

2007

Social class, femininity and school sport

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Recommended Citation

Wright, Jan and O'Flynn, Gabrielle: Social class, femininity and school sport 2007.
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/edupapers/66>

Paper Title: Social class, femininity and school sport

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Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between the discursive and material practices associated with school sport and physical education and the formation of particular classed and gendered subjectivities; and how these, in turn, impact on young women's potential life chances. In so doing, the paper will attempt to go beyond an understanding of 'subjectivity' as formed in relation to cultural and institutional discourses, to engage with the notion of ability or 'embodied capacity' as a form of physical capital (Shilling 1993) which has particular salience in a consumerist 'performance' motivated market economy and which is differentially made available in schools. This argument will be developed through the examination of the material and discursive contexts of two Australian schools: an elite private girls' school and a coeducational government school which draws primarily from young people living a low socio-economic suburb.

The sociological literature in education has always recognised schools as places that shape the way young people see themselves and their chances in life. The impact of social class relations on students' experiences of schooling and their life chances has long been central to UK social analyses of schooling, particularly as influenced by the work of Bernstein, Bourdieu and Foucault (e.g. Ball 2003; Fitz, Davies, and Evans 2006; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001; Willis 1977). In the US, Wexler (1992) has critically examined the ways schools' discursive and material contexts have been implicated in producing particular classed subjects and life opportunities. More

recently, Fine and Burns (2003) in their epilogue to the *Journal of Social Issues* special issue on the contributions of psychology to understanding social class, argue for a deeper and more reflexive (on the part of academics) understanding of the relationship between class identity, consciousness and activism and between privilege, poverty and global relations, in order to create more socially just conditions of schooling.

In Australia, the study by Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982) challenged simple notions of schools as sites of class reproduction by turning their attention to the practices of schooling and the interactions between home, school and the social context. And lastly, in a longitudinal study, the *12 to 18 Project*, on which the research described in this paper was modelled, Yates and McLeod examined how schooling impacted on the gendered and class identities of young people (McLeod and Yates 1998; McLeod 2000; Yates and McLeod 2000). Through their analysis of the individual biographies developed from lengthy interviews conducted over a seven year period, they demonstrate how ‘the inseparable interplay of gender and class ... are mediated through the experiences of specific forms of schooling’ (McLeod 2000: 507) and how all schools are implicated in some way or another in practices which shut down or open up opportunities for students and in the formation of the ways members of a society regard and treat each other (Yates and McLeod 2000).

This chapter contributes to this discussion through its examination of how a particular context in schools - school sport and physical activity – contributes to production of classed and gendered subjectivities for female students. Historically school sport has held a privileged place in the education of the sons of the affluent middle class in

Britain and its colonies. It follows then that there has been considerable academic interest in the place of school sport as it contributes to the construction of masculinity (Hickey and Fitzclarence 1999; Gard and Meyenn 2000) and particular classed forms of masculinity (Light and Kirk 2000). Other historical and genealogical studies point to the profoundly gendered and classed nature of school sport and physical education in Britain and Australia. Kirk (1998) and Wright (1996), for example, point to the ways physical education and sport have disciplined bodies in ways that reflected the anticipated and very differentiated futures of the students in government as compared to the elite private schools.

Most of these studies have looked at the past configurations of physical education and school sport. Social class and marginalisation had, to a certain extent, dropped off the agenda of social analyses of physical education and sport until recently when Evans urged physical educators to take cognisance of how ‘ability’ in the form of ‘physical capital is reflected, reproduced and perhaps reconfigured and challenged in schools’ (Evans 2004: 104). Drawing on Bernstein, he asks: ‘How does the grammar and syntax of PE’s pedagogic device regulate consciousness, communication and relationships and contribute to patterns of success and failure that feature in schools?’ While we draw more on Foucault and Bourdieu for our analysis in this paper, we do follow Evans lead in examining the ways particular forms of physical and cultural capital are produced in and through school sport and physical activity. We take social class as embodied, as a ‘visceral reality’ (Evans and Davies 2004) or following Walkerdine *et al.* (2001:215), as not something that is ‘simply produced economically ... [but] performed, marked, written on bodies and minds’. This allows us to ask: How do sport and physical activity, as school sites which so fundamentally involve

the body, contribute to young women's relationships with their social world and their experience of class?; How do they contribute to the self-formation of the subject as an embodied subject? The notion of the body as a source of physical capital, as 'the possessor of power, status and symbolic forms' (Shilling 1993: 127), allows for the possibility that sport and physical activity not only work through disciplinary practices that operate as discourse, as imperatives, for example, about how one should conduct oneself on and off the field, but also as bodily learning that differentiates subjects (see also Wright and Burrows 2006).

