

Students' Gendered Body Dispositions toward (Non) Participation in Physical Education at an Urban Male High School in Makkah, Saudi Arabia

Majed Eid ALHARBI

PhDc in School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa, CANADA

Email: majjodym@hotmail.com

Type: Research Article (Received: 03.09.2018 – Corrected: 16.11.2018 - Accepted: 06.12.2018)

Abstract

Drawing on Bourdieu's relational theory of (gendered) body habitus, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to develop a better understanding of the embodied, gendered dispositions that influence Saudi male students' experiences in physical education (PE). The paper reports data generated by semi-structured interviews with male students (n=27) between the ages of 15 and 20, all of whom attended a public secondary school in Makkah during the autumn of 2012. The study found that the concept of hygienic dispositions is an issue that concerns some students in ways that prevent them from participating in PE. With limited PE facilities (i.e. changing and showering rooms), masculine values (expressed both physically and verbally) impact attitudes towards participation in PE. Surprisingly, the Saudi adult masculine identity, so closely associated with traditional clothing (the *thawb*), is also a condition that influences PE students' participation. As part of this study's results, meanings attached to the *thawb* are analyzed, revealing social representations of masculinity and its cultural/social value (i.e. prestige, respect).

Keywords: Physical education; Saudi male high school; masculinity; gendered body habitus

Introduction

This study seeks to reveal both the enabling and constraining socio-cultural factors that influence students' experiences in PE at school in order to understand why certain students participate and others do not. The research explores the influence of students' gendered body dispositions on their participation in PE by providing insights into the experiences, beliefs, behaviors and routines that shape their bodies and perceptions towards PE. Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework is applied to the adolescents' social world and the interplay of social and cultural dimensions that influence their participation in PE.

At the time of this research, PE was taught in Saudi public schools only to boys (PE programs for girls are to begin in 2018). Primary school-aged male students have two PE classes per week for a total of 90 minutes, while intermediate and secondary school Saudi students have just one PE class per week lasting 45 minutes. In Saudi, soccer is typically the preferred activity in PE classes; it is the sport in which boys feel most highly skilled (Al-Liheibi, 2008). In the school studied here, as in many other schools, other sports, such as volleyball, basketball and handball were unavailable. Because PE is under-resourced in Saudi in general, and opportunities to participate in different activities are limited, PE is mostly focused on soccer, and that there is little or no variety in PE in boys' schools in Saudi (Al-Aifan 2000; Al-Wetshi, 2001; Alghamdi, 2005; Samargandy, 2007; Al-Liheibi, 2008).

A further indication of the low status of PE is reflected in the fact that no student is ever failed in PE, during this research, although the PE grade is included in the overall grade point average. A distinctive factor in the Saudi context is that all male students and teachers from elementary to high school must wear *thawbs*, except while teaching or undertaking PE.

The *thawb* is a loose length of wool or cotton material covering the body to the ankles. The students interviewed for this study follow the Saudi cultural practice of wearing the *thawb* all day, but during PE and school sports, students should normally wear athletic clothing consisting of athletic trousers and a t-shirt; wearing the *thawb* during PE is frowned upon. However, sometimes boys wear a mixture of traditional and sports clothing, which is acceptable. Some boys wished they could wear the *thawb* even during PE class, as some did during informal play outside school.

Through a Bourdieusian lens, this qualitative case study also reviews relevant literature, including existing studies on participation in PE at secondary high schools, in Saudi, and Western literature. There is a description of the methodology used, details of participants, the research process and data analysis procedures. The results provide a detailed analysis incorporating the research participants' own words.

Theoretical Framework

For Bourdieu (1984), the habitus has an effect on every aspect of human embodiment. The way people experience physical activity (PA) in general reveals the innermost dispositions of the habitus. Habitus is a set of embodied dispositions that generate practice in relation to the structural principles of the social world (Bourdieu 1977). Therefore, practice is 'the product of a habitus that is itself the product of the embodiment of the immanent regularities and tendencies of the world' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.138).

Bourdieu (1984) defined habitus as schemes of structured and structuring dispositions that lead to certain practices, tendencies and actions. Habitus influences the development of the

body, shaping levels of participation in exercise as well as ordinary movement, including gait and even posture. One of the implications of this process is that the body materializes class tastes in terms of how the body is treated and taken care of; fed and maintained. For Shilling (2003), bodies are shaped through the development of taste. The development of taste is 'embodied and has an effect on people's orientation to their bodies' and thus their orientations to particular forms of physical activity (Shilling, 2003, p.113). For Bourdieu, the body is a site of social memory, and the concept of habitus defines the process by which the social is written into the corporeal (Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003).

