

# Influence of Gender Stereotype on Participation in Physical Education Class of High School Students

Yuqin Deng <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Grace Christian Academy, 510000, China

\*Corresponding author email: 631302070429@mails.cqjtu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** Some researchers have discovered that gender stereotypes in physical education courses have a significant impact on the course participation rates of high school students; however, the formation mechanisms and influencing factors that are behind them still lack a unified explanation. Gender stereotypes in physical education courses have become one of the most important topics of research in recent years. As a result, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact that gender stereotypes have on the level of participation that high school students have in physical education classes. For this purpose, this paper undertakes a case study and gathers information from the curriculum, family, society, and schools that may have an impact on how many boys and girls choose to participate in physical education in high school, respectively. According to the findings of the study, male and female high school students physical education (PE) self-perceptions as well as their engagement in PE were influenced by gender stereotypes in PE. The number of females who participated in physical education was often far smaller than the number of males who did so, and many people had the impression that boys dominated the field. In light of this, eradicating gender stereotypes in sports will make it possible to make better use of the athletic interests and abilities of both young men and young women.

**Keywords:** Stereotypes; physical education; high school.

## 1. Introduction

The lower involvement rate of girls in athletics relative to boys is visible in both the data and the real world, particularly for high school boys and girls. And as a result of the social normalization of stereotypes, gender stereotypes in society have a continuous and timely impact on the lives of individuals in all fields of work and study [1]. In school sports education, the traditional notion of "gendered" physical exercise persists [2]. Sports are regarded to be the realm of boys, and they are essential to becoming genuine because they are considered to be active, aggressive, and associated with masculine characteristics. However, girls are thought to have a soft and sensitive temperament, which is the polar opposite of the physical education temperament and therefore does not meet the needs of the sport. In addition, physical education teachers deliberately include stereotyped behaviors in the curriculum, so increasing and tacitly admitting the problem of gender stereotypes in the physical education curriculum. Existing research lacks a systematic examination of the influence of stereotypes on the physical education participation of high school boys and girls. In light of the current status of high school boys' and girls' participation in physical education, gender-specific family expectations and social expectations in physical education, and stereotypes in the physical education curriculum, this study will examine why and how stereotypes influence the athletic participation of high school boys and girls.

## 2. Status of Participation in Physical Education for Boys and Girls in High School

### 2.1 Boys and Girls' Participation Gap in Physical Education Curriculum

There is a disparity between the participation of male and female students in different types of physical education classes [3]. Regarding a gender survey analysis of the physical activity in high school for boys and girls during childhood, the data show that boys' participation in physical activity

and level of physical education accounts for the majority of the male to female ratio, as well as a higher appreciation of sports, whereas on the other hand, girls have a high percentage of participation in sports they like only and do not like nor participate in sports [4]. In addition, when it comes to selecting classes for physical education, boys are more likely to lean toward dynamic sports such as those involving adventure sports, while girls are more likely to lean toward static sports such as dance [4]. Girls have a lower participation rate in physical education classes as well as a lower level of interest in these classes than boys do. On the other hand, both boys and girls are more likely to participate in sports that are geared toward their gender temperament.

## **2.2 The gap between boys' and girls' participation in sports**

The disparities that exist between the sexes in terms of athletic participation are reflected not only in the context of physical education classes but also in school physical activity. At the same time, young women are frequently put under a significant amount of pressure to participate in activities that are typically associated with men, such as sports [5]. The findings of a study that surveyed 482 high schools in the United States and found that both male and female students participated in school sports revealed that the average percentage of girls' sports participation was lower than the percentage of boys' sports participation. Even though the gender gaps in sports participation between boys and girls in urban and rural schools are not nearly as significant as the gender gaps in sports participation between boys and girls in urban and suburban schools, gender gaps in sports participation do still exist [6]. Even though the gender gap in sports participation between boys and girls in areas with lower socioeconomic status is narrowing, boys' sports participation remains higher than girls' .

