

COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES IN A SECOND GRADE  
CLASSROOM:  
DO GIRLS COOPERATE BETTER?\*

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*Proponents of the "different cultures" model describe the genders as essentially different and segregated from one another. When applied to children, girls are said to be more cooperative than boys. Cooperative education research suggests that use of cooperative goal structures (making cooperation a requirement to reach a goal) increases not only learning but also prosocial interactions among students. This paper describes the effect of introducing cooperative activities to a second grade physical education class. The different cultures model would predict girls to be more receptive to and better at cooperative activities; the cooperative education literature would predict a decrease in gender segregation. Neither of these outcomes was observed. Results are discussed in the context of a situational model advocated by Thorne in Gender Play: Girls and Boys at School (1993).*

This paper resulted from the combination of two ostensibly unrelated interests of its coauthors. One was a growing conviction that if schools are to socialize children to behave prosocially, cooperation should replace the traditionally competitive approaches to education, including physical education. The other was a concern about gender inequality, which social science literature suggests is fostered in schools by the separation of girls and boys into two groups so different from each other as to be conceptualized as different cultures (Lever 1976; Maccoby 1990; Thorne 1993).

To combine these interests we initiated an exploratory study in which we introduced cooperative activities to a second grade physical education class and observed the interactions between the girls and boys. If cooperative activities encourage prosocial behaviors (e.g., empathy, trust, perspective-taking) in children as proponents claim, would it cross gender lines as well, making the two cultures less distinct? If girls are by nature or culture more cooperative would they find themselves at an advantage in a physical education class that uses only cooperative activities, contrary to their usual experiences in competitive activities?

Since these questions are based in part on the "different cultures" model, we describe the model briefly. For a full description and critique, see Chapter 6 in

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Thorne (1993), "Do Girls and Boys Have Different Cultures?" A critic of this model, Thorne proposes an alternative "situational" model, asking *in what situations do girls and boys exhibit certain behaviors, including those attributed to them by the different cultures model?* For example, rather than say that boys are competitive and girls cooperative, Thorne argues that we need to ask which boys or girls are competitive. Where, when, and under what circumstances are they cooperative (Thorne 1993:108)?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Increasingly, feminist theorists reject the different cultures model as being "essentialist," that is, portraying the genders (in this case girls and boys) as essentially different (Stacey 1994). The model portrays the boys' culture as made up of groups that are larger, more public, hierarchical, and competitive, and girls' groups as smaller, more oriented to relationships and intimacy, and more private and cooperative (Thorne 1993:92).

As might be expected, the different cultures model also describes the two cultures as being physically separated, with interaction occurring primarily within same-gender groups. The interaction styles resulting from this segregated interaction have been called "enabling" (girls) and "restrictive" (boys) (Unpublished manuscript cited in Maccoby 1990). Enabling refers to a style which facilitates interaction by encouraging, agreeing, supporting one's partner; the restrictive style discourages interaction by contradicting, interrupting, boasting, etc.

Like many proponents of the different cultures model, Maccoby (1990) expresses concern about what happens later in life when these styles, developed in largely segregated childhood groups, are used in adult mixed-gender interactions. This concern illustrates the notion intrinsic to this model that these gender differences are deep-seated and unlikely to change in adulthood. A more recent and popularized version of this concern about the negative effects of girls' and boys' learning different interaction (and language) styles is Tannen's (1990) best seller, *You Just Don't Understand*. The social construction of gender as difference is so powerful (and apparently appealing) that people, including researchers, see it everywhere (Lorber 1994).

Given our interest in gender interaction and the use of cooperative activities in elementary physical education, the two aspects of the different cultures model that we examined were cooperativeness (vs. competitiveness) and gender segregation. What does it mean to say that girls are more "cooperative"? In an early explication of this part of the different cultures model, Lever (1976) made a distinction between play and games. Play was defined as a cooperative interaction that had no specific goal, no end point, and no winners, whereas games were competitive interactions with a goal, endpoint, and winners. According to Lever, girls "played" more than boys; boys "gamed" more than girls. More recently, in a study refuting the different cultures model, Hughes (1988) interpreted girls' cooperativeness as referring to their concern for relationships in general and

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friends in particular. The different cultures model assumes that this concern is incompatible with competitive interaction (Hughes 1988).

