This paper examines the role of sport, physical education and hygiene in the secondary educational system of early modern France (i.e., nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). Attention is particularly devoted to the lycées and collèges which were publicly controlled and managed respectively by the state and the municipalities. Through the use of literary and historical records the attitudes toward youth within these institutions is investigated.1

While some have directed varying degrees of attention to this issue, this study explicitly describes and outlines through both literary texts and archival evidence, educators' approach to the body. The intensity of these beliefs and practices is brought into sharper focus when various pressures within French society which could have led to different attitudes within the schools are outlined. A multidimensional analysis focusing on several key influences within French society suggests why these practices and beliefs persisted and were integral parts of the educational system. Before discussing the nature of this orientation, how students experienced its affects and why it arose, however, let us first examine the developments which were occurring before and during the nineteenth century which were focused upon the physical health of school youth.

For several reasons one might expect the early modern French educational system to be concerned with sports, physical education and hygiene. Already in neighbouring countries such as England and Germany the concern had arisen and efforts had been taken to improve the physical health of people. And, French society was dedicating more and more leisure time to sports and enjoying the new facilities which could be used to clean one's body.

In nineteenth century France, there was a growing concern as well as a growing interest in sports. Many philosophers had been the advocates of physical fitness. As early as the sixteenth century, Rabelais and Montaigne had proclaimed its benefits. Then, of course, in the late eighteenth century Rousseau and others such as Philipon advocated formal attention being given to the growing child and the role of physical activities in the development of his natural capacities.
This growing interest was also reflected in the emergence of different organizations and facilities devoted to physical recreation. As soon as 1818 gymnasiums were created. Although they were estranged from each other, both the lower and upper classes had their own recreational and athletic clubs. There was actually an impressive number of clubs such as the Club Alpin or the Société des Marcheurs touristes de France if one wished to walk and the Rowing Club de Paris or the Bordeaux Athletic Club if one enjoyed water sports. There were also bicycle clubs, groups for runners, organizations for footballers and soccer players and even clubs for boxers.2

Along with this great concern for sports, new habits toward cleanliness were being developed. Although one would have to wait for the seventeenth century to see water specifically associated with cleanliness, the bath became quite rapidly a regular practice in France, especially in bourgeois homes. Georges Vigarello noted that in 1782 there were bathtubs in every newly built house and that when an affluent individual wanted to rent an apartment, he considered the bathroom to be one of the essential rooms.3 Therefore, when the nineteenth century arrived, taking baths for hygienic reasons had become customary. This is reflected in the popular practice of using the woman in her bath for a painting subject by artists such as Degas, although he was far from being the only artist to cultivate this type of domestic scene. While the practice of using the bathtub was limited to the social elite, the state soon encouraged the rest of the nation to follow the elitist example. The disparity between bourgeois cleanliness and the cleanliness of the common people was reduced by degrees thanks to the publication of a large number of 'sanitary' texts and, as soon as 1821, the creation of free public bathhouses.4

Furthermore, if one were to assume that through the teaching of ideas and the cultivation of students' intellectual life, education can be a mechanism of social control, a reasonable hypothesis might be that physical education would further enhance the ability to control and shape students' lives. By controlling their bodies, their recreational activities and socio-emotional life, another technique would be provided for shaping the beliefs and practices of students. It would, therefore, seem to be a plausible assumption that French educational institutions might exhibit some interest in controlling the bodily or physical activities of their students, both in terms of hygiene and physical education.

The real situation we find, however, is quite different from what we might expect. Let us begin our examination of conditions in the lycées and collèges of early modern France with the observations of Céline which provide a striking counterpoint for this discussion.
When Céline describes his first impression upon his arrival to 'collège,' everything seems attractive, the air is wonderful, the site splendid, the buildings are surrounded by gardens, the windows offer a magnificent scenery. One can notice the panorama of the river, three cities, the wharf, the boats passing by that can be seen again a little later behind the hills and the meadows, as they head out to sea. This is an institution with great appeal. Are we really talking about a 'collège'? Certainly we are, but not a French 'collège'. Rather, it is the British Meanwell College where Céline studied. If this author's subsequent experiences do not leave him many happy remembrances, one cannot, however, remain indifferent to his first impression. This 'collège', associated with light, greenery, and space is in marked contrast to the French schoolbuilding characterized by darkness and seclusion. If the word 'jail' is often associated with the French lycée or collège, this surname is derived from the architecture and location of the schoolbuildings which usually possessed a gloomy and an unhealthy appearance.

