

Social Dynamics of Gender Views In Physical Education In The School Environment

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the social dynamics of gender within physical education activities, focusing on forms of resistance and identity negotiation in the school environment. Physical education not only plays a role in developing students' physical fitness but also serves as a social space where gender values, roles, and power relations are reproduced and negotiated. This research employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with several teachers at UPT SPF SDI Pannampu 1 as participants. The findings reveal that physical education practices in schools are not entirely gender-neutral. Physical activities are still dominated by male students who are perceived as strong, active, and competitive, while female students tend to be directed toward activities considered soft or less challenging. These gender biases and stereotypes are reflected in the distribution of activities, social roles, and teaching practices of physical education teachers. However, the study also identified forms of resistance and identity negotiation, where some female students challenged traditional boundaries by participating in activities typically viewed as masculine. Teachers likewise began to develop critical awareness of the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. Therefore, physical education can be understood as a dynamic social arena where gender dominance and resistance coexist. The study highlights the need for implementing reflective and gender-sensitive pedagogical strategies to promote equality and inclusivity in school-based physical education.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical education, as an integral part of the school curriculum, not only plays a role in shaping students' physical health but also serves as a social space that reflects and shapes the dynamics of relationships between individuals (Mulyana et al., 2025). According to Sutoyo (2024), one striking dynamic in physical education practices is the differential treatment and participation based on gender. In many cases, stereotypes, discrimination, and disparities in access persist, limiting the equal participation of men and women in physical activity.

Male students are often considered superior in sports that rely on strength and speed, while female students are often pushed toward activities considered more "gentle" or "feminine" (JUMSANI, 2024). As a result, the available space for participation is unequal, impacting the development of students' self-confidence, motivation, and perceptions of their physical abilities. Physical education teachers often unknowingly reinforce this social construct through teaching methods, role assignments, and activity selection. This phenomenon demonstrates that physical education is not a gender-neutral space but rather a social space where the dynamics of power, identity, and gender roles are contested (Jatiningsih, 2024). Therefore, it is important to further examine how societal gender dynamics emerge and develop in the context of school physical education, as well as how to implement inclusive education strategies to create a fair and equitable environment for all students.

Resistance to gender equality values in schools can manifest in various forms, from stereotyping in role assignments and labelling students based on gender to discrimination in participation in certain activities, such as sports, leadership, or self-expression (Jatiningsih, 2024). For example, male students who exhibit sensitive traits or choose activities considered "feminine" often face social pressure, as do female students who express leadership or assertiveness. This resistance often comes not only from fellow students but also from teachers and the school system itself (Tupamahu, 2021). However, within this same environment, an interesting negotiation process also occurs. Students and teachers are beginning to challenge traditional gender boundaries, both consciously and unconsciously. This negotiation process is evident in dress codes, group role choices, involvement in student organizations, and classroom debates.

In this study, schools become dynamic arenas where gender norms are negotiated, perpetuated, or even challenged. Gender differences are also viewed as inherent biological factors that impact students' physical fitness levels. During puberty, physical abilities develop more and more rapidly in boys than in girls. As a result, from puberty onward, boys are better at performing motor tasks requiring strength or speed. Biological factors may partially explain gender differences, but other factors are likely involved as well. It turns out that gender accounts for only 5% of the variation in physical ability. Observing gender differences does not provide information about their origins, which can be both natural and environmental (Espada et al., 2023).

Several previous studies support the existence of gender inequality and inequalities in school environments. According to St. Louis & Sharma (2024), female students tend to avoid upper-level, mixed-gender courses. They cited that the classroom atmosphere is not inclusive, male students dominate interactions, and female students feel "silenced" or less heard. This demonstrates stereotypes and inequalities in treatment and access. Meanwhile, according to Lazarowicz et al. (2021), female students report participating in physical activity after school less often than male students. Barriers include feelings of inadequacy, social disruption, health status, and environmental/social factors. In some school environments, female students often limit themselves due to social pressures and stereotypes, such as fear of being perceived as

"immodest" or "masculine." However, some display subtle resistance by remaining active and demonstrating physical abilities equal to those of males (Utama et al., 2018).

Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how resistance to and negotiation of gender norms occur in school environments, as well as the role of educational institutions in creating more inclusive, just, and equal spaces for all students, regardless of their gender identity. Based on these studies on the Social Dynamics of Gender in Physical Education Activities, Resistance, and Identity Negotiation in School Environments, the author.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach, in this case, the implementation of interviews conducted in the form of 'semi-structured', where the interviewer gives a series of structured questions to informants that have been planned and the questions are deepened one by one to obtain further information. To dig a deep understanding of how resistance and gender negotiation work in the school environment of UPT SPF SDI Pannampu 1. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to obtain narrative experiences and subjective perspectives from participants who are directly involved in the social dynamics at school. For the research population, which includes a number of teachers of UPT SPF SDI Pannampu 1, the participation criteria include interview readiness, direct experience in handling gender-related situations at school, as well as gender representation and social roles (Creswell, 2024; Moleong, 2017). Data collection techniques are the most important step in research, because the main purpose of research is to obtain data. In qualitative research, data collection techniques are carried out through Observation, Interviews, and Documentation. Observation itself understands the phenomenon directly, interviews explore the meaning and views of informants, while documentation supports findings with written evidence (Moleong, 2017).

Table 1.

Analysis of Field Findings on Gender Perspectives in Physical Education Learning

Aspect	Teacher Statement / Field Data	Meaning of Findings
Male dominance	"In mixed-gender activities, men usually take the lead. Women tend to follow."	Shows a patriarchal social structure in physical activities.
Activity bias	"If it's futsal, it's automatically the boys who join."	Activities considered masculine emphasize the division of roles based on gender.
Student resistance	"The student who loves playing football was finally accepted because of her abilities."	Forms of resistance to traditional norms emerge.
Teacher awareness	"It could change if teachers and schools provided equal space for expression."	Teachers are beginning to realize the importance of gender equality in physical education classes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several teachers shared differing views, the first being about the social dynamics of gender within the school environment. The interviewer posed several questions, such

as how the relationship between male and female students during physical education lessons is dynamic and whether physical education is a gender-neutral space. The interviewee, a physical education teacher at the school, responded to the interviewer's question: "In mixed-gender activities, boys usually lead. Girls tend to follow, but in non-competitive activities, like fitness games, they can be more balanced." "I don't think the school environment is entirely gender-neutral; many values and customs make it more suitable for boys. But I believe this can change if teachers and schools provide equal space for expression." The interviewee's response implied that physical education activities reflect social power relations, where gender determines participation, and teachers recognize physical education as a social arena where power and identity are negotiated.

Sports activities are still gender-differentiated; boys are perceived as strong and competitive, while girls are seen as gentle and cautious. An example of this evidence from the interview is "if it's futsal, it's automatically the boys who participate." Certain male and female students resist gender restrictions by participating in activities that are not "typical" for their gender. This example of evidence from the interview results, "A student who likes playing soccer is finally accepted because of her abilities," illustrates resistance and identity struggle. Teachers have a critical awareness of gender neutrality in physical education. Although there are no formal rules that differentiate between male and female students, practice in the field shows that physical education activities are still gender biased. Teachers tend to unconsciously separate types of activities based on social constructs. For example, sports like soccer, futsal, and basketball are considered masculine and more suitable for boys, while activities like gymnastics, volleyball, or fitness are considered feminine and more suitable for girls. Boys dominate the physical activity space; teachers describe how male students are more confident, more daring to perform, and more recognized by peers and teachers. Meanwhile, female students tend to be quiet, passive, or choose supporting roles for fear of being labelled negatively as "tomboy" or "impolite."

Physical Education Activities Dominated by Male Roles

The perception that males are considered strong and competitive in physical education is a social reality that has become ingrained in educational practices in schools. In many contexts, physical education is still understood as a space that emphasizes physical strength, endurance, and competitive ability, resulting in males often being positioned as the dominant players in sports activities (Lagestad et al., 2021). This perception is not solely shaped by biological factors, but also by a societal culture that positions males as symbols of strength, courage, and competitiveness. During the learning process, male students are generally given more opportunities to lead games, organize groups, and participate in competitive sports such as soccer, futsal, and basketball. This gender bias is also reflected in teachers' expectations, where males are often considered more suited to activities requiring strength and agility, while female students are more directed toward gentler activities such as rhythmic gymnastics, simple games, or low-intensity fitness activities (Pautu et al., 2025). As a result,

interaction patterns during learning tend to give male students a dominant role, allowing them to appear more aggressive, confident, and active. This not only creates unequal participation but also has the potential to reinforce the stereotype that physical ability and motor skills are naturally more inherent in males.