In studying the boys' involvement in PE, this research highlights the problems surrounding hygiene, not least because of a lack of facilities – Saudi schools do not tend to have showers or changing rooms). The role of gender in habitus is investigated in this sporting and hygiene context as it is also central to the practice of PE.

Gendered Body Habitus: Masculinity

The notion of habitus highlights the ways in which gendered values and expectations are ingrained in our bodies; however, some individuals resist gender norms, or have little room for change, according to Bourdieu (Thorpe, 2010). Masculinity 'as an unconscious strategy forms part of the habitus of men that is both transposable and malleable to given situations to form practical dispositions and actions to everyday situations' (Coles, 2009, p.39). For Coles, men perform and act upon the masculine behaviors arising from their position in a particular social field (sports, family, and school, for example). Habitus has the ability to facilitate 'insights into how men use masculinity (e.g., posture, gait, gestures, speech, etc.) as a 'resourceful strategy,' to negotiate space, and access to capital, within particular fields' (Coles, 2009, p.38).

Lee (2008) has defined masculinity as: traditional belief, attitude, value, and behavior associated with what it means to be male in society. Masculinity is based on biological, physical, psychological and social-cultural characteristics. It is also defined as arising from traditional beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors regarding the meaning of maleness, which is historically, socially and culturally constructed (2008, p.16). This definition represents the features and attributes that reinforce dominant forms of masculinity. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (2001) argued that the gendered habitus is characterized by generating gendered body dispositions, and thus the gendered habitus sees the individual internalizing gender-appropriate behavior and external values in the course of socialization processes over time.

Two perspectives outlined by Dumas and Bournival (2011) examine the body in social sciences in the context of men's health. First, the body is understood as a system of cultural importance – the 'body-as-representation' (Dumas & Bournival, 2011, p.36). This reflects the values and norms that form social representations of masculinity. The authors argue that masculinity is socially constructed, so this perspective is intended for understanding social representations of masculinity in a given society. The second perspective sees the body as the bastion of experience and action; special attention must be paid to the 'lived body' as well as to the shapes of 'embodied experiences of masculinity' in daily life (Dumas & Bournival, 2011). The authors describe the importance of feelings, emotions, social practices and 'the transformative power of social structure onto the material aspects of the body' (Dumas & Bournival, 2011, p.36). Both perspectives enhance the understanding of the social mechanisms, including the role of gender, that influence bodily action. In relation to gender, 'masculinity participates in fashioning both a vision of the world and a relationship to the

body that is inscribed in power relations through ways of treating the body, caring for it, feeding it, and otherwise maintaining it' (Dumas & Bournival, 2011, p.39).

This study presents Bourdieu's understanding of masculinity through his relational concept of (a gendered) body habitus, alongside the important role played by cultural obstacles or 'hidden entry requirements' (Bourdieu, 1978, p.838) such as clothing, traditions, skills, knowledge, practices and techniques of sociability; these open certain activities, and their privileges, to some people and close them to others, as this study illustrates in a sporting context. Bourdieu's ideas are useful for understanding how the male students enacted their body dispositions in PE; they also illuminate and contextualize the social practices that emerge through acts of practical and symbolic masculinity.

Gendered Body Habitus and PE

According to Brown and Evans (2004), schools are powerful masculine institutions which formulate structures of masculine domination in the world; this is particularly the case in the areas of male PE and school sports, which have been identified as 'bastions for the construction and expression of dominant masculinities' (p.54). PE sports practices are associated with toughness, competition and bodily skills, which subordinates or marginalizes some boys (those with low levels of toughness, confidence and skill) (Jachyra, 2014; Alharbi, 2014; Garrett and Wrench, 2011; Azzarito, 2004). In schools, there are rigorous codes of competition in team sports, mainly those that value symbolic violence and aggression; these play a role in the formation of hierarchies amongst boys (Kirk, 2010a). Sports is presented to young men as 'character building and as promoting courage, chivalry, moral strength, and military patriotism' (Lee et al., 2009, p.61). But among Australian high school students, while boys as a group are advantaged by the association of sports and masculinity, individual boys experience PE negatively to a greater degree than had been realized (Martino, 1999).