There has been considerable discussion about the importance of the appearance of the body and the bodywork necessary to achieve the socially valued body for girls and women (less about how this is related to class – an exception being the recent work of Evans, Rich, and Holroyd 2004). To our knowledge, there has been no discussion about the relationship between femininity, 'ability' or 'embodied capacity' as physical capital and the constitution of class differences and differentiated life chances. There is good reason for this. Any discussion around 'ability' in the context of sport and physical education inevitably leads to questions about how 'ability' is constituted. Traditionally physical ability in schools has been associated with those sets of skills and dispositions required for sports, such as strength and power, which have been, in turn, associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1983). Does 'ability' then mean ability in the privileged male domain of sport or something else, and if something else does this lead to an essentialist binary that still leaves women on the less valued side of the slash? This paper does not take up this discussion directly but is certainly informed by it. We *do* want to argue that physical capital is associated with the capacity to engage with and act on the world with confidence. This 'capacity'

is not necessarily acquired through traditional sports, although it is clear from the ways sport has been taken up in elite girls' and boys' schools that this is their conviction. We do also want to keep in mind Young's description of how girls and women use their bodies to engage with world:

For the most part, girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full body capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys to develop specific bodily skills.

(Young, 1980: 153)

This quote from I. M. Young, should, of course, be treated as an observation on particular engagements with physical activity for some young women and not a generalisation to all young women. The point here is that the body inscribed with social meanings, these are not just written on bodies but 'systematically deposited and constructed on an anatomical plane' (Dempster 1988: 37). How bodies *are* impacts on the ways in which individuals interact with their world, how they use their bodies in space. If we accept Young's position, then it should be possible for physical education and school sport to contribute to the development of 'embodied capacities' or 'abilities' which allow women to engage with their world differently (and arguably more competently and with more confidence) than otherwise. In this paper, however we argue that while this is recognised in the elite girls school, the discursive relationship between femininity and sport, between health and physical education and between sport and productive citizenship continue to make this less likely for girls in the government coeducational school. The assumption of a student in need of remediation, who needs to be prepared for a future as a healthy and productive

‘employee’, together with the social and cultural privilege accorded sport as a male domain, works against the potential of physical education and school sport to make a difference to these young women’s lives through the development of ‘embodied capacity’ and dispositions which will challenge ‘existing and persistent patterns of success and failure’ (Evans 2006).

At the same time we do not want to uncritically privilege the practices associated with the elite girls schools as the ideal. As McLeod (2000) points out in her analysis of the ‘self-descriptions’ of Marion, a young woman interviewed for the Yates and McLeod project, the middle class subjectivities made available for young women are often constraining and prescriptive. Marion, for example, is described as gradually learning ‘to take on the demeanour and poise of the successful, high-achieving girl’ (McLeod 2000: 517), a subject position which is ‘congruent with... the professional middle-class values of her private schooling’ (McLeod 2000: 517). The rewards are high in terms of economic and social status, however, the costs are also considerable in terms of constraining other ways of being, of limiting ‘spaces of play’ and ‘room for improvisation’. As indicated by interviews with the young women in the *Life Activity Project* (O’Flynn 2004), the discourses of dutifulness, achievement and self-discipline projected by the elite girls’ school are highly prescriptive and difficult to resist because of their congruence with values promoted through every aspect of the school, through their families and through the wider society.