Sociologically, placing males as the primary actors in physical activities can boost their confidence in sports contexts, but on the other hand, it creates barriers for female students who want to demonstrate the same abilities. Many female students ultimately feel less confident or choose not to actively participate due to fear of criticism or comparison with male students. This situation can foster a long-term perception that females are less capable in physical activity and sports, even though these abilities can actually develop through equal learning and training. Furthermore, the role of teachers as learning facilitators also plays a determining role in the perpetuation of gender bias in physical education classes. Unwittingly, some teachers reinforce traditional gender norms through unequal assignments, material selection, or instruction. For example, teachers may automatically assign male students to lead groups or choose sports predominantly played by males (Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023b). Although many teachers are beginning to recognize the importance of equality in learning, field practice shows that such biases still frequently emerge in everyday interactions. Thus, the perception that males are stronger and more competitive in physical education does not simply reflect physical differences, but rather reflects cultural constructs that continue to be reproduced in educational settings. Schools and educators must develop inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching approaches, providing equal opportunities for all students to participate and develop to their full potential, without being bound by social stereotypes (Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023). Through equitable learning strategies and reflective awareness from educators, physical education can become a space that promotes equality, empowers female students, and changes traditional perceptions of gender-based physical abilities.

Gender-Based Activity Segregation and Stereotypes

In physical education settings, gender-based sporting activities are still a common phenomenon. In general, activities such as soccer, futsal, and basketball tend to be perceived as masculine sports more appropriate for boys. This view is rooted in social constructs that identify men with strength, toughness, courage, and dominance in physical space. Conversely, gymnastics, volleyball, and fitness activities are often considered more feminine and more appropriate for girls because they emphasize elements of softness, aesthetic coordination, and refined body control (Pautu et al., 2025). These stereotypes do not form spontaneously but are the result of cultural norms that are continuously reproduced, whether through the media, social interaction patterns, or educational experiences from an early age. This gender-based activity division creates unwritten boundaries that influence students' choices and interests in physical education activities. Boys, for example, are often encouraged to choose sports considered "hard" or competitive because they are assumed to align more with their masculine identity. They gain social legitimacy when they demonstrate physical prowess

in games like soccer or basketball. This makes these activities not only a means of exercise but also a symbol of social status and masculine identity at school. Conversely, girls are more often encouraged or even directed to participate in sports that are considered less physically demanding, making activities like gymnastics or volleyball the choices most often associated with feminine identities.

The impact of this stereotypical division is significant on student participation and development. Female students who are interested in or capable of competitive sports often face social and psychological barriers. They may receive negative comments, be labelled "tomboys," or not conform to gender expectations if they actively participate in sports like soccer or futsal. This pressure can lower self-confidence, hinder the exploration of potential, and even lead to a reluctance to actively participate. On the other hand, male students can also experience similar social burdens. When they choose activities considered more "gentle," like gymnastics or fitness, they may be the target of ridicule or perceived as less masculine, limiting their freedom to express their true sporting interests. Gender stereotypes in physical education not only influence students' experiences with physical activity but also impact their long-term perceptions of sport and their physical abilities. Unequal access to diverse sports experiences can foster an internal bias that physical ability and endurance are inherently male, while grace and prudence are inherently female. However, physical ability is the result of training, exposure, and opportunities provided equitably, regardless of gender.

Therefore, educators and schools must recognize that dividing activities based on gender stereotypes has the potential to hinder equal learning opportunities. Physical education should be an inclusive space that encourages students to explore their individual potential without social barriers. Teachers need to adopt gender-sensitive teaching approaches, provide equal opportunities, and develop strategies that enable all students to feel valued and able to participate in a variety of activities. In this way, inherent stereotypes can be addressed, and physical education can serve as a more just, democratic, and inclusive space for identity formation.

Forms of Female Students' Resistance to Gender Norms

In the context of physical education in elementary schools, gender norms generally place female students in a less dominant position and less active in physical activities than male students. However, this situation is not passively accepted by all female students. This study found that female students exhibit various forms of resistance in challenging these gender boundaries. This resistance emerges as a rejection of stereotypes that consider women less strong, less courageous, and only suited for gentle or aesthetic physical activities. One form of resistance that emerges is female students' active involvement in sports activities socially considered masculine, such as soccer, futsal, or other competitive games. Some female students deliberately choose to participate in these sports to prove their physical abilities and reject the perception that certain sports are only for men. Their actions not only demonstrate courage in stepping outside traditional gender boundaries but also build a new identity that is more independent, strong, and confident. In addition to physical participation, resistance is

also evident in verbal expressions and attitudes. Female students demonstrate courage in voicing their desires in group assignments, choosing their desired activities, and defending their right to participate fully in games. In some cases, female students even challenge peers or reject derogatory comments about their physical abilities. This reflects girls' readiness to defend equal participation in physical education learning.