A Canadian study of masculinity and sports (Laberge and Albert, 2000) confirmed a connection between the construction of masculinities and social class. They found that upper- and middle-class boys valued intelligence and sociability as characteristics of masculinity, while those from working-class backgrounds valued 'male chauvinism and masculine showing-off' (p.201). These distinctions were ascribed to discrepancies in living conditions and family/socio-cultural backgrounds. Upper- and middle-classes boys socialized with the aspiration of leadership positions in their future employment, meaning that they were unlikely to aim for occupations requiring physical strength, thus decreasing the importance of physical toughness in the evaluation of maleness. In contrast, working class boys were more likely to (eventually) do occupations requiring physical strength that would not require the social/leadership skills the upper/middle class boys were trying to acquire. This illustrates the 'embodiments and verbalizations of masculinity to convey power over others within a context of perceived powerlessness' (Laberge & Albert, 2000, p.202).

Davison (2000) interviewed 11 Canadian males aged 18 to 58 regarding how they experienced masculinity in school. He found that those who could not achieve the masculine model required in PE classes experienced embarrassment. The physical sense of maleness is embodied in a certain size, shape, posture and movement, including physical/sporting skills; these elements of maleness are significant within the school environment (Davison, 2000). In school-based PE, lower skilled students were more likely to avoid participating when they felt judged or criticized by peers, an alienating experience (Portman, 1995). Some participants in the present study described experiencing this.

Azzarito (2004) found that US high school PE students place themselves on ‘a continuum between the center and the margins within physical education practices by choosing to engage in or resist physical activity practices’ (p.9). Those who display sporting prowess in male-dominated PE activities and school sports are accorded a high status of masculinity and thus popularity among their peers.

Playing soccer, a sport replete with masculine meanings and practices that sustain male gender norms, was the most valued practice in the Saudi school. Full participation in the shared values of the group required immersion into soccer. This is reflected in the wider popularity of soccer among Saudi boys and men. Masculinity in Saudi differs from Westernized masculine norms in terms of culture and socialization. Thus, what it is ‘to be a man’ in Saudi is not the same as it is in the West. Nevertheless, there is a shared repertoire constructing masculine dispositions including one’s physical appearance, and physical strength and prowess acquired through playing games. This will be shown in the results and discussions later in the paper.

The body and its relationship to sports and exercise have become increasingly prominent as markers of gendered identity during the past two to three decades (Gorely et al., 2003). Much Western literature on this topic studies and compares male and female participation in PE, scrutinizing their perspectives on the barriers and experiences associated with PE. As males and females are educated separately, such comparisons have not been made in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the relationship between body dispositions and PE participation in Saudi male high schools remains under-studied. However, there is a consensus on the peripheral status of PE, insufficient time allocation, a lack of adequate equipment, facilities, and resources to deliver high-quality, diversified PE programs (Al-Aifan 2000; Al-Ghamdi 2005; Al-Liheibi, 2008).

But Saudi male students’ perceptions of PE have not been examined through a qualitative case study approach or from a sociological perspective, applying Bourdieu’s theory of body habitus, physical capital and masculinity, and taking into account the various socio-cultural factors that influence PE participation. This study does so, identifying the influences that shape students’ gendered, embodied experiences in relation to their participation in PE.

Methodology

Qualitative Case Study

A case study methodology was chosen because it allows replication and extension of individual cases (Bonoma, 1985). An individual case such as the urban high school selected here can independently corroborate propositions that reveal patterns of behavior or circumstances, allowing the researcher to draw a more complete theoretical picture. The case study approach also allows for thorough, contextual and comprehensive description of an inquiry (Yin, 2009). The present study examines, through observation and interviews, how and why Saudi students describe and make sense of their particular experiences related to PE participation. For Bourdieu (1999), interviews are useful in order to reconcile the social, historical, and demographic elements that contextualize how the participant’s social position influences their perspectives.

Socio-demographic information was collected in the interview in order to contextualize the participants’ life and personal history. This included the participants’ age, parental occupation and educational attainment. Formulating the questions based on Bourdieu’s work was helpful

for understanding boys' participation in PE as it related to social structures (i.e. neighborhood, peers, family, PE environment, etc.). Further information included: (a) characteristics of participants' socio-economic milieu (b) students' likes and dislikes; and (c) perceptions of and attitudes toward resources available (e.g. barriers to PE).

Interview questions helped uncover boys' lifestyles in relation to their body habitus and the ways their backgrounds and experiences shaped their participation in PE. This study can be described as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2005). The results are specific to this school and are meant to improve participation in PE there.

Research Sample

Data was collected between November 2012 and January 2013 in a male secondary public school in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The school draws students from different neighborhoods and there is some variation in social class. Participants in the study represent a cross-section of the urban middle- and lower-middle classes in Saudi Arabia as defined by Al-Sultan (1988).