## **2.3 Male and female preferences of high school students in sports**

It is generally accepted that young men dominate the sporting world. However, traditionally, sports can be broken down into two categories: those that are geared specifically toward men and those that are geared specifically toward women. The rates at which boys and girls participate in gendered sports also vary [7]. And children of both sexes will perform better in the aspects of their personalities that are associated with their gender. The values of individuals are influenced by the gender stereotypes that are prevalent in sports [8]. Because confidence and bravery are characteristics commonly associated with male athletes, grace and sensitivity are characteristics commonly associated with female athletes and sports. Therefore, males placed a higher value on athletic ability, competition, and masculinity, whereas females placed a higher value on weight management, appearance, and femininity than males did [9]. This was also confirmed based on the findings of a study that investigated possible gender differences in the evaluations of the importance of masculine and feminine traits in sports made by secondary school students, as well as the relationship between the students' evaluations of value and their participation in genetically engineered sports [10]. As a result, young men and women are becoming increasingly interested in how physical activity can further support the development of masculine and feminine characteristics and temperaments.

# **3. Family and social expectations for different genders in Physical Education**

## **3.1 Girls are taught to behave in a feminine way**

Girls are taught to be delicate, sensitive, and feminine, and because sports participation is frequently influenced by both boys' and girls' gender identities [11], the culture of femininity instilled in girls by their social and family environments from a young age interferes with their preferences and sports participation. In this social and domestic culture, the female body is portrayed as static and well-kept, which is incompatible with the requirements of exercise, which require a great deal of movement [12]. Therefore, girls who participate in historically male-dominated movements run the risk of being misidentified as boys and also violate the expected gender roles of women [13]. Consequently, despite efforts to achieve gender equality, girls engage in physical activity less often

than boys as children [14]. A study examining the reasons for female youth sports participation revealed that girls' lower sports participation than boys was due to their fear of masculinity in sports and a disconnect with femininity deemed feminine in a society that is not appearance-centered but power-centered. Other possible causes include a disconnect with femininity, which is not appearance-focused but rather power-focused. Young women believe they are judged in the traditionally masculine realm of athleticism because it allows boys to shape and display their bodies in a manner that is more appealing to them. Physical femininity is defined by "good looks" as opposed to the capacity to perform physical activities. Consequently, they develop anxiety and stress, which inhibits their ability to engage in physical activity. Consequently, the influence of family and societal stereotypes of femininity restricts the time young women devote to sports and their participation in sports [12].

### **3.2 Boys are taught to act masculine**

When the first sports forms appeared, social culture began to create male role models for certain activities that mirrored the concept of the warrior. Sports metaphors reinforce hegemonic masculinity by propagating the concept of being a soldier in war [15]. In Western nations, sports have traditionally been viewed as a masculine activity and a male realm [16]. Sports are viewed as a training ground for boys to learn fundamental social values like as hard effort and perseverance, which are essential to their development as men and productive members of society [17]. Men viewed athletics as a method to develop a close relationship with their sons, typically through using sports to make their sons more masculine [18]. At the same time, it is considered that the movement plays a vital role in constructing, validating, and testing boys' masculinity [19]. Boys are stigmatized when their behavior does not conform to societal masculinity ideals. According to the poll of boys' experiences with rugby union, "hard boys" with hegemonic masculinity enjoy privileges, whilst "intellectual guys" with marginalized masculinity are bullied, establishing an unequal power dynamic. The "hard guys" generate dominant school athletics, whilst the "intellectual boys" are depicted as inferior [20]. Male stereotypes in sports also compel boys to pursue socially and familially defined same-sex sports, so restricting their own behavior and preferences.