Neither of these definitions of cooperation corresponds exactly to that used in the education literature. There a distinction is made between goals and goal structures (Johnson and Johnson 1975). The same goal (e.g., to increase upper body strength) can be reached using cooperative or competitive goal structures. Thus, it is the goal structure that determines appropriate interaction (oppositional or interdependent) among participants. For example, the children's game of musical chairs is a competitive game in which all but one child are losers. In a cooperative version of this game, as chairs are removed children must figure out how they can all fit into the remaining spaces --by sitting on parts of chairs and each other-- even when only one chair is left. Although competitive games often require cooperation among team members to defeat the opposing team, games with cooperative goal structures require all players to work together to achieve the goal of the game, with no losers.

Use of cooperative games in elementary physical education is not common despite evidence that it maximizes learning in physical education classrooms as well as others (see, for example, Decker 1990; Deline 1991; Dunn and Wilson 1991; Glakas 1991; Grineski 1989; and Orlick 1978, 1982). These studies show that children experience enhanced feelings of self-esteem, increased motivation, and a greater sense of belonging in cooperative learning situations.

We found only one study (Orlick 1977) in the cooperative education literature reporting improved gender relations. In it, fourth and fifth grade boys complained about having to play with the girls, and when they did they monopolized the ball. Transforming the goal structure of the game to a more cooperative one also transformed the interaction between the girls and boys, resulting in congenial integration (Orlick 1977).

This outcome was markedly different from the situation described by one of our university students writing about her experience as a coach of 5 to 8 year olds playing T-ball and pop-up ball in a city parks and recreation program (Volk, 1993). She paired girls with boys, and, especially among the older children,

The boys did not want to play with any girls, unless it was Anna. She was a "tomboy" and was better than most of the boys on our team. The boys would say that Anna was not a "real" girl because she was cool... I had a lot of problems with the boys saying, "Don't worry she can't hit the ball! It's a girl, she'll miss it! She's a girl and she sucks!" ... The boys on my team always tried to outdo the girls and then put them down and make fun of them. When a girl would cry, they would tease her even more. When we were sitting on the bench the boys would push the girls off, try to barge in front of them, tell them how good boys were compared to girls, and even spit on them.

Orlick's contrasting example suggests that cooperative goal structures increase positive interactions and decrease the importance of ability (because

children can help each other with whatever tasks are required by the game). Thus, gender conflict and segregation would also be expected to decrease.

Gender segregated play groups have been found consistently in this and other cultures (Serbin, Tonick and Sternblitz 1977). Maccoby (1990) reviewed and evaluated the extensive literature on children's same-gender preferences and concluded that girls avoid boys because they are put off by boys' rougher play, and their orientation to competition and dominance, and because it is more difficult to influence them. Boys' reasons for avoiding girls are less clear, according to Maccoby, though the avoidance is as extreme.

Given these reasons for children's same-gender preferences, would use of cooperative activities help to integrate them? Cooperative goal structures, which determine appropriate behavior for accomplishing a goal, should decrease boys' orientation to competition and dominance, possibly increasing their willingness to accept influence from girls.

In this paper we describe our observations of second grade boys' and girls' reactions to the introduction of cooperative activities to their physical education class. Based on the different cultures model, we would expect girls to show more enthusiasm for the cooperative activities than boys, who should resist participating or try to transform the activities into competitive ones. With respect to gender segregation, over time we might expect it to decline in a situation in which both genders have approximately the same opportunity to influence one another in reaching a joint goal.

## SETTING AND SAMPLE

The second-grade physical education class we observed was a convenience sample of twenty-two students, 10 girls and 12 boys. It was available to us because of the long term working relationship between co-author Grineski and the physical education teacher at the school. Physical education classes there, from kindergarten through 6th grade, serve as a laboratory for Grineski's university students. Because of this, the children are accustomed to having outsiders (college students and their professors) in their physical education classes. Our presence required no more explanation than that the children would be learning some new, cooperative activities.

As we describe this setting, the children, and how we went about observing them, it should be acknowledged that we do not consider this group of children to be a "sample" from which generalizations can be made. Rather, the small number of observations we made of this non-representative group of school children was intended as an exploration of an idea; a pilot project to determine if further, more comprehensive, investigation is warranted.

