demonstrates that being a girl in school PE means to be failure. In these PE class, the violence is unconsciously practiced and difficult to recognize since it appears symbolically. In addition, symbolic violence plays a fundamental role in the reproduction and naturalizing of the social hierarchy that masculinities are superior over femininities.

The domination of masculinity also works through pedagogic action. Pedagogic action proceeds by promoting certain “doxa” and concentrating certain positions and life styles. Doxa could simply be defined as common belief or opinion. In Bourdieu’s theory, the role of the bodies of knowledge performing ‘reproductive’ function is to articulate Doxa. As this concept is close to cultural reproduction, the articulation of doxa is achieved by communicating the values and meanings of the existing social order and values that students are disposed as natural and legitimate. Doxa works to distinguish the thinkable from the unthinkable, so that certain course of action, those that seriously challenge established social relations—become literally unthinkable (Webb, Schirato, Danaher, 2002: pp 118-119). The role of doxa is to authorize the truth or form of social conventionality. In school PE, doxa operates through

the way teachers organize the class. PE teachers usually separate the genders through PE practice. Conducted in Australian schools, research by Hunter (2004) reveals such a gender separation expressed by teacher instruction like “today we’re going to measure. Ok boys, you have to pick the 600 [gram javelin]. You can pick any of these [and he shows them the green javelin]. The orange is the heaviest—you can usually tell by the thickness. The girls have to have the smaller ones”. This practice occurs because the doxa of ordering gender is based on the taken-for-granted assumptions about masculine superiority. Through this PE pedagogical action, children learn unthinkably that boys should always be in a higher position than girls.

The domination of masculinity in PE results to what Bourdieu calls deviance. The deviance in PE class is vividly shown by the students with feminine qualities (non-privilege capitals). These students do not look suitable to PE class and therefore they are deviant. A Danish sport sociologist, Rønholt (2002), analyzes an event observed in a critical classroom study on teaching and learning in physical education and demonstrates how deviance is produced through socio-cultural discourses embedded in children’s and teachers’ discursive practices. Using video to observe teaching and learning in PE at schools in Denmark, her research reveals that the boys playing in ladylike ways is valued for being ‘sissies’. Similarly, in the case that PE provides masculine activities such as football or rugby, girl who plays aggressively would acquire some traits socially considered as masculine. The fact that she is biologically female while she “acts like a man” leads her to be teased for being tomboy (Coakley, 2004). Apparently, this is the way male domination works: if women are able then they are defined as deviant.

## CONCLUSION

As a habitus, masculinities are shaped by and help to shape the nature of PE class in several ways. Masculinities go through PE educational habitus, social and cultural capital, discourse, symbolic violence, pedagogic action, and deviance. Because the operation of those entities is smooth, gender segregation in school PE is perceived as “natural”.

PE reproduces the environments of its own perpetuation through teacher and student partisanship, strong connection to sport, and the related practices and discourses. The adaptation of Bourdieu’s model, following Laberge (1995), is a potentially enriching approach to explore gendered experience in sport/ school PE. It helps to understand the way in which masculinity reproduces PE practices as well as the path through which masculinity is reproduced by those practices.

In order to pursue more equal relationship in school PE, the idea of implementing the “Sport for Peace” curriculum, for example, is worthwhile to consider. Ennis (1999) reports the use of an innovative approach to team-sport curriculum (Sport for Peace) to enhance girls’ levels of engagement and satisfaction in urban high school physical education. She suggests that the Sport for Peace curriculum is potential to improve the sport environment for girls by enhancing their perceptions of success, promoting ownership of the sport content and the class processes, creating authentic cooperative environments for boys and girls, and encouraging the use of second chances to promote understanding and learning. Further, the Sport for Peace curriculum serves as one of model for reducing if not eliminating male dominance of sport in physical education.~

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