### **3.3 The influence of family and social gender stereotypes on school physical education**

In school activities, the concept of "gendered" sports is still prevalent [21]. In addition, society's binary structure of "masculinity" and "femininity" normalizes the concept of "gendered" sports in school activities. In the context of physical activity, it also normalizes masculine and feminine behaviors. Classes are the site of the transformation of dominant discourses about social output, where students learn gendered cultural messages about the body, both within and outside of the school environment. Students learn not only from physical education classes in physical education classes, but also from observing and interacting with people around them in terms of physical performance, body type, negotiating meanings about their bodies, gendering themselves, and thus participating in activities in gender-segregated physical education classes within society [22]. A study examined whether the discursive structure of parents, physical educators, and high school students' own discourse about the relevance of the body and physical activity in a given research context influences the choice of physical activity in high school boys' and girls' physical education classes. The outcomes were favorable. The group of boys who were influenced by the discourse structure would also participate more in a physical education class, while the group of girls who were less influenced by the discourse structure would participate less. In addition, high school girls felt that the physical education component, which was designed as a "male domain," lacked significance. This further demonstrates that parental and societal constructions of gender binary influence the physical education choices of high school students. Male and female behavior concerning physical activity. Physical education classes are the site of the transformation of dominant discourses about social output, where students learn gendered cultural messages about the body, both within and outside of the school environment. Students learn not only from physical education classes in physical education,

but also from exposure to people around them, observing their physical performance and body types, negotiating meanings about their bodies, and, as a result, gendering themselves and participating in gender-defined physical education programs under society. A study examined whether the discursive structure of parents, physical educators, and high school students own discourse about the relevance of the body and physical activity in a given research context influences the choice of physical activity in high school boys' and girls' physical education classes. The outcomes were favorable [23]. The group of boys who were influenced by the discourse structure would also participate more in a physical education class, while the group of girls who were less influenced by the discourse structure would participate less. In addition, high school girls felt that the physical education component, which was designed as a "male domain," lacked significance [23]. This further confirms that parental and social constructions of gender binary influence the physical education decisions of high school students.

## **4. Stereotypes in the physical education curriculum**

### **4.1 Gender Stereotypes in gender of the Physical Education Teaching Profession**

The gender of the coach and coaching staff can subtly influence students' and athletes' perceptions of gender in sports activities, competitions, and programs. In sports, however, gender stereotypes exist among technical and managerial staff, with women constituting the minority on coaching staffs and men occupying positions of authority [24]. Male physical education instructors were judged to have a higher level of expertise in the subject matter compared to their female counterparts in the course of teacher evaluations. The process of replicating or challenging gender systems in a physical education context, as well as the potential for agency, were both investigated in a study that looked at the comments made by physical education teachers in two different ethnic studies of seventh-graders. It was stated that being a female P.E. teacher is a difficult job and that among P.E. teacher interviewees who expressed the need for male role models to fill positions of authority, female P.E. teachers would not be recognized by boys in sports such as baseball, soccer, etc. There was a greater degree of uncertainty regarding the ability of female teachers to instruct boys, whereas there was no doubt whatsoever regarding the capability of male teachers to instruct girls [25]. The teaching practices of physical education instructors have reinforced the stereotypical notion that there are separate roles for men and women in the field of physical education through the use of gender segregation in their classrooms.

### **4.2 Stereotypes in physical Teachers' expectations**

In sports, organizations advocating restorative masculinity have called for a more boy-centered approach to teaching and emphasized the need for more male teachers to serve as a "man role model" for boys. They argue that boys need to restore their masculine identity [26]. However, physical education teachers frequently encourage and permit girls to schedule classes so as to avoid participation in activities because, in some cases, they feel uncomfortable due to male dominance or aversion to class participation [27]. According to the results of an interview with teachers and students regarding the perceptions, discriminatory behaviors, and attitudes of different genders participating in sports in physical education classes and physical activities, It was demonstrated that both students and instructors view the male body and characteristics as the most suited for exercising strength and resistance. And that this trait makes it "natural" for teachers and students to have different expectations for the performance of boys and girls [28]. Even if the teachers are aware of the unequal relationship between sports rights, they consider it to be normal.

In addition, the teachers' and students' nonverbal and verbal communication in the classroom environment revealed various forms of gender bias. A survey of four physical education teachers regarding the impact of gender on the teachers and the classroom revealed that the majority of teachers reported that gender-biased language was prevalent in the classroom and that girls were frequently

viewed as the weaker side [29]. Boys and girls are subtly discouraged from participating in physical education by the PE teachers' actions and words.