These second graders were a very homogeneous group with respect to race and religion, as the Catholic school they attended is located in a middle-sized upper midwestern community that is about 97% white. All the children were white except one (Asian), and nearly all who attend this school are Roman Catholic. This homogeneity made the focus on gender easier by eliminating

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other, possibly confounding, differences. It may have had the effect of optimizing cooperation in both genders, but this did not constitute a problem for our purposes.

A university professor of physical education (Grineski) planned and taught eight 30-minute sessions of cooperative physical education. These sessions occurred once a week. The other four days the regular teacher, who was also a white male of similar age, used primarily individual or competitive-game formats. During the 8 sessions, the children learned nineteen different activities, each with a cooperative goal structure and no losers.

## METHODS

Our method consisted primarily of observation recorded in field notes. These were supplemented by one-minute interval recordings taken only during the cooperative activities (as opposed to during instructions or demonstrations) and one small-group interview.

In field notes we described the cooperative and non-cooperative interactions of the girls and boys as they occurred during, as well as before and after the activities. We also noted when and how the children segregated themselves.

The one-minute interval recordings made during the cooperative activities consisted of observing one child at a time for 60 seconds, alternating between girls and boys. Behaviors observed were classified as cooperative, non-cooperative, and neutral. We defined an action as cooperative when the child physically helped a peer or peers with an activity, made verbal suggestions, or gave positive reinforcement. We defined non-cooperative behavior as behavior that detracted from collective goal achievement with peers. Typical examples of this category were physical restriction of another child's participation and unwillingness to participate in an activity. When children neither helped nor hindered their partners or team members we termed their behavior as neutral. When a child exhibited more than one kind of behavior during a one-minute observation interval, classification depended on which kind of behavior took up more of the interval.

On our last observation day we divided the 17 children who were present into three mixed-sex groups. Each group met with one of the three coauthors in different corners of the gym. In a group interview of about 15 minutes the children were asked to respond to three questions: how they felt about the cooperative activities we had introduced (i.e., whether they liked them or not); whether they thought cooperation was "good;" and whether they liked to choose their own partners or have their teacher choose for them. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. Time (we preferred to use our limited time for observation of the cooperative activities) and school policy did not permit individual interviews, which would have been preferable given the influence of peers in small groups. Also, in hindsight, single gender groups may have been more effective. In any case, the children's comments reported below should be interpreted cautiously.

We have outlined a number of methodological limitations in this preliminary effort to explore gender segregation and cooperation among young children in a physical education classroom. The short duration of the observation period was a serious constraint, and the fact that the children were engaged in the cooperative activities only one day out of 5 has unknown consequences. Had it been every day, their learning would have occurred more rapidly, but they may have tired of the activities. All of these limitations should be addressed in a more comprehensive study: larger sample sizes, varying age groups, longer duration of observations, and more time for interviewing.

## FINDINGS

Using the methods described we looked for similarities and differences in the behaviors of the girls and boys. These observations are reported in the following categories: cooperativeness, reprimands, enthusiasm for cooperative activities, displays of affection, ability/skill, and segregation. Like cooperativeness and segregation, these categories came primarily from the different cultures model.

**Cooperativeness.** The interval recording system resulted in 64 one-minute intervals: 33 for girls' and 31 for boys' actions. Seventy percent of girls' behaviors were cooperative, 12% were non-cooperative, and 18% neutral. Of the boys' behaviors, 64% were cooperative, 23% were non-cooperative, and 13% were neutral. Thus, girls performed only slightly more cooperative acts (70% vs. 64%). It should be noted, however, that boys were almost twice as likely to be non-cooperative (23% vs. 12%). This difference may be explained by the fact that on the whole the boys tended to be less physically restrained than the girls. Whereas girls' non-cooperation took the form of ignoring instructions or rejecting another player, boys' non-cooperation seemed to stem from their being less able or less willing to control themselves as in sitting still during instructions, stopping their action when told, following directions, or being quiet.

**Reprimands** Individual boys were reprimanded by the teacher more than twice as often as were individual girls (10 vs. 4 times), sometimes having to "sit out" of an activity for several minutes at a time. Only one girl was ever required to sit out.<sup>2</sup>

**Enthusiasm/attitudes.** Field notes revealed that both genders were equally responsive to the cooperative-activity format. This was consistent with their respective rates of cooperation (70% for girls vs. 64% for boys) in the interval recordings reported above.

