

# Researchers study why high school boys dodge 'Phys Ed'

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As obesity and inactivity among youth becomes a growing concern for North American families, new research based at The University of Western Ontario is asking why some high school boys are reluctant to participate in Grade 9 health and physical education classes.

And while a majority of the research being publicly debated links the inactivity to television viewing and hours logged on the computer time, Michael Kehler, an associate professor at Western's Faculty of Education, is examining the relationship between perceived masculinity, body image, and health.

In Ontario, all high school students are required to take at least one course in health and physical education. Most boys choose to take the mandatory course in Grade 9. Others postpone the 'Phys Ed' requirement until a later year when the topic is related to health issues and does not include activities in the gymnasium or on the playing field.

Kehler is speaking to young men from the London, Ontario region to better understand the degree body image in adolescent boys is a factor contributing to whether or not they continue pursuing physical activity.

"There appears to be a link between body image, masculinity, and long-term apathy toward physical activity and ultimately one's quality of life," Kehler said.

"So much research has been done examining girls and issues around

body image but very little research has explored the relationship between boys, health and body image in secondary schools.

“If a boy is thinner or heavier than he would like to be, the stress and anxiety of participating in physical education may be prohibitive. That anxiety plays out in a number of ways from disinterest to genuine fear of being harassed.”

The study, in collaboration with Kevin Wamsley of Western’s Faculty of Health Sciences and Michael Atkinson of the University of Loughborough (U.K.), involves one-on-one interviews, as well as observations in physical education classes and weblogging.

“Often boys who don’t feel at ease are terrified to go to the locker room or class, fearing they will be mocked for their size, their lack of athletic prowess, or that they will fall victim to homophobia.”

Source: University of Western Ontario

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