Another form of resistance emerges through improvements in technical abilities and motor skills. Female students who consistently perform well in competitive sports receive recognition from peers and teachers, thus creating a shift in perceptions within the classroom. Their success serves as a concrete example that physical competence is not determined by gender, but rather by opportunity, practice, and motivation. In this context, resistance is not only individual but also has social implications because it can influence collective norms and perceptions. However, female students' resistance is not always unimpeded. Some still face social pressure, awkwardness, and even ridicule from peers for being perceived as exceeding socially accepted gender boundaries. Nevertheless, teacher support and an inclusive learning environment can strengthen female students' courage in defending equal participation. Therefore, the role of educators is crucial in providing a safe space and validating these experiences of resistance as part of the social learning process (Cowley et al., 2021).

Overall, female students' resistance to gender norms in physical education demonstrates that they are not passive objects subject to social structures, but rather active agents capable of fighting for equality and shaping their physical and social identities. This phenomenon indicates that awareness of gender equality is growing, and physical education holds great potential as a transformative space to encourage more equitable and inclusive cultural change for all students.

Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) Teachers' Awareness of the Importance of Gender Equality

Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) teachers' awareness of the importance of gender equality is a key factor in creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. Although some teaching practices unconsciously reinforce gender stereotypes, this study found that some teachers are beginning to develop a critical understanding of equality issues and are demonstrating concrete efforts to reduce bias in the PJOK teaching process (Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023a). This awareness stems from direct observation of student behavior, reflection on teaching experiences, and an understanding of pedagogical principles oriented toward educational equity. PJOK teachers demonstrate an awareness that physical activity should not be limited by gender identity. They acknowledge that female students often lack confidence in sports activities due to social perceptions that they are weaker and less competitive than males. Teachers with gender awareness tend to provide equal opportunities and encouragement for all students to participate in a variety of sports activities, including those traditionally considered masculine, such as soccer and basketball. In interviews, teachers emphasized that physical ability is not determined by gender, but rather by learning experiences, motivation, and consistent practice (Makrooni et al., 2025).

In addition to focusing on opportunities for participation, teachers also strive to create a classroom atmosphere that values the diversity of student abilities. They encourage male students not to dominate physical activity spaces and provide space for female students to perform and develop their skills. Teachers have also begun to challenge student comments or attitudes that belittle the abilities of their peers due to gender. These actions demonstrate that teachers not only recognize the importance of equality but also take concrete steps to create a classroom culture that supports inclusion.

However, teachers' awareness of the importance of gender equality is not always accompanied by the pedagogical ability to implement it consistently. Several teachers acknowledged that in practice, gender stereotypes still emerge, for example, when they unwittingly assign tasks or choose games that more often involve males as leaders. This unintentional change suggests that even with awareness, changing practices requires mentoring, training, and school policies that support gender-sensitive learning (Salvatori & Cherubini, 2024).

Physical education teachers' awareness of gender issues is also reflected in their understanding of the importance of providing character education and values of equality through physical activity. Teachers recognize that physical education is not only about motor skills and physical health, but also about developing social attitudes, cooperation, and mutual respect. By providing equal opportunities and treating students equally, physical education teachers play a role in shaping a generation that values equality and avoids gender-based discrimination (Yıldırım & Gürpınar, 2023). Overall, physical education teachers' awareness of the importance of gender equality is a crucial element in transforming physical education practices in schools. While challenges remain in its implementation, the initial step of teachers' reflective awareness provides a strong foundation for creating inclusive, equitable, and gender-stereotypical learning spaces. Support from school policies, professional training, and increased gender literacy among educators is needed to ensure that gender equality in physical education is not merely a normative ideal but is realized in learning practices (Işıkgoz et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted at the SPF SDI Pannampu 1 School, it can be concluded that physical education is a social space that is not entirely gender-neutral. Physical activities in schools still exhibit biases and social constructs that position male students as more dominant, strong, and competitive, while female students are often perceived as passive, gentle, and less willing to participate in activities that require strength or leadership.

Although there are no formal gender-based restrictions in physical education activities, practices still reflect inequalities. Teachers, both consciously and unconsciously, sometimes reinforce these stereotypes through role assignments or activity selection. However, this research also found forms of resistance and identity

negotiation among both students and teachers. Some female students began to reject traditional boundaries by participating in activities considered "masculine," while some teachers began to demonstrate critical awareness of the importance of providing equal space for all students.

Thus, the social dynamics of gender in physical education demonstrate a process of contestation between domination and resistance, in which the values of equality and inclusivity are gradually being negotiated. Schools play an important role as an arena for social transformation that can develop gender equality through a pedagogical approach that is reflective, inclusive, and sensitive to differences in identity.

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