When we interviewed the children at the end of the observation period we tried to elicit the meanings they attached to cooperation, including their degree of enthusiasm for it. The words "cooperation" and "collective" had been used frequently by the teacher introducing the cooperative activities over the three month period. For example, they did "collective" pushups in groups of three or four in which they pooled the number completed.

When asked their overall assessment of the activities and the value of cooperation, the children gave uniformly positive answers. For example, learning to cooperate "will help later, when you're older," and "it helps you learn teamwork" (with some reference to soccer). One boy mentioned the fact that cooperation requires their holding hands - "like in the scoop-up game," and another boy recalled an incident in the hoop game in which they were told by the teacher not to make fun of people. Apparently they associated such prosocial behaviors as holding hands and not ridiculing others with the cooperative activities. Striking to us was how well they remembered and could name or describe the various activities, considering that they had been introduced to as many as 19 over a three-month period. Many of the children volunteered their favorite one. We took this as an indication that the activities had been fun.

We noted that boys occasionally engaged in displays that symbolized winning -- raised fists, loud whoops, etc. -- even though no competition was involved. But we also observed situations in which the children had a perfect opportunity to turn the activity into a competition but did not. Collective pushups is one example. Instructions were for the children in groups of 3 or 4 to do as many pushups as they could, counting each one they do individually. When they were too tired to continue, they were to hold the position (thus strengthening their arms) and continue counting until time was called. We observed a group of girls report their individual scores to a group of boys who then reported theirs (we couldn't hear which was higher). Neither group taunted the other with "We got more than you did!" What the children seemed most interested in was "that big number" (the grand total from all the groups) that on one occasion they had to remind the teacher to report to them.

**Affection.** Boys and girls were about equally inclined to show affection in the form of hand-holding, hugging, sitting close together, and other such gestures. We observed these behaviors between pairs of boys 5 times and between pairs of girls 6 times. (These do not, of course, represent all such exchanges, but only the ones we witnessed.) All 11 of these observations occurred outside the activities, e.g., during instructions or when entering and leaving the gym.

**Ability/skill.** It was clear that both girls and boys had to be taught to cooperate. A cooperative goal structure seemed unfamiliar to them, and neither girls nor boys adapted to it more quickly. For example, in partner activities where the sexes were integrated, it appeared equally likely that a girl or a boy would provide direction for the pair. With respect to the issue of skills, boys and girls seemed equally physically capable in the activities. Boys did not outperform girls; if anything, girls displayed a slight advantage in motor skills in one or two activities. On one occasion the teacher asked two girls to demonstrate a partnered activity that required balance and coordination. They completed the action smoothly and competently, and several of the boys watching applauded, commenting "They're really good at that!"

To this point it should be clear that one of our two most striking observations was the similarity in behavior of these seven and eight year old

boys and girls. The other, as reported in the remainder of this section, was that the children segregated themselves by gender whenever they had the opportunity.

*Segregation.* Of the 19 cooperative activities we introduced, 15 required participation with partners or in small groups. The children were allowed to choose their own partners in 10 of these; the teacher chose for them in 5. In no instance did a boy choose a girl or vice versa, although at times they were forced together because of uneven numbers. The different cultures model describes a high degree of gender segregation among children, and Thorne (1993) points out that "study after study" in the United States and some other countries has found that when they have a choice boys and girls are more likely to separate than integrate. Still, we were not expecting the *total* segregation we found in these children, especially in the absence of any evidence of antagonism between the girls and the boys. When another-gender partner was chosen for them, we observed in a few cases a momentary look of disappointment, irritation, or mock incredulity ("You and me??"), but once the game commenced, we saw no further resistance. On one occasion a group of two boys and two girls effectively segregated themselves *within* their mixed group in the way they organized the activity. (We should also point out that we saw the boy in one mixed-gender pair approach his designated girl partner with a happy smile.)