### 4.3 Stereotypes in physical Course content

Students are able to obtain some of the information that they need about gender stereotypes in sports from the content that is included in their school textbooks. The unequal portrayal of females and males in school textbooks contributes to the development and consolidation of gender roles and stereotypical behaviors among students. On the other hand, it is common for textbooks to contain a high proportion of stereotypical statements [30]. Male characters are depicted as being courageous and fearless, and they tend to have a greater presence in literary works overall. While girls are typically portrayed as shy and uncertain in the books, boys are often portrayed as confident and bold [31]. According to a study of how gender differences are depicted in Spanish secondary school physical education textbooks, there is a clear imbalance in the representation of boys and girls, with boys significantly more represented and dominant. At the same time, girls and boys are portrayed in sports books in stereotypical roles, with girls being distinguished in artistic activities such as gymnastics, swimming, and fitness practices. Regarding team sports such as soccer and rugby, boys are categorized differently than girls [32]. The stereotypes in physical education textbooks can have a negative impact on the perceptions of both boys and girls, thus limiting their opportunities.

## 5 Conclusion

This research led to the discovery that gender stereotypes in society, families, and schools have an effect on the self-perceptions of male and female high school students. These preconceptions also limit the interest in and development of physical education, particularly among female students. Through family expectations, social expectations, gender inequalities in the physical education profession, the expectations of physical education teachers, and textbooks, separate stereotypes of males and females in sports were identified and reinforced. As a direct consequence of this, the percentage of high school students who participate in athletics is often lower for female high school students than it is for male high school students. In addition, when male or female high school students do not behave in accordance with the stereotypical same-sex temperament, they are rejected by the same sex and, at the same time, are considered to be in violation of same-sex roles. This is the case whether the students are acting in accordance with the stereotypical same-sex temperament or not. This study focuses on the objective effects that stereotypes have on the likelihood of male and female high school students participating in sports. This helps to clarify how and why stereotypes affect the sports involvement of male and female high school students, especially given the fact that stereotypes also influence educational choices. Continued exploration of stereotypes is particularly relevant for boys' and girls' sports engagement in high school since stereotypes can affect judgment and academic performance. Consequently, limiting the athletic participation and interest of male and female high school students. Both boys and girls should be encouraged to be more free and open to challenging and exploring their sense of self in order to create their autonomous selves, which will allow them to move beyond the gender binary that is inherent in sports. On the basis of the current study, future research and discussion on how stereotypes affect high school students' engagement in sports can be done based on the investigation of policy support.

## References

- [1] Preece S, Bullingham R. Gender stereotypes: The impact upon perceived roles and practice of in-service teachers in physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 2022, 27(3), 259-271.
- [2] Penney D. *Gender and physical education. Contemporary issues and future directions*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

