

Deviant Bodies –Discursive Othering in Physical Education

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In line with the symposium topic, the contribution approaches the fundamental question “Who become the *Others* in Physical Education (PE)?”. Following Foucault (2019), discourses are complex formations of power-knowledge-structures which call the things they speak of into existence. Discourses bring forth social differences, which are intersectionally entangled and inscribed into subjects and their bodies (Riegel, 2016), through discursive practices of Othering (Spivak, 1994). Othering describes the identification and categorization of entities along hierarchically organized binary oppositions within societal power structures. Through Othering, discourses constitute and maintain normality and deviance in specific socio-historic contexts. How children and adolescents come to understand their own physicality largely depends on wider societal discourses on bodily norms and ideals, and while the body takes the center stage in sports and PE, research on how these discourses are negotiated in PE remains rather scarce in German-speaking contexts (Thiel et al., 2020). This contribution addresses the question, how discursive constructions of the normal and deviant body perpetuate in-/equality and mechanisms of in-/exclusion in PE. Data material from interviews with 25 PE teachers from the Vienna area was analyzed with discourse analysis in a four-dimensional intersectional framework of gender, race/ethnicity, class and body (Winker & Degele, 2009). Results show the actualization of deeply rooted hegemonic body discourses in PE, which sustain the marginalization of students whose bodies are marked as deviant from the male, white, slim and able-bodied norm. Norms of physical performance as an expression of acquired cultural and physical capital depend on these actualizations to maintain established power structures. Resistant discursive positions shed light on how to destabilize existing power relations and value all students in their individual physicality. Based on these results and in order to facilitate equality and participation in PE for everybody and all bodies, possible discursive shifts and opportunities for further research are discussed.

References

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Arbeitskreis

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