Although they never chose each other, boys and girls never invoked gender verbally except when asked to in our last-day interviewing. In the 15 minute group interview described earlier, we asked if the children preferred to choose their own partners or to have the teacher do it. Two of the three groups immediately responded that they preferred to choose. Four girls' responses from these groups are quoted as follows:

1. "I like it when I get to pick my own partner because I always get the person I like." (Two boys indicated agreement).
2. "I like it when I get to pick. Then if you have a good friend who you told you would be with, then.. [you can keep the promise]." 3. "I like [picking my own partner] because then they like to do what I want to do." 4. "I like picking because sometimes I'd promise somebody that I would go with them, and then I can't."

The third group (two girls and three boys) at first responded that it is better when the teacher chooses, giving socially acceptable reasons such as an opportunity to be with a variety of different people and getting to be with two particular boys that are otherwise always together. Most of this talk came from the boys. When the interviewer pressed to see if there was a genuine consensus, one girl dissented: she said, "I want to choose." When asked why, and why girls always choose girls, she said, "Boys don't cooperate as well." The boys seemed a bit taken aback at this and one said tentatively, "Some girls don't cooperate..." No one was willing to try to argue this, however, and one boy pointed out that he and his (girl) partner had cooperated well that day: "We both

decided to do something" (when they were required to choose among some alternatives) and "We worked together." One of the other two boys, however, was already intent on explaining why boys and girls don't choose each other and/or don't cooperate. "Boys and girls don't like each other yet," he said, and "they're different." They then proceeded to count the ways.

An explanation of gender segregation given by a girl in another group was "It's more exciting if you're a boy [and] you get to have a boy for your partner. Then if you're a girl and you get a girl it's more exciting for you." It is not clear what she meant by "exciting," but who their partners or group members were did seem to be more important to girls. We saw two incidents in which a dominant girl dictated very overtly which other girls would be in the group she was in: Mary appeared to be one of the most popular girls in the class. At one point during a session when the children were allowed to choose their own groups for a game, we saw a group of five or six girls moving toward her. Suddenly, the girls dashed toward her, in an apparent "race" to be first at her side. Mary pointed to two girls and declared, "Those two were last." The two looked disappointed at the judgment but did not contest it. Without protest, they joined the other group of girls.

In another incident involving Mary, the children had gathered on the floor around the instructor, who was explaining the rules of an activity. Shelley, who was the tallest and oldest-looking girl in the class, was sitting near Mary. Shelley shifted her position closer to Mary's, and Mary quickly moved away. It continued in this fashion-- Shelley inching closer and Mary moving away-- until Mary turned to Shelley with an angry face and told her to stop.

It seemed to be Mary's prerogative to accept or exclude other girls when partners or groups formed for the activities. The process of choosing partners was, for the girls, an event that generated much excitement and anxiety. Girls exhibited more concern than did boys over the question of who would pair up with whom. Most of the girls in the class found partners easily, while one or two of the apparently less popular girls got each other (or a "leftover" boy) as partners. In the one case of exclusion that involved boys, two boys excluded a third boy, but did it nonverbally and much less obviously.

## DISCUSSION

Our purpose in this exploratory study was to observe differences and similarities in girls' and boys' reactions to and performance in cooperative activities in physical education. There is considerable evidence of the positive effects of cooperative learning, both academic and social, but few studies have focused on its effect on gender interaction. Our observations were guided by the two theoretical models that attempt to explain the gendered social relations of school children: the different cultures model, exemplified for many by Gilligan's (1982) *In A Different Voice*, and the situational (or perhaps microstructural) model exemplified by Thorne's (1993) *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School*.

The different cultures model would predict girls to be more enthusiastic about cooperative activities and more adept at them than boys. Its prediction regarding the influence of cooperative activities on gender segregation is not so clear; different cultures theorists have admitted that the extreme segregation of the two cultures can be broken down (e.g., by deliberate reinforcement), but it is difficult.

The situational model emphasizes the complexity of gender relations (contradictions, ambiguities, and diversity) in contrast to the dualism of the different cultures model. Proponents of the situational model advocate looking at gender in context, starting with activities rather than the assumption of two cultures (Thorne 1993). In this view, some situations elicit a sense of gender difference (or even antagonism), others one of unity. For example, in our interviews the children were requested to address gender. When they did so, an us-versus-them attitude emerged, with comments like "Boys are yucky to girls" (girl), "I hate girls" (boy), "I used to like boys to play with...but I've changed" (girl) and a boy's response, "I never even liked girls." By contrast, when girls and boys were assigned other-gender partners and given an interesting task, the harmonious result belied these harsh words.