Method

The data from schools which form the focus of this paper, were collected as part of a doctoral study (O’Flynn 2004), which was, in turn, part of a larger longitudinal study funded by an Australian Research Council Grant, on the place and meaning of health and physical activity in the lives of young people (*The Life Activity Project*). For the *Life Activity Project* around 60 young people aged between 11 and 16 years, from nine urban, regional and rural high schools across three states on the East coast of Australia, were interviewed five times in the first year and twice in subsequent years over a period of six years (see Wright, Macdonald, and Groom 2003, for a more detailed description of the study). Contextual data was also collected at the participants’ schools through interviews with physical and health education teachers and from school policies and websites to determine the ways schools constructed meanings around physical activity and health. It is the data from this component of the project that are discussed in this chapter, with a focus on two schools, Bloomsbury Girls and Sunnydale High. The schools were chosen for this discussion because of their marked differences from one another: one was a prestigious, independent, religious, girls’ school located in the metropolitan area of an Australian city and the other a coeducational government comprehensive high school in the outer suburbs of the same city, which drew its students from a lower socio-economic area.

School sport policies and programs were collected from both schools and relevant material from the schools’ websites. In addition, two physical and health education¹ teachers were interviewed from each school about the way sport and physical education was conducted at their school, the importance placed on these at the school

¹ In the Australian states included in this study most teachers taught both physical and health education, and the designation of the key learning area involved some combination of health and physical education.

and their own meanings about school sport and physical education. Two male teachers were interviewed from Bloomsbury and one male and one female teacher was interviewed from Sunnydale. These teachers were recruited because of their leadership positions within the physical and health education departments, and because of their long time employment at their schools. School programs, policies, websites and transcripts of interviews were analysed to determine the answers to the following questions: What values and meanings are attributed to sport and physical activity? How are these associated with institutional and cultural discourses constituting gender and social class and with what likely effects for the female students at the schools?

Bloomsbury Girls' Private School: healthy capable young women who can manage a career

Historically, Bloomsbury has served an affluent, 'middle-class' clientele, and its ethos reflects this. The policies and prospectus collected for the study proclaim its commitment to academic excellence, extracurricular activities and the development of well-rounded, independent, young women who are exemplary students and potential leaders in their community. The importance of school sport to the wider school endeavour of building particular kinds of young women is demonstrated by the extensive investment of financial resources, facilities and time into its implementation and organization. The school possesses an aquatics centre with an Olympic-sized swimming pool and an extensive gymnasium with cardio and weight rooms. The school is also equipped with a range of other facilities, such as a hockey field, tennis, netball and basketball courts. Furthermore, in addition to the physical and health

education staff and other teachers with particular sporting expertise, the school hires qualified coaches to coach the inter-school sport competition teams. Every student therefore has access to expert tuition in a wide range of activities to develop her physical ‘abilities’.

At the time of this study, like most private girls’ schools in Australia, school sport at Bloomsbury was largely organised as an extracurricular activity through the Independent Girls’ School Sport Association (IGSSA). Through IGSSA, the students competed against similar schools in individual sports, including swimming, athletics, gymnastics, and fencing. They also participated in inter-school competitions for team sports, such as hockey, rowing, tennis, basketball, softball, water polo, netball, and cricket. These sports were played on Saturday mornings and the teams were expected to train twice a week. Beyond the traditional games and activities organised through IGSSA, the school also provided opportunities for other forms of physical activity, such as the dance club (organised by senior students), roller blading, walking groups, running club, Rock Eisteddfod dancing, and Kempo (a form of martial arts organised by a professional trainer).

In addition to an extensive range of material and human resources, Bloomsbury also possessed an extensive range of documentation defining school sport and appropriate behaviours associated with it. Such documentation included the Bloomsbury’s *Sports Handbook*, the *Constitution for the Independent Girls’ Schools Sports Association* (IGSSA) and the IGSSA *Code of Conduct for Inter-school Sport*. These documents defined the aims of and rationale behind school sport and present a detailed list of rules or “codes of conduct” that students were required to follow. It is through these “codes of conduct”, that the instrumental purpose of school sport, as an

extracurricular activity necessary for the development of a particular kind of ‘young woman’, becomes especially clear. This ‘young woman’ is one who possesses a “sense of sporting conduct and a spirit of fairness, respect, graciousness and generosity towards others” (IGSSA Constitution).