The social class of the students is reflected in the professions of their fathers. Students have fathers who are employed in the military, police, or public administration, and university graduates are typical of the middle to low-middle echelon in the government sector (Students 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27). Their fathers hold mostly high school diploma and few with baccalaureate. Students whose parents are retired received two sources of income: a) the retirement wage, and b) the social guarantee wage (Students 1, 6, 9, 14, 22, 26). Fathers/family who were retired from one job continued to run a business, one as a real estate broker (Students 2, and 15), one as a contractor (student 10) and another as a shopkeeper (Student 8). Students' single parenting family are (Students 10, 17, and 20). All students relied on family financially, and for transport, and recreational activities. Generally, came from families whose fathers are the sole earners.

The locations where students live are primarily inhabited by families who have been living together in neighborhoods for a long period of time. In terms of a group of actors who share the same interests, social experiences and traditions, that students lived in the same neighborhood, for example, students (8, 9, and 20) and (14, 19, and 22) were very close relatives; their fathers were retired soldiers and their mothers stayed home and were illiterate. Most students live in neighborhoods that lack parks, soccer fields, playgrounds, sidewalks, and community centers in which a variety of social and sports activities are not organized.

Research Process

Data was collected during an observation period of three weeks, following which

individual interviews were conducted. These were audio-recorded and took place in the resource center at the beginning of each PE class, during the school recess, or during school hours in the student's spare time. During the observation period, the researcher assumed an outsider role by sitting in a corner of the soccer field and observed but did not interrupt the classes. With the PE teacher's help, students were categorized as participants or non-participants. The selection of students for interviews used a sampling approach, so that less-skilled students were interviewed as well as medium- and top-performing students. The rationale was to 'intentionally select individuals and sites to understand the central phenomenon' (Creswell, 2013, p.204).

The parents of each participant signed a letter of consent informing them of the purpose of the study and the type of questions that would be asked. To ensure confidentiality, the interviews took place in a private room in the school. To protect anonymity, codes were allocated to each student. For the purpose of this paper, I use some quotes that belong to the students who participated in the PE class (Students 1, 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 27) and students who rarely participated or took no part at all in PE (Students 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26).

Data Analysis Procedures

Using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), transcribed interviews were read and re-read to achieve familiarity with the data. Data was highlighted in terms of initial codes regarding the enabling and constraining conditions identified in the literature review, as well as new codes and ideas emerging from the interviews. Second, the initial ideas and codes were attached to the text in order to identify sub-themes in the data. Third, codes and sub-themes were organized into major themes, which were reviewed to ensure that the concepts and codes were coherent with the text as well as the identified themes. Fourth, each theme based on the sub-themes in the texts was given a specific name. Finally, the data were organized and regrouped according to themes in relation to the research questions were essential components of the analysis and coding.

Results and Discussions

As PE class commenced, students walked out to the field, a few students sprinting ahead, eager to play the game. Those who wanted to participate took off the top layer of their clothes, their *thawb*, revealing sports clothes underneath. The *thawbs* were left hanging on the goal or on chairs behind the goals. The non-participating students talked among themselves and slowly made their way to the pitch. They sat in the corners or behind the line of the pitch. The teacher was not effective in motivating the students to achieve the goals of the PE lessons; some students in previous studies complained that teachers did not properly teach or structure PE activities (Al-Aifan, 2000; Al-Liheibi, 2008). Overall, the teaching style appeared to contribute to a disinclination to participate (i.e. soccer skills were not taught, and students were not encouraged). This limited the potential of PE class and appeared to negatively influence students' engagement. Other, more socio-cultural conditions influencing students' participation in PE are explained below.

Hygienic Body Dispositions of Masculinity

Some non-participants worried about becoming sweaty after participating in PE; when it took place in the morning, this would result in unpleasant body odor for the rest of the day. The lack of private changing facilities meant they would not be able to change out of their exercise clothes.

'I don't love ball. It is in the fourth period and sunny weather. Also, without shower rooms, I will be sweaty when I enter the classroom; it is disgusting.' (Student 19)

'I will be sweaty and smelly sitting in the classroom without taking a shower, which is not appropriate.' (Student 23)

'The deficiency of facilities such as showering rooms and a lack of rest time are a problem for PE participation. I want to have time to wash and relax to be ready for the next class.' (Student 6)

'PE class is a short period. Without sufficient time to dress up, wash and relax I cannot continue playing soccer.' (Student 21)

'As I remembered my first participation in PE in this school, I just quickly threw water on my face and hair and washed my hands and then I put on the *thawb*. There is too little time to have all this done. I was worried of being late for the next class or enter the classroom without dressing in my *thawb*.' (Student 5)

Clearly, the lack of privacy, time and facilities for changing and showering was a serious and constraining concern for non-participants.

