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Bullying in physical education: a sociological perspective

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Education policies, such as the White Report on Education (2010), have been explicit in denouncing bullying. Yet, despite intolerant attitudes towards bullying, the problem still exists. Most research examines bullying interactions and refers to 'the school' as the social setting for where it takes place. Rivers (2012) calls for researchers to consider how bullying exists in different educational contexts. Sympathetic of Rivers' (2012) considerations, this study recognises that schools are social settings that are comprised of multiple social sub-settings. This presentation discusses findings from a review of literature on bullying in physical education. Research questions were 'what forms of bullying exist in physical education?' and 'what are the social processes that enable bullying to exist in physical education?' Bullying was widely accepted as a social process that involves imbalances of power and power relations were evident in physical education settings. Practices within physical education, such as changing clothing, provided pupils with challenging experiences. Physical education was identified as one of the few school subjects that centralises the body and performance. The body was frequently cited as a central topic of ridicule and reason for bullying incidents. These included representations of body dichotomies such as the aggressive/passive body, the athletic/non-athletic body and the abled/disabled body.

Key words: physical education, bullying, bodies, power