The attributes of this particular kind of young woman is further defined in the IGSSA *Code of Conduct for Inter-school Sport* which provides explicit prescriptions of how to behave and engage in competitive sports. This document provides a detailed set of twenty-five instructions on how to behave during inter-school sport competitions. The following examples are selections from the list:

Once you commit yourself to a sport for a season, honour that commitment whole-heartedly.

Respect the members in your team and treat them courteously.

Respect the opponents and treat them courteously.

When captains meet before a game to toss, wish the opposing captain a good game.

Control your temper. Never abuse equipment.

Be gracious at all times, whether you have won or lost. Be modest in success and, if you have been defeated, acknowledge your opponents’ performance.

(Code of Conduct For Inter-School Sport: 7-8)

This list indicates the high number of codes, rules and regulations which prescribe how young women should ‘be’ in competitive contexts. As stated in the *Code of Conduct* document, in a section termed “Governing Principles”: “winning inter-

school sporting events and competitions is relatively unimportant". In this sense, there seem to be few differences in the prescriptive codes and regulations for being a young woman playing sport in the early twenty-first century compared to those in the early twentieth century. The social context, however, is very different and, as indicated by the teachers' talk about school sport to follow, sport is not only seen as training for what seem to be particularly compliant forms of femininity, but also for the 'new woman' who will be able to take her place in the professions, have a career and manage the difficult task of work, family and her own health and well-being (cf McLeod 2000). For example, in the following quote one of the male physical and health education teachers, William, anticipates a particular life for his Bloomsbury students in which they will enter professional careers, which require ambition and initiative:

(sport) teaches them a little bit of perseverance, commitment, and hard work. I guess, as well as, because it's an all girls' school, there's obviously a large push to, or a large drive in the area of making girls realise that they can achieve the highest levels as well, and I think a lot of the time that comes from sport, and sport is a great place for that to start. But to build the characteristics of things that they are going to take into their careers, into the life once they leave here, and to have an idea of the way that things do happen in the outside world. Again, not everything is going to fall into place easily and they might come up against obstacles. Goal setting is particularly important, and being able to work with people and problem solve. (William, interview 2002)

Given the centrality of health to many public discourses of physical activity in the current Australian context, it is not surprising that school sport was also described in the school documents and the teachers' comments as necessary to the development of the young women's health and a healthy lifestyle. However, unlike the widespread public association between health and the prevention of overweight and obesity which currently dominates public health discourse around physical activity (Gard and Wright 2005), the relationship between sport and health for the Bloomsbury student was constituted in terms of producing the "well-rounded young woman" who could maintain her social and emotional health through successfully balancing the demands of study and leisure or, in the future, work, family, and who had a healthy/appropriate relationship with her body. For example, in the IGSA Constitution and the *Code of Conduct for Inter-school Sport* document, school sport was associated with developing "well-balanced", "healthy", young women, who had "respect for their own health and body image", were "self-disciplined" and also appreciated "sport, recreation, and exercise as part of a healthy, balanced lifestyle".

Sunnydale High: employable young women who are capable of making healthy lifestyle choices

At the time of the study, Sunnydale was made up of relatively new one-storey buildings surrounded by playgrounds marked with handball squares. The school also possessed two sporting fields, which were out of bounds during lunch and recess. A prominent feature of the school was the tall metal fence surrounding its entire grounds. Where Bloomsbury's school documents and teachers emphasised the development of a particular kind of young woman, as a coeducational school, the

school sport and physical education policies made no distinction between the male and female students, which meant that the school, like most coeducational schools tended to ignore differences (at least rhetorically) amongst students other than those associated with academic ability and behaviour. This has made it difficult to tease out the specific ways in which femininity was constructed around sport and physical activity in this specific school.

In all of the quotes used from the teachers to talk about ‘students’ at Sunnydale in this chapter, the generic ‘kids’ is used. The physical and health education teachers would generally see themselves as not differentiating between students on the basis of gender – that is, as treating students ‘equally’. The ways in which ‘gender differences’ are erased is evident in the following quote – a very typical response when physical education teachers are asked about how they deal with differences (of any kind in their lessons) – that is, attitude counts more than any other attribute.

Gabrielle: What do you most like to see in a student?

Justine: Okay, um, the one thing that I ask from all the kids I teach no matter their background, their gender, their ability, is that they try their best and give their best effort. Obviously they're a lot easier to teach if they're diligent and if they, ahhh, are here because they're motivated and here because they want to learn, but a lot of the time it's not the case (laughs).

Despite this, we would argue that the subject anticipated in Sunnydale’s texts is not gender neutral. In the school documents, traditional assumptions associated with

‘working-class’, young males are drawn on to characterise the students as potentially ‘delinquent’, and as possessing a poor work-ethic (Walkerdine 1997). In addition, as so much other research has demonstrated (Ennis 1999; Paechter 2003; Wright 1999), where there are not specific policies and strategies designed to recognise the diversity of interests, needs and experiences between and within groups of male and female students, the dominant discursive constructions associated with sport and physical activity prevail; that is sport is primarily a ‘male domain’ dominated by the various codes of football, cricket and more recently basketball (Ennis 1999; Olafson 2002; Paechter 2003). It is within this context that the practices associated with sport and physical activity at Sunnydale will be explored and interpreted.

At Sunnydale school sport, for the junior students, was organised weekly during a double period. The sports available were soccer, indoor soccer, volleyball, netball, cricket, basketball, softball, indoor cricket, hockey, and tennis. These sports were conducted within the school, and involved the students competing against each other in intra-school competitions. Senior school sport (for grades nine to eleven) was organised weekly on Wednesday afternoons, also during school time. Senior students had the option of participating in an inter-school sport competition or recreational activities. The inter-school competition sports included softball, indoor cricket, netball, oztag, touch football, softball, basketball, and soccer. The students often travelled to other locations to compete against other schools in the same district. The recreational activities included roller-skating, ten-pin bowling, snooker/pool, rock climbing, powerwalking, weights, and aerobics. Except for powerwalking, these activities were conducted in local facilities outside the school. As well as sport conducted within school hours, both junior and senior students had the opportunity to

participate in knockout sporting competitions in rugby league, soccer, cricket, basketball, golf, indoor cricket, hockey, softball, netball and volleyball (Sunnydale High Website, 2003).

While there were opportunities for students to play in sports that were not traditionally associated with male and female players and to play in mixed teams, as is still the case in most coeducational schools sport was organised around traditional gender lines, with rugby league generally played by male students, and netball and softball played by female students. During the study, some senior female students organised a rugby union team to enter a local inter-school, knock-out competition. This team, however, soon dissolved after some of the young women left school to work and the remaining students entered their final year of study.

The physical and health education staff at Sunnydale were expected to plan and manage the school sport program, and provide opportunities for students to participate in inter-school knock-out competitions. At the time of the study, the human resources available to run school sport and inter-school sport competitions were limited. Both of the physical and health education teachers who were interviewed talked about the difficulty of allocating teaching staff to supervise school sport, as well as the difficulty of recruiting the students to make up inter-school competition teams. Whereas Bloomsbury employed a number of accredited coaches, the sports organiser at Sunnydale struggled to locate teachers from within the school to coach and run training sessions with sporting teams.

In comparison to the written detail in the Bloomsbury documents, which specified how sport should be conducted and played, there was very little material from Sunnydale that explicitly outlined the value of school sport in the lives of its students. In the teachers' talk about school sport and the few pieces of school documentation, school sport was largely defined as a remedial practice. It was described as a means for 'putting right' or 'improving' the lives of the students, as a way of compensating for the 'deficiencies' in their economic and material circumstances. However, opportunities to participate were also circumscribed by these same circumstances and students who could not afford to pay the bus fare could not leave school and were therefore limited in what they could choose. The recognition of these different 'kinds' of students was explicitly written into the Sunnydale's school sport policy where one aim was to "provide varied and satisfying activities for students unable to afford to leave school for sport".

As was the case with Bloomsbury, school sport at Sunnydale was described in school documents and by the teachers as instrumental in the production of particular kinds of citizens. However, there were considerable differences in how the schools imagined their students and the role they envisaged sport playing in shaping them as citizens. At Bloomsbury, school sport contributed to the school vision of a 'well-balanced', high achieving career oriented successful young woman; at Sunnydale, the school worked towards producing employable and law abiding citizens.

