


RESEARCH BRIEF

Gender typologies in the school playground

September 2023



Introduction



Boys are more physically active than girls in the school playground. To build school playgrounds that can improve both boys' and girls' physical activity it is crucial to understand the cultural practices that shape and are shaped by gender activities in the school playground.

This brief provides insights from a study conducted in 17 Danish school playgrounds where 111 10-11-year-old children were interviewed. The study was led by Charlotte Skau Pawlowski from the World Playground Research Institute.

This brief is particularly relevant for policy and decision makers involved in creating and maintaining playground environments in schools. It may also be of interest to researchers and professionals designing school playgrounds.

Results

Six gender typologies with varying behaviors, needs and power relations exist in the school playground:

The Soccer Girls



'Soccer girls' joined boys' games. Some were skilled, while others, less skilled, juggled between the game to chat, use phones, or gymnastics.

The Talking Girls



Some girls formed 'talking girls' groups for recess communication. Some stayed outdoors, while others chose indoor spaces to chat, or use social media.

The Dancing Girls



Dancing girls led physically active games, such as dancing and rope skipping. Some boys joined, but it was the girls who took the lead.

The Soccer Boys



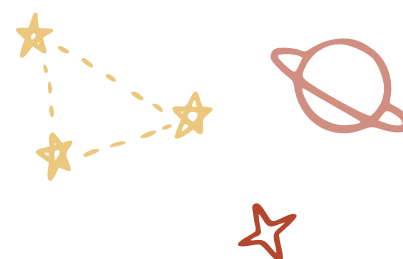
For some boys, soccer was the main reason for attending school. Competitive dynamics and skill hierarchies prevailed among them.

The 'Chasing Game' Boys



Boys participated in chasing games and set the rules. Some girls occasionally joined. Schoolyard features and the space between them were used.

The Nerds



A smaller group of boys, the 'nerds', showed little interest in sports. They were absorbed in a fantasy world and engaged in imaginative play.



Key take home message

Our findings of six gendered play typologies with varying behaviors, needs, and power relations imply that different intervention strategies in the school playground might be needed to increase the physical activity level in different subgroups of children.

Furthermore, to increase physical activity in the school playground it is necessary to be aware of the interrelation between these six groups.



The brief is based on

Pawłowski CS, Ergler C, Tjørnhøj-Thomsen T, Schipperijn J, Troelsen T. 'Like a soccer camp for boys': A qualitative exploration of gendered activity patterns in children's self-organized play during school recess. *European Physical Education Review* 2015, Vol. 21(3) 275–291.



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All briefs focus on topics related to the development and design of playground as well as the impact of playgrounds on children's physical activity, mental and social health and motor skills.

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