However, those who did take part thought that those who did not participate because of not wanting to be sweaty were simply being 'soft'; or that there was no reason to be afraid of sweating. They argued that men should not fear such 'small things'. For them, students should not only be eager to play in PE, but also be relaxed about showing their maleness, as they felt that sweating did not degrade one's masculinity (Alharbi, 2014). These students were not concerned about the lack of changing and shower facilities in the school; they knew to bring sports clothes and change in the washrooms or wear their sports clothes underneath their *thawbs*. They developed coping strategies:

'When PE class is over, I go to the washroom carrying my bag, take my sporting clothes off, put them in the bag, and put on traditional clothes, so I feel like a normal student with no sweaty clothes.' (Student 11)

'I am familiar with wearing sporting clothes underneath the *thawb* from intermediate school to save time and play soccer more. When I finish, I just wash my face and hands and then put the *thawb* on over the sporting clothes.' (Student 12)

"I like to wear sporting clothes underneath the *thawb* to save time. It is okay for me to appear with this sort of clothes in school or even out of school." (Student 16)

These students positively experience PE with its clothing/hygiene implications; their 'hygienic' body dispositions and perceptions of PE are quite different from those of non-participants. For participants, the clothing/hygiene constraints do not constitute an insurmountable barrier to PE. For them, lack of proper hygiene (being sweaty) is a concept that can be firmly associated with masculinity. Participants' view of this aspect of practice involved certain actions – changing clothes, washing one's hands – which were, for them, sufficient to the dispositions of hygiene. What is produced is 'a generative principle, a disposition towards one's experience within the fields of practice that the actor must address' (Bourdieu, 1990, pp.52–53). It embraces culture, imagery and a historically predisposed means of understanding the world, as well as patterns of action and conduct. For Bourdieu (1997), a social agent's habitus is the product of history and becomes 'inscribed in their bodies by past experiences' (p.138). The lack of privacy and hygiene seem to be not conditional barriers for participants, but these things were shameful to non-participants. It is notable that only a minority of students participated; by far the majority did not.

Saudi Manhood and Clothing in PE

In terms of PE participation, Saudi males' preferences and practices varied markedly according to the way their bodies are oriented to their resources within their social world; this revealed how students negotiated their social representation of masculinity in terms of how they dressed at school. For most students, the *thawb* reflected their social values and cultural traditions, which contributed to shaping their identities in terms of the 'body as representation' (Dumas & Bournival, 2011). Those who did not participate in PE worried about being judged by the way they looked when wearing sports clothes, even if the clothes were worn underneath the *thawb* (apparently, they would still be visible). They felt uncomfortable with sports clothes not only at school, but in the neighborhood beyond.

An integral component in the construction of masculinity in this sample is boys' cultural values as they relate to clothes. Some students felt that wearing the *thawb* gave them status; wearing it, they felt sophisticated, whereas changing into sports clothes lowered their status:

'When I wear the *thawb*, I look genteel and prestigious. However, when I change to sporting clothes, I look disorderly, unorganized. I am a man and have to follow the traditions.' (Student 7)

'When I first came to this school and participated in PE, I had weird feelings when I changed my clothes from the *thawb* to exercise clothes. I felt like a non-Saudi.' (Student 15)

'Sporting clothes are not cool and if I wear them I feel as if I look disordered and being sweaty. The *thawb* is my favorite clothing to give me prestige.' (Student 20)

For these boys, the *thawb* symbolizes manhood and specifically, what it is to be a Saudi man; they felt disdain for sporting clothes and felt others would also see them disdainfully. A failure to change into sporting clothes and negotiate their ideas of masculinity in terms of their public appearance in school or the community is one of the cultural influences associated with non-participation in PE. Bourdieu (1990) stated that the politics of gender are reflected and negotiated through enduring dispositions – a way of standing, speaking, feeling and thinking. Students' negotiations regarding their social representation of masculinity in terms of sports clothing concerned an interpretation of a male identity that proved to be significant for how men express habitual gender (Davison, 2000).

Gendered Dispositions of Clothing, Performance and Masculinity

Clothing was perceived to highlight a symbolic form of masculinity in terms of the style of dress and the style of the performance of school sport. Statements from both participants and non-participants demonstrate how boys' body performance of gender connects with clothing. The boys viewed themselves as fit bodies with clothes which can be seen as representing/symbolizing a suitable form of masculinity. One student participant described his sporting clothes in PE and outside school when playing soccer:

'When I play in PE I wear shorts [that end at the knee] (...) the same as I play in the neighborhood team. I am comfortable wearing them to play well.' (Student 11)

Outside school, Student 11 plays with a local football club. He practices soccer four times a week and wants to become a professional player. His embodied experience of playing soccer includes wearing sporting clothes comfortably; this began in his neighborhood team. His participation in community sport during his formative years may have contributed to his physical and social ease with PE at school.