We did not find girls to be more cooperative than boys, at least as defined by our cooperative activities. These activities seemed to minimize gender differences because girls and boys were equally unfamiliar with how to "do" cooperation. This suggests that situational factors (such as the introduction of cooperative learning in a physical-education setting) can influence the behavior of children in ways counter to the "culture" of gender.

The basis for different cultures theorists' assertion that girls are more cooperative is that girls "stress intimacy and connection" and "affirm solidarity and commonality, expressing what has been called an 'egalitarian ethos'" (Thorne 1993). In other words, girls supposedly prefer not to compete because competition emphasizes "rank" and position relative to others. However, when we observed the children's interactions between activities, such as during periods of instruction or when partners for activities were being chosen, it appeared that girls were more concerned about rank among themselves than were boys.

Girls were aware of their position relative to other girls in the class, and no "egalitarian ethos" was evident in their interactions. Moreover, incidents of exclusion such as those described suggest that the "ethics" which guide girls' interactions in same-sex groups are not congruent with the inclusive, helping philosophy of cooperative learning.

Finally, with respect to the issue of gender segregation, our observation was that complete gender segregation would occur unless the situation was structured by the teacher. When the teacher mixed girls and boys, they interacted harmoniously and apparently happily. Whether this is seen as supporting the different cultures or the situational model is a matter of interpretation. For example, Maccoby (1990), a different cultures theorist, and Thorne (1993), a proponent of the situational model, interpret the same study (Serbin, Tonick, and Sternblitz 1977) differently. In this study, teachers gave positive reinforcement

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for preschoolers' cooperative cross-sex play. During the two-week duration of the experiment gender integration increased significantly and then returned to the earlier segregated pattern when reinforcement stopped. Maccoby took this as evidence that children's same-sex preferences are difficult to change, whereas Thorne was impressed by the significant difference after such a short period of intervention (Thorne 1993:210).

Both models look at the effect of adult presence on children's gender segregation. Different cultures theorists argue that girls' inability to influence boys may also explain a well-known finding that girls in school tend to stay nearer an adult than boys do, presumably for protection from boys' dominance. Maccoby (1990) cites at least one (unpublished) finding that girls do not stay nearer to an adult when playing in all-girl groups.

Thorne (1993) suggests that presence of an adult tends to undermine gender separation both because they have the authority to enforce gender mixing, and by doing so legitimize it. Wherever adults exert more control (e.g., in classrooms compared to playgrounds), she argues, one finds more gender integration. Because adult enforcement of it also legitimizes gender mixing, children's fear of being called a sissy or being accused of having a crush on someone is reduced. When children are allowed to choose their own partners, which Thorne calls "witnessed choice," it is a situation "ripe for teasing" (Thorne 1993:54). Thus, the argument goes, boys will choose boys and girls girls in order to avoid being teased.

Though we only observed these second graders in their physical education classes, and for a relatively short period of time, we never once observed an incident of heterosexual teasing. Neither did we hear any reference to it in the group interviews we conducted. Nevertheless, in the presence of several adults (their substitute teacher, their regular teacher, who was usually somewhere in the gym, and two observers), these children segregated themselves completely whenever they had the opportunity. On the day we observed the greatest degree of both cooperation and enjoyment, the teacher had assigned boy-girl pairs, and had given them an absorbing task that required a variety of mental and physical skills. The activity was to pick up a card from the center ring, read the instructions, and do the activity. For example, the card chosen by a boy-girl pair might say "Do 100 collective jumping jacks," meaning that one child would do them until tired, then the other would take over. They would go on this way until they reached 100, and then return to the ring to get another card.

We observed this "card game" activity in the second to last session, and were struck by how different (more involved, positive, and focused) the children seemed compared to many of the prior sessions. From this we speculated that cooperative goal structures alone are not sufficient for promoting gender integration. It appeared that the "card game" was so successful because it required more complete concentration than some of the other activities.