- [3] Ferry M, Lund S. Pupils in upper secondary school sports: choices based on what?. *Sport, Education and Society*, 2018, 23(3), 270-282.
- [4] Ferreira A. F, Rufino L. G. B, Diniz, I. K. D. S, Darido S. C. Secondary education student bodily practices: implications of gender in and outside physical education classes. *Motriz: Revista de Educação Física*, 2016, 22, 72-83.
- [5] Shakib S. Female basketball participation: Negotiating the conflation of peer status and gender status from childhood through puberty. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2003, 46(10), 1405-1422.
- [6] Jill K, Daniel G. The Status of High School Girls' Sport Participation Phase 2: A Report Compiled for the State of Michigan Women in Sports Task Force. DOI : [https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/sos/33lawens/Status\\_of\\_\\_HS\\_Girls\\_Sport\\_Participation\\_Phase\\_2.pdf?rev=51128749b3a8421a99cc857535a1f7c7](https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/sos/33lawens/Status_of__HS_Girls_Sport_Participation_Phase_2.pdf?rev=51128749b3a8421a99cc857535a1f7c7), 2020.
- [7] Fasting K. Women and sport in Norway, In I. Hartmann-Tews, G. Pfister (Eds.), *Sport and women: Social issues in international perspective* (pp. 15–34). London: Routledge, 2003.
- [8] Boiché, J., Chalabaev, A., & Sarrazin, P. Development of sex stereotypes relative to sport competence and value during adolescence. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 2014, 15(2), 212-215.
- [9] Jakobsen A. M. Evjen E. Gender differences in motives for participation in sports and exercise among Norwegian adolescents. *Baltic Journal of Health and Physical Activity*, 2018, 10(2), 10.
- [10] Klomsten A. T, Marsh, H. W, Skaalvik E. M. Adolescents' perceptions of masculine and feminine values in sport and physical education: A study of gender differences. *Sex roles*, 2005, 52(9), 625-636.
- [11] Joy P, Zahavich J. B. L, Kirk S. F. L. Gendered bodies and physical education (PE) participation: exploring the experiences of adolescent students and PE teachers in Nova Scotia. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2021, 30(6), 663–675.
- [12] Evans B. 'I'd feel ashamed': Girls' bodies and sports participation. *Gender, place & culture*, 2006, 13(5), 547-561.
- [13] Eitzen D. S, Sage G. H. *Sociology of North American sport* (5th ed.). Dubuque, IA: W. C. Brown, 1993.
- [14] Cárcamo C, Moreno, A, Del Barrio, C. Girls do not sweat: the development of gender stereotypes in physical education in primary school. *Human Arenas*, 2021, 4(2), 196-217.
- [15] Connell, R. Masculinity construction and sports in boys' education: A framework for thinking about the issue. *Sport, education and society*, 2008, 13(2), 131-145.
- [16] Messner M. A. *Taking the field: Women, men, and sports* (Vol. 4). U of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- [17] Coakley J. *Sport in society: Issues and controversies*. 10th ed. Baltimore, MD: Mosby, 2009.
- [18] Gottzén L, Kremer-Sadlik T. Fatherhood and youth sports: A balancing act between care and expectations. *Gender & Society*, 2012, 26(4), 639-664.
- [19] Drummond M. J. Sport and images of masculinity: The meaning of relationships in the life course of "elite" male athletes. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 2002, 10(2), 129-141.
- [20] Pringle R. 'No rugby—no fear': collective stories, masculinities and transformative possibilities in schools. *Sport, Education and Society*, 2008, 13(2), 215-237.
- [21] Azzarito L, Solmon M.A, Harrison, L. Jr. A feminist post-structuralist perspective on girls in physical education classes. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 2006, 77, 222–239.
- [22] Metcalfe S. Adolescent constructions of gendered identities: The role of sport and (physical) education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 2018, 23(7), 681-693.
- [23] Azzarito L, Solmon M. An investigation of students' embodied discourses in physical education: A gender project. *Journal of teaching in physical education*, 2009, 28(2), 173-191.
- [24] Madsen R. M, Burton L. J, Clark, B. S. Gender role expectations and the prevalence of women as assistant, 2017.
- [25] Berg P, Lahelma E. Gendering processes in the field of physical education. *Gender and education*, 2010, 22(1), 31-46.
- [26] Foster V, Kimmel M, Skelton C. What about the boys: An overview of the debates. What about the boys: issues of masculinity in schools. 1-23, 2001.

- [27] Koca C. Gender interaction in coed physical education: A study in Turkey. *Adolescence*, 2009, 44, 165–185.
- [28] Silva P, Botelho-Gomes P, Goellner S. V. Masculinities and sport: the emphasis on hegemonic masculinity in Portuguese physical education classes. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 2012, 25(3), 269-291.
- [29] Valley J. A. Graber K. C. Gender-biased communication in physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 2017, 36(4), 498-509.
- [30] Biemmi I. The imagery of gender in Italian textbooks. *Research into primary school books. Foro de Educación*, 2015, 13(18), 15-35.
- [31] Koenig A. M. Comparing prescriptive and descriptive gender stereotypes about children, adults, and the elderly. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1086, 2018.
- [32] Táboas-Pais M. I, Rey-Cao, A. Gender differences in physical education textbooks in Spain: A content analysis of photographs. *Sex roles*, 67(7), 2012, 389-402.