In contrast, non-participants believed they should not have to change from *thawb* to sporting clothes in PE. Some boys played soccer wearing the *thawb* outside of school (in informal neighborhood settings): this was their way of resisting a given set of gender norms (Thorpe, 2010). Students' inclinations on this point were arguably in line with the subconscious nature of the habitus, though they also consciously expressed these ideas (Bourdieu, 1977):

'I see participating by wearing *thawb* in PE you can be good at soccer performing high skills. So, students should have the opportunity to participate without changing and be able to play wearing *thawbs*.' (Student 14)

'I like to play wearing a *thawb* if I have a chance to play soccer with other students who wear *thawbs* too.' (Student 22)

For these students, being able to participate in sport wearing the *thawb* in their community led them to want to do the same at school, reflecting the continuity of their own values as manifested by this item of clothing and the culture it represents to them. This reflects Bourdieu's (1984) concept of bodily *hexis* (embodiment of habitus); the way people 'carry themselves' and live in and through their bodies is predominantly social and cultural. The situation for Saudi boys is complicated due to confusion over what constitutes appropriate attire for students in PE. Rather than sporting attire being simply a matter for suitability for PE participation, it carries cultural weight, including disdain for sporting clothing, which, for some Saudis, lowers the social value of maleness.

Peer Influence

Although the experiences and perceptions of boys can vary between environments, masculinity is always socially and culturally constructed in relation to a dominant image of gender and status differences and ultimately defines it (Dumas & Bournival, 2011; Lee, 2008). Brooks and Magnusson (2006) suggested that negative experiences in PE, such as those cited below, influence a student's physical identity and his level of PE participation. Some non-participants described the embarrassment they felt changing their clothes without privacy:

'After PE class, students have to go upstairs wearing their exercise clothes, walking among all the students. It is difficult. There are supposed to be changing and washing rooms near the soccer field, so that students feel comfortable [changing out of their sports clothes].' (Student 14)

'There are some bad words when you change clothes before and after the PE class, come from those strong players. Sometimes, they make jokes about you and you are embarrassed' (Student 20).

'In the 10th grade, I participated in PE class. My classmates called me 'butcher' because I played with no skills and just ran behind the ball and hit players, so it somewhat affected me and stopped my participation.' (Student 8)

Negative comments from peers, experienced by the boys as offensive and condescending, contributed to body dispositions toward non-participation and even disdain for PE. Aggressive attributes have been cited as markers of male-appropriate sports in high school, and participation in PE can be affected by verbal expressions (insults) during PE class (Kirk, 2010a; Brown & Evans, 2004). These factors hinder students' participation, as boys experience discomfort and shame regarding their physical appearance when changing their clothes; there is a sense that they are seen to present weak body performance (Jachyra, 2014;

Alharbi, 2014). This becomes a source of inequality in PE class participation. Deciding not to participate is the logical outcome of a pattern of thought, behavior and action which actively constructs, directs and organizes social realities for non-dominant boys who perform weakly (Bourdieu, 1971).

Interviews with non-participants showed that students who controlled the game were in a position to marginalize those who lacked sporting skills.

‘I would like to participate in the PE class, but it is tough because my classmates are skillful, and they want students like them.’ (Student 21)

‘I don’t like to play because all the students watch me, and they want to see a good and competitive student, but I am not... I feel panic. Some players here won’t let me join them.’ (Student 9)

In this school, non-participants were discouraged from participating in PE because of their lack of competence in the sold activity offered (soccer), and by an over-emphasis on competition. For students like these, a lack of physical/sporting skills can lead to marginalization and lower levels of social participation (Portman, 1995; Azzarito, 2004).

Ultimately, this lack of physical capital could expand the gap between a student and his classmates, decreasing his social networking capacity. Struggling to participate in PE was painful for the students I studied. Feeling unfit playing soccer during the class fostered a feeling that they could not keep up with others physically; they felt their bodies could not perform as well other boys did. This indicates how student involvement in sport is fashioned by capital that is the result of a combination of socio-economic status, schooling routines and available resources (Lee et al., 2009).

Social Class and PE in this Saudi High School

To understand the sociological concepts underlying the students’ body dispositions, this study examines the socio-demographic characteristics related to the students’ parental occupational and educational background. The findings suggest that Saudi boys’ participation and their relation to their own body habitus are fashioned by the conditions of existence of a given milieu. According to Dagkas and Stathi (2007), one’s social, economic, and cultural background is considered to be aligned with a person’s habits, identity, and dispositions toward PE and leisure; these are, in turn, characteristics of an individual’s social class.