Three authors, Evans (1986), Griffin (1983), and Thorne (1993), have suggested that characteristics of the games themselves affect the likelihood that they will be gender integrated. Griffin (1983), in "Gymnastics Is a Girl Thing,"

pointed out that perceived sex-appropriateness is an important determinant of gender integration in gymnastics. In her study, boys participated seriously only on the rings, horse, and parallel bars. During the "girl appropriate" events, they clowned, teased, and harassed the girls.

Evans (1986:6) focused on skill requirements of the game. He observed during recess at an Illinois public school and found that of 238 team games, 78% were played by boys and only 22% by girls. He attributed this difference to differences in skill. For example, girls and boys played kickball together more than football because kickball did not require the throwing and catching skills that girls were less likely to have.

For Thorne (1993), the key to gender integration was structuring the game to avoid witnessed choice. In her study, the most gender-integrated games were kickball, handball, and dodgeball, all of which could be entered easily without being chosen. The problem of witnessed choice is eliminated, she argued, if one could enter simply by getting into line. When this occurred, the game was more likely to be gender- (and also age- and race-) integrated.

Cooperative activities address these three concerns. Because they are new to the children, they are not sex-typed; because they require children to assist each other, differences in skill levels are minimized. The problem of witnessed choice is solved, but only when the teacher assigns gender-integrated pairs or groups. As indicated above, however, not all cooperatively structured activities are equally effective in promoting gender integration. If they are to be used for this purpose, more study is needed to distinguish among them. To our knowledge, advocates of cooperative education have not attempted to make distinctions among cooperative activities except on the basis of age-appropriateness.

The findings of this pilot project with all its limitations (described above) may not be confirmed by future studies based on large, representative samples of children of varying ages. If they are, however, the implications for educational practice are striking. If interesting and challenging activities with cooperative goal structures can achieve gender integration, they should be widely used in physical education classes. Title IX requires that girls and boys be in the same physical education classes, but, as the experience of the student who coached T-ball and our own observations illustrate, that is clearly not enough. Comprehensive and rigorous studies are needed to convince school policymakers and physical education teachers that cooperative activities may be a way to reach the goal of real gender integration. As we have seen, a program of systematic positive reinforcement also resulted in gender integration in a preschool classroom. For the physical education teacher, however, use of cooperative activities, which can achieve educational goals such as skill development and fitness as well as gender integration, seems much more feasible.

## ENDNOTES

1. This is not to suggest that all girls are less skilled than boys at the team games usually played in elementary physical education. In a recent conversation with an experienced elementary physical education teacher in this community, the teacher observed that over time skill differences between girls and boys have diminished noticeably. Griffin (1985) created a typology of "participation styles" of middle school children within genders based partly on skill. The most frequent types among the girls were those with low skill levels.
2. A number of studies have shown that in the academic classroom boys are scolded more for misbehavior but praised for academic work (see, for example, Wilkinson and Marrett 1985). In our observation there was no special praise for boys to offset their being reprimanded more.

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## LANGUAGE OBSTACLES IN THE NARRATIVES OF ABUSED WOMEN

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*Language is a gendered system that reflects male experience and expressions and the categories used in traditional sociological inquiry are often incongruent with the experiences of women's lives (Devault 1990; Long 1987; Keller 1985; Smith 1979). An examination of 32 abused women's narratives of violence from their intimate partners demonstrates that words for the content of their experiences were readily accessible. Women's articulations of the interactional meanings of the violence, however, indicated vocabularies insufficient to describe the effects. I examine how abused women's reports of naming and use of language shape meaning and consequent actions. I argue that a gendered language system poses obstacles to the constructions and expressions of these meanings.*

Language is the quintessential embodiment of human experience. It is the most social of all human phenomena anchoring and articulating everything from sexual relations and family intimacy to the war plans and peace negotiations of nation-states (Boden 1991:848). Language is not merely a passive form of communication (Todd and Fisher 1988), but an active force shaping the constructions and interpretations of experience. It defines, mirrors, and thus sustains social order.

Language and the power to name are vital in both social control and knowledge construction processes. It is through language and naming that actors create their own realities and that phenomena are made "real." Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), for example, discussed the power of language and naming in science. By naming nature, by creating theories and models which constructed and defined nature, scientists transformed the unknown into the known. DuBois' (1983:108) amplifications of naming processes suggested that what was left unnamed, in society as in science, became non-existent, as its reality was not confirmed:

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