Because space was so sparse in cities, the first lycées and collages were constructed in former hospitals or former abbeys, such as the lycée Henri IV. Even when new, they retained the quality of military barracks. Children would spend their short recesses in small dark squares surrounded by the buildings' walls. Such an unhealthy atmosphere, at least for certain of the administrators who expressed some concerns for the health of the children, was one of the reasons for choosing the country as the site of future schoolbuildings. In moving from the congested world of the city, the country would provide physical space for play and fresh air. Although the idea seemed reasonable and worthy, school directors still did not give their students much freedom of movement. While some of the new lycées built in the country were located in large areas of land, their administrators still reinforced the 'imprisonment' of the children by keeping them in small courtyards during recess. As Jules Isaac describes it, the beautiful park surrounding the lycée Lakanal, outside Paris, is only there to appeal to the parents. During the five years of his schooling there, J. Isaac states that he was never once allowed to enter the park and that he spent most of his recess climbing at the top of the courtyard's gate in order to admire that inaccessible place. For him this restriction imposed by the school's administrators was torture.

Thus, when we examine the lycées and colleges of early modern France, which were usually boarding schools, we find that even when the surroundings permitted it, the children were confined in their schools and their physical well being was repressed. Moreover, in these institutions the
human body was systematically neglected, because of both a lack of physical exercise through sporting activities and a lack of attention for basic hygiene.

In regards to physical education, it is at a very late date that the French educational system begins to pay attention to this issue. Only in 1880 do sports begin to appear in the lycées. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many lycées still do not have any gymnasium. When physical education is included in the curriculum we find it is often conducted in city clothes which suggests that such exercises were neither strenuous in nature nor considered important enough to warrant this kind of preparation. In fact, it will not be until 1933 that the Ecole Normale d'éducation physique will be created, which is the first school that trained physical education teachers. In sum, physical education was either totally lacking or received minimal attention within the educational system during the nineteenth century.

So too, we find that the bodily needs and personal hygiene of students were of minor importance to French educators of this era. The famous line "mens sana in corpore sano," was apparently unknown to them. Specific attitudes concerning the cleanliness of youth reflects this indifference to body hygiene. Antoine Prost notes that at the lycée de Vanves, boarders did not take more than one bath per trimester and a footbath once every two weeks.7 Ironically, this institution was chosen as a model lycée in 1872 by Jules Simon, the minister of public instruction.

In his Souvenirs, Ernest Lavisse recalls his own experience about cleanliness.8 In his college in Laon, there wasn't any room to wash in; furthermore, the water the students were provided with did not run into sinks but was only dispensed through small fountains. Cleaning supplies were enclosed in small boxes which were left on the floor of one of the staircases. Everyone cleaned himself in his own way since nobody supervised or forced the students to wash. The cleaning of oneself was a very superficial exercise consisting only of the washing of the face with the end of a towel. No supplies were provided for the cleaning of students' feet. Only from time to time were the children taken to the bathhouse of the city, while in the summer, some cold baths were allowed in the nearby river. Clearly, E. Lavisse does not exaggerate when saying that he and his classmates were dirty children.

The cleanliness of students was neglected to about the same degree in other lycées such as the lycée de Nevers. In Inventaire de L'Abime, we find that, unlike the collège of Laon, there was a room especially equipped for footbaths. However, this room was used only once a week by the youngsters to wash their feet.9 We can, therefore, imagine the kinds of aversive odors that emanated from the classrooms where numerous unclean children were
assembled. The authors of *La Vie Quotidienne des Professeurs en France de 1870 à 1940* make direct reference to this situation: "What was striking in yesterday's lycées were the odors of uncleaned bodies, of the old clothes, of worn-out socks."\(^\text{10}\)