Some middle-class students whose parents had high educational achievement participated in PE and played soccer outside school (Students 3, 4, 11, 12, 16 and 27). These boys, whose fathers also practiced sport, preferred a body that was trained through regular participation in PE, dressing in the proper soccer uniform at school, and additionally, playing soccer in the community supported by their fathers and neighborhood friends. They had more economic and cultural capital, which assisted and maintained their body dispositions and enabled their participation in PE. In addition, this group of social agents valued the physically competitive nature of and skills inherent in playing soccer, as well as the display of masculine traits in the game.

In contrast, some lower-middle class boys whose parents had low educational attainment showed no interest in sport/PA; they preferred talking or doing homework during PE class, playing soccer irregularly, and dressing in *thawbs* when they did play soccer (Students 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, and 26). In fact, wearing the *thawb* inhibits boys because it restricts their running, speed and kicking, but these boys accepted these restrictions. Drawing

on Bourdieu (1984), some groups of actors share the same interests, social experiences and traditions; in the present study, eight students (5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 19, 20, 22) lived in the same neighborhood, were close relatives, had lower middle-class backgrounds with fathers who were low-waged, or retired soldiers, while their mothers stayed at home and were illiterate. None of these boys participated in PE. It's clear that parental encouragement is vital, and that family incomes that allow for private club memberships may help, but it could indicate that the social class impact on these boys is to be a less influence on their levels of PE and PAs.

Conclusion

Value in the high school PE context is linked with skillful sporting bodies (Shilling, 2003), and emphasizes the enduring importance of corporeal performance. Boys therefore need to possess specific bodily dispositions with a taste for sporting culture and the capacity to develop and display physical skills. However, as this study showed, some boys may lack these dispositions for reasons beyond their control. These boys are left at a disadvantage, with implications for their wellbeing.

Students described the impact of the masculine school environment and their struggle in this environment in terms of the judgement of other boys, and potential for embarrassment. With limited resources, the PE environment habituated students in such a way that some curtailed their capacity and willingness to participate in the sole activity (soccer) available in PE, with its values and influence over what are seen by the group to be legitimate bodily practices (Bourdieu, 1993). The lack of PE facilities, time and privacy for changing and showering, and concerns about being unhygienic throughout the rest of the day, were all barriers to participation. Some boys were uncomfortable changing in front of others, suggesting that changing rooms and shower facilities that offered privacy would be helpful. Some boys actively engaged in acting out their sense of masculinity through speech and bodily actions. These boys did not mind becoming sweaty, or changing in public, and some of them behaved towards non-participants in ways that further discouraged this group from joining in.

Some students seemed to dominate the PE class in terms of their expression of maleness. Participants and non-participants made different choices and displayed different preferences for style of dress (*thawb* or sporting clothes) and had distinct interactions with peers in PE and on the soccer field (or indeed, off the field if they were not participating). Aggressive behavior was observed among boys who took part enthusiastically. But instead of fostering sporting skill among all boys, the school's PE environment seems to have enabled a kind of cultural permission regarding expressions of masculine identity associated with PE participation, and this could be damaging. PE in this setting became a masculine activity favored by dominant, higher status students who typically wanted to take part, while those of lower social status felt challenged and discouraged when faced with this more dominant masculinity. This reduced the latter group's opportunities to experience and benefit from PE classes. In Saudi, the experience of high school PE students is influenced by social and cultural conditions. Students of the same social class share similar living conditions and backgrounds, so they internalize ideas and behavioral rules and routines that result in similar dispositions over time. This influences their willingness to participate in PE.

This study has given voice to adolescent males in a school setting, and aims to contribute to the literature on embodied experiences of masculinity by addressing the lack of participation in PE in Saudi Arabia. The school itself is concerned to improve on this point. Understanding

the students' perspectives should guide schools in addressing the deficiencies identified here to increase PE participation and make its environment more welcoming and worthwhile.