The teachers talked, for example, not so much about sport as an educational end in itself, but about its importance for building self-esteem and particularly for instilling discipline and appropriate social behaviour. For example, Justine talked about school

sport as an opportunity for students to learn how to follow rules, learn to respect others, and to respect authority:

But I think generally sport itself has that, the potential to build characteristics 'cause, you know, they'll (the students) behave in a certain way because they are playing the sport so that will build characteristics in them that are good. And I suppose it's difficult to pinpoint what they are but just that respect for other people, you know, being able to follow rules and do those types of things, that maybe some kids have trouble doing in other situations, you know. But once they are on the footy field they can follow all the rules perfectly because they know that that's how they can continue to play. (Justine, Interview 2002)

School sport and physical activity were also valued for instilling the 'correct' attitude and the necessary and appropriate work-ethic required for students' future lives as employees. For example, Steve talked about physical activity as a means for teaching the importance of persistence and working hard. In doing so, he drew on discourses which construct 'success' as the outcome of individual effort, and a discourse which assumes that 'achieving' (in this case trying your best when you are not very academic) can be learnt through sport and transferred to other aspects of students' lives:

I'll say (to the students) "You've just got to keep trying and never give up, because if you learn that, you can take that from your sport and you can use it in life." And I think that's the whole, a lot of the kids here aren't the best in academic but if they take the idea of, you know, keep trying, keep trying, keep

trying and don't give up, in their life, maybe in games they've learnt or teams they've played at this school or coaches they've had at this school, they've tried to get that into their head, then it's something they can take from sport to their life. They may never play sport again, but they may, as long as they take the idea of trying their best, because that's what I say to the kids. (Steve, Interview 2002).

School based physical activity was also assumed to have the capacity to make up for otherwise unsatisfactory lives, boost self-esteem and both correct and prevent the ill-health, that is again assumed to be a characteristic of children who are judged to be disadvantaged not only economically but also socially and culturally. The students who are the subject of this discourse were thus constructed as deficit and potentially delinquent: physical activity and sport provides an alternative route, a choice between productive citizenship or anti-social behaviour and ill-health.

I think [physical activity is] very important. I think it's important for all kids, I think, especially for those um our kids that, might not have access to some other areas of life, you know, not have a lot of money, might not have a lot of family support, they might not have a lot of different things. It is one way that they can boost their self-esteem and their self-confidence and also stay reasonably healthy because we know that people in low socio-economic areas generally are less healthy than those in the higher, so it's a huge issue. You know for all of those reasons, for the reasons themselves, but also for reasons for the people around them too and if a kid in Year 9 can get involved in the local softball club and not

become involved in drugs and alcohol and smoking cigarettes and how much better off are they and are we? (Justine, Interview 2002)

In this quote physical activity is constructed as, what Evans (2006: 14) describes as a ‘palliative distraction for disaffected youth’ – a common rationale for school and community-based organised physical activity. Although Justine does refer to softball (a traditionally female sport), the discourse constituting a relationship between physical activity and regulation usually presupposes a delinquent male subject. This is evident in the Police Citizen Youth Club programs in Australia, programs for underserved youth in the US and rehabilitations programs for young [male] offenders. ‘Disaffected female students’ are more likely to be those who leave their sports uniforms at home and use physical education and sport as a form of resistance and subversion (Scruton 1987). So while both Justine and Steve seem to include all students in their comments, the institutional genealogy of this discourse suggests that it renders young women’s experience and subjectivities invisible. On the one hand this may seem to be beneficial, they are not targeted as ‘delinquent’; on the other hand, there are discourses working in sport and physical activity contexts that construct them as deficient in other ways. These discourses draw on cultural discourses of sport as a masculine activity to construct female students as ‘problems’ through their lack of ‘ability’ and enthusiasm for physical education and school sport. In government policies, the rationale for physical education and sport is increasingly in terms of its benefit to health, particularly in the long term through instilling life long habits of physical activity. In this context the emphasis in physical education particularly for female students is on creating a desire to participate through activities that are enjoyable and relevant. What this can mean in practice is the provision of

separate sport or physical education classes consisting of traditional female games or bodywork activities such as aerobics (Paechter 2003; Wright 1999). Such activities do little to challenge binary and essentialist notions of gender difference. They continue to constitute female bodies as imperfect and in need of correction, now or potentially in the future, not through particularly developing 'ability', what we have been calling embodied competence, but through creating a desire to make 'choices', to develop right attitudes that will contribute to their future health. As Evans and Davies (2004) argue:

