



**Book Review**

***Boys' Bodies: Speaking the Unspoken***

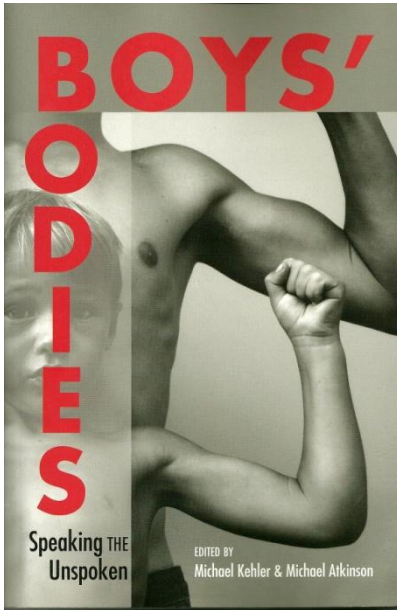
**Edited by Michael Kehler & Michael Atkinson**

**[Peter Lang](#), New York, 2010**

**Reviewed by**

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*Boys' Bodies* is a welcome addition to the literature on gender, sport and physical education. While feminist writers have been critiquing and contributing to the discussion on girls, women and sport for several decades, masculinity studies have been lagging, particularly in the scholarship on sports and physical education. Both practitioners and scholars will be aware that these areas remain male dominated, however the particular 'brand' of masculinity most prized is alienating not only to would-be female athletes/participants, but also to many boys and men.

While there has been much worry about boys falling behind in school, with laments in the popular media that the feminist movement has emasculated boys and men (at least in Western societies), this book is not just another "what about the boys?"

Rather, it is a well-researched, thoughtful collection of essays on some of the contemporary concerns merging gender, health, physical education/physical activity, sport, and media, with particular attention paid to the so-called "obesity epidemic."

The editors have divided the book into three "meta-sections", the first addressing obesity and body image, the second on enforcing masculinities, and the third on emerging/contesting masculinities which includes a "series of international case studies examining how boys resist and contest dominant

messages regarding and physical cultures of preferred masculinities” (p. xiii). The chapter topics include a “skeptical” review of obesity research and the role of schools in managing and monitoring students’ body weights; the experience of gyms and locker rooms for boys; bullying in secondary schools; body image; social class and schooling, and other discussions of specific research related to these themes.

The editors’ goal was to develop a better understanding of the paradoxical development of a sedentary youth culture in the face of growing research and concern regarding the health related consequences of physical inactivity among populations, with a particular focus in this instance on young boys. Although the book’s focus is on boys’ bodies, and physical activity, it has a much broader reach. In that the consequences of a youth culture invested in hegemonic masculinity (and even a “hyper-masculinity” when it comes to sport and physical education) has far reaching social and personal consequences.

The book is successful in promoting more thoughtful and critical debate among readers, and challenging teachers, parents, coaches and other stakeholders to re-think the impact and consequences of reproducing sport and physical education pedagogy in all of its traditional ways. Many of these traditions have not served us well, and in fact have caused more harm than good in many instances, despite claims of being healthy and health promoting pursuits for youth and for boys in particular.