Corresponding Author

Majed Eid ALHARBI

PhDc in School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa,
CANADA

Email: majjodym@hotmail.com, Twitter: @majedpe

Conflict of Interest

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

References

- Al-Aifan S (2000). Obstacles associated with positive participation in a physical education lesson for secondary school students in Riyadh. (In Arabic)
- Al-Liheibi A (2008). Middle and high school students' attitudes toward physical education in Saudi Arabia. University of Arkansas.
- Al-Ghamdi A (2005). Analytical study of the difficulties facing the school sport in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Middle East Journal*. (In Arabic)
- Alharbi M (2014). *Male Students' Experiences in Urban High School Physical Education in Makkah, Saudi Arabia* (Master's Thesis, University of Ottawa).
- Al-Sultan A A (1988). Class structure in Saudi Arabia. Michigan State University, *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Volume I and II), pg. n/a
- Al-Wetshi Q S (2001). *Analytical study of the problems of the implementation of the physical education curriculum and methods of solution phase medium in Riyadh*. King Saud University. (Unpublished master's thesis). (In Arabic).
- Azzarito L (2004). *Students' construction of the body in physical education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Bonoma T (1985). Case research in marketing: opportunities, problems, and a process. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 12, 199–208.
- Bourdieu P (1971). Intellectual field and creative project. In M.F.D. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge and control: New directions in the sociology of education* (pp. 161-188). London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Bourdieu P (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu P (1978). Sport and social class. *Social Science Information*, 17(6), 819-840.
- Bourdieu P (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu P (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bourdieu P, and L Wacquant (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu P (1993). *The field of cultural production*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu P (1997). The forms of capital. In: Halsey AH, Lauder H, Brown P. (eds) *Education: Culture, Economy, Society*, pp. 46–58. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Google Scholar
- Bourdieu P (1999). *The Weight of the World. Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Trans. P. Parkhurst Ferguson et al. *Stanford University Press*, Stanford, Cali.
- Bourdieu P (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Braun V, Clarke V (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- Brooks F, Magnusson J (2006). Taking part counts: Adolescents' experiences of the transition from inactivity to active participation in school-based physical education. *Health Education Research*, 21(6), 872-883.
- Brown D, Evans J (2004). Reproducing gender? Intergenerational links and the male PE teacher as a cultural conduit in teaching physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 23(1), 48–70.
- Coles T (2009). Negotiating the field of masculinity: The production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(1), 30-44.
- Creswell J W (2013). *Writing a qualitative study. In Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dagkas S, Stathi, A. (2007). Exploring social and environmental factors affecting adolescents' participation in physical activity. *European Physical Education Review*, 13(3), 369-384.
- Davison K G (2000). Boys' bodies in school: Physical education. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 8(2), 255-255.
- Dumas, A., Bournival, E. (2011). Men, masculinities and health. Theory and application. In Jason Laker (Ed.), *Canadian Perspectives on Men and Masculinities. An Interdisciplinary Reader*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Gorely T, Holroyd R, Kirk D (2003). Muscularity, the Habitus and the Social Construction of Gender: towards a gender-relevant physical education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(4), 429–448.
- Jachyra P (2014). 'Exploring Mechanisms of (Dis)Engagement in Health and Physical Education Class with Adolescent Boys.' Unpublished master's diss., University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.
- Garrett R, Wrench A (2011) Making Physical Education a fairer, safer and happier place: Putting critical practices into action, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 2(2), 35-49.
- Kirk D (2010a). The 'masculinity vortex' of school physical education: Beyond the myth of hyper-masculinity. In M. Kehler & M. Atkinson (Eds.), *Boys' bodies: Speaking the unspoken* (pp. 51_72). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Laberge S, Albert M (2000). Conceptions of masculinity and gender transgressions in sport among adolescent boys. In M. A. Messner & D. Sabo (Eds.), *Masculinities, gender relations, and sport* (pp. 195-221). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lee J (2008). *Socio-cultural constructions of traditional masculinity and relationships to sport/physical activity values and behaviors*. Michigan State University. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, 271.
- Lee J, Macdonald D, Wright J (2009). Young Men's Physical Activity Choices: The Impact of Capital, Masculinities, and Location. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 33(1), 59–77.
- Martino W (1999). 'Cool boys,' 'party animals,' 'squids' and 'poofters': Interrogating the dynamics and politics of adolescent masculinities in school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20, 239–263.
- Portman P A (1995). Coping behaviors of low-skilled students in physical education: Avoid, announce, act out, and accept. *The Physical Educator*, 52(1), 29–39.
- Samargandy T H (2006). *The perceptions of physical education teachers, school directors, and PE supervisors in Saudi Arabia regarding the implication of goals of the physical education curriculum*. University of Umm-Al-Qura (Unpublished master's thesis). (In Arabic).
- Shilling C (2003). *The body and social theory*. London: Sage.
- Stake R (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Thorpe H (2010). Bourdieu, gender reflexivity, and physical culture: A case of masculinities in the snowboarding field. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 34(2), 176-176-214.
- Yin R K (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.