... although there are tensions between the variety of health discourses and modalities now found in schools, all, in one way or another, focus on the body as imperfect (whether through the circumstances of ones class and poverty, or self neglect), unfinished and to be ameliorated through physical therapy (circuit training, fitness through sport and a better diet), threatened (by the risks of modernity/lifestyles of food, overeating, inactivity) and, therefore, in need of care and being changed.

(Evans and Davies 2004: 214).

It is in the government school where perfection codes seem to be most in evidence, where students are positioned as 'deficient' as productive citizens and/or as needing the 'abilities' to prevent ill-health in the future through participating in 'lifelong physical activity'. In the elite private school, with its greater emphasis on sport, the performance codes, realised in discourses of competition and achievement, persist (Evans and Davies, 2004). Ironically, the private school seem to work from a more pragmatic position – improving performance in the present through expecting high

standards; whereas the teachers in the government school hope that through an experience of enjoyment in physical activity they will perhaps achieve something in the future for their students. Their focus on physical activity for health (coded as 'preventing obesity') is also an intangible; a false hope, expressed in rhetoric but unable to be realised in practice. This is a discourse where improving 'ability', developing 'embodied capacity' seems to have a very limited relevance, except to acknowledge that some have it and some do not and this may influence their enjoyment of sport.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have described two very different school contexts in which school sport and physical activity is made sense of, practiced and delivered. Like the schools in the studies by Wexler (1992), Yates and McLeod (2000) and McLeod (2000), Bloomsbury and Sunnysdale invite their students to 'become' particular classed and gendered subjects. In this paper we have demonstrated how school sport and physical activity are implicated in the production of very different discursive and material resources for the formation of particular feminine subjectivities.

At Bloomsbury, the young women were expected to be 'successful' in many fields, prepare for 'successful' professional careers, and live 'full' and 'productive' lives. This does not mean, however, that the young women from Bloomsbury's lives are problem free or inherently 'privileged'. As discussed by Walkerdine *et al* (2001), the notion of the 'bourgeois', 'middle-class' subject is also associated with a highly structured life in which academic achievement and professional employment are paramount, and in which the normalised construction of the 'super-girl,' 'high-

achieving,' young woman holds consequences for the production of guilt and self-deprecation (something that emerged in many of the young women's interviews from Bloomsbury, see O'Flynn 2004).

It can thus be argued that the ways in which the young women at the elite private school are interpellated into neoliberal discourses close down other options. In this sense the absence of such prescriptions, the limited investments discursively, emotionally as well as materially at Sunnydale in school sport, could be seen as providing more spaces of freedom for other forms of subjectivity. In addition, sport as a school practice is likely to have very little hold (for all kinds of reasons including its dissonance with many forms of working class femininity) over young women in this context. For the young men at the school being in the successful school soccer or league team may have some power to persuade to particular forms of behaviour, however, this is unlikely for young women at the school, given the absence of such teams or the status associated in being in them.

On the other hand, if we take the notion of ability – physical capital – as investing subjects with a capacity and value that has high exchange value on all kinds of levels in society, then the inequities in the provision of resources do matter. The material resources and attention to the development of excellence in the private school continue to promote differentiated privilege and access to physical and social capital. By comparison, the Sunnydale teachers talked about the lack of human, structural, and financial resources to organise and implement school sport, and maintain its sport and physical education facilities. In addition, school sport was constructed as a remedial practice, necessary for keeping young people off the streets, temporarily

improving their quality of life, giving them a chance to follow rules and to learn to behave properly. In this context, the potential of sport and physical activity to provide spaces and resources for the development of 'embodied capacities' that allow for confident and competent engagements with the world are thus extremely limited. Differential forms of feminine subjectivity thus become embodied and impact very differently on the life chances of the female students in the two schools.

Acknowledgements

The second author would like to acknowledge that the PhD research drawn on was supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award and that the writing of this paper was supported by a Charles Sturt University Writing-up Award.

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