In summary, what we find is that students generally did not regularly wash in the lycées and collages of this era and only the best schools were equipped with bathrooms. Having a bathroom, moreover, did not necessarily mean that one's body was properly cared for. At the lycée Lakanal, although equipped with a showerroom, showers were authorized only once a month. The historian Jules Isaac, who studied there, states that the daily clean-up consisted of washing one's face, neck and hands, i.e., that which was visible. The rest of the body was ignored.\(^\text{11}\) Furthermore, a survey conducted at the the beginning of the third Republic showed that bath and showers were rarely taken, usually only when authorized by medical prescription, and footbaths were presumably given only weekly.\(^\text{12}\) In light of these findings and repeated commentaries by various writers, the discussion concerning the lack of body care in *Poil de Carotte* may not be an exaggeration. In this novel, the narrator insists that there existed an extreme lack of concern for hygiene in the school where he and his brother studied. This condition lead to a common ritual when the children returned home:

> As soon as big brother Felix and Poil de Carotte arrive from the Saint-Marc institution, Madame Lepic has them take a footbath. They have needed one for the last three months since feet are never washed at the boarding school. In fact, no rule has been established in relation to it.\(^\text{13}\)

This orientation, involving a lack of concern for hygiene and the body as a whole, was also manifested in the daily schedule of the students. Children in these schools got up early, at five or six o'clock, and went to bed relatively late, dedicating most of the day to their studies. In fact, they spent over eleven hours daily in the classroom, silent and immobile. Generally, the recess was very short and often canceled if the students were caught talking or misbehaving. The lunch, often taken in silence, was swallowed in half an hour. Everyday, students were burdened with work and nothing distracted them from their studies.

A final illustration of this pervasive lack of concern for the physical well-being of youth concerns the extreme temperatures in the schools which not only were uncomfortable but unsafe. Throughout the nineteenth century dormitories in the winter were often chillingly cold. In that regard, the historian Francoise Mayeur notes that dormitory buildings had no heating
sources or ventilation except for one or two fireplaces depending on the size of the room. She also adds that dormitories were not adequately heated until the end of the century. F. Mayeur’s remarks are graphically substantiated by the comments of Georges Duhamel. Talking about the winter of 1899-1900, he recalls his experience:

A piercing cold. . . . The night in the dormitories was as rigorous as in the pole. The men in charge of the cleaning would always leave, at the bottom of the chamberpots, a small quantity of water that we would find again at night, transmuted into ice rings. Discobolus with reddened hands, my roommates were throwing to each other the ice cubes across the dormitory. . . . I was falling asleep with difficulty under my thin blankets. . . . The following morning, we would find again some fragments of ice on the tile floor and even on the blankets, because the room temperature had not risen.

Given these harsh and unhealthy conditions in which students lived it should be apparent why certain historians who have studied the French educational system often quote Victor de Laprade’s L'Education Homicide. In this work, the author denounces the bad treatment inflicted upon these children, which he suggests is contrary to nature. Indeed he argues that many of these individuals remained physically handicapped for the rest of their lives due to these practices and conditions.

Nevertheless, for bourgeois families of this period, education was the key to success and the preservation of their childrens’ privileged and elitist positions. Earning a good education meant acquiring the requisite skills and knowledge to obtain the baccalaureat, the only diploma which would allow a student to enter the university and go on from there to the highest ranking positions in society. And, of course, lycées and colleges were the only institutions which prepared students for the baccalaureat. In achieving that goal, hygiene and sports were ignored and even when the latter was included in the curriculum, it was neither compulsory for obtaining the baccalaureat nor an integral part of the educational program.

In essence, a lack of concern for physical education, physical health and the body as a whole is clearly evident. Repeated references to hygienic issues in numerous literary texts strikingly document and complement what certain historical sources suggest concerning this issue.

In this context, it is important to recognize that administrators of the French lycées and collages were insensitive to the new trends emerging within
French society during this period. Even the greatest advocates for sport could not influence their thinking. For instance, de Coubertin, attempted to implant a love of sports within French culture and to recreate the Olympics in the modern era. He vigorously pushed French youth to engage in these new kinds of activities.  

While no one can deny that his attempt to establish the Olympics was successful and many private clubs were created, one must also recognize that the schools very seldom took part in this change. It could be argued that students of some lycées such as Lycée Saint-Louis had team sports, but these teams were founded by some of the non-boarding students who were meeting outside the school during their free time and were not formally associated with the institution. Furthermore, when physical education did become compulsