

0460

Boys and masculinities in physical education

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Background

Central to physical education and sport is physicality. Indeed, it is a certain kind of physicality that is promoted and valued in physical education. For boys, this is often associated with aggression, competition and masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hickey and Fitzclarence, 1999). Connell (2008) recently reminded us that the presence of hegemonic masculinity reinforces the 'illusion' that it is a particular kind masculinity that is often worked towards. Like Connell, other contributors to the special issue of *Sport Education and Society* (2008) - 'Boys, the body, sport and schooling', reinforce the need to recognise and celebrate diverse masculinities. This paper seeks to build on this body of knowledge by focusing on the performance of masculinities through contexts including physical education lessons, the playground and extra-curricular sport. More specifically, I centralise the narratives of boys with disabilities and their expressions of masculinities.

Research Questions

I draw on data generated in an interview-based study with young disabled boys and consider:

(1) How does school and physical education contribute to young disabled boys constructions of masculinities?

(2) How are these masculinities valued by the boys and others around them?

Methods

This presentation focuses on data generated as part of a larger research project exploring the physical education and sporting experiences of young disabled people in a County Sports Partnership located in England. This presentation will explore the data generated from interviews with eight disabled boys. Interview discussions were recorded on an audiotape and then transcribed. The transcriptions were coded into categories, key themes developed and sorted (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Following the constant comparison method of analyzing data (Lincoln and Guba 1985) I continually reviewed and reworked these categories and themes. Analysis was conducted immediately following each focus group session. In addition to providing an ongoing and evolving insight into the data this also enabled preliminary results to be considered. Three broad themes emerged from these data and provide insights into the ways in which disabled boys negotiate and perform masculinities.

Frame

Sometime ago Connell asserted that the sporting experiences of boys during their schooling can significantly influence their gendered identities (Connell, 1983). More recently, it has also been acknowledged that school is a significant site in which young disabled people begin to understand themselves and others (Davis and Watson, 2001). In this presentation I seek to recognize the importance of moving beyond single issue research that gives primacy to one social category and instead focus on intersections (Flintoff et al. 2008). Moreover, I utilize Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of capital and habitus to understand young disabled boy's experiences of school and physical education. Like a number of writers within disability studies I believe Bourdieu's concept of capital and habitus bridges the structure/agency gap that limits the extent to which social and medical models can assist us to understand disability (Edwards and Imrie 2003).

Research findings

Three broad themes emerged from these data including: (1) '(Re)-producing the masculine ideal', (2) 'Deconstructing hegemonic masculinity', and (3) 'Re-constructing (dis)ABLED masculinities'. Although all of the boys had different school experiences it is clear that they were continuously confronted with challenges to their masculine identities that they constantly negotiated in different settings within the school.