Abstract

With increasing global ‘moral panic’ regarding childhood obesity, Health and Physical Education (HPE) class has been championed as a potential panacea to tackle this burgeoning global ‘epidemic’. Concurrently in Ontario, adolescent boys are increasingly withdrawing from secondary school HPE as soon as they institutionally are allowed to do so (Kehler & Atkinson, 2010). Yet, there remains only a primitive understanding of the potential mechanisms that promote disengagement and withdrawal rather than active participation among adolescent boys. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research that has investigated HPE experiences from adolescent boys’ as they transition from elementary to secondary school HPE. The transition between elementary school and secondary school is a liminal point in time in the life course that has been associated with adopting new and or relinquishing previous health and physical activity behaviours. Of central concern then, and the foundation of this research, is to develop a substantive and theoretical understanding of the intersubjective and intrasubjective meanings ascribed to HPE among adolescent boys who are transitioning from elementary school HPE into their final year of institutionalized HPE in Ontario. Drawing from an ethnographic, grounded theory case study conducted at an independent elementary school for boys’, this research elucidates the mechanisms of HPE (dis)engagement from 15 adolescent boys (12-14 years of age) of varying physical abilities. In conjunction with Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptual tools of field, capital, habitus, practice and symbolic violence, it is proposed that a habitus of HPE (dis)engagement is formed through the reflexive observation, somatization and naturalization of the valorized forms of physical cultural capital in this particular social field. Considering the findings of this research, I echo a call from other critical HPE scholars to critically (re)asses the current iterations of HPE pedagogical practices to promote rather than dissuade participation in elementary school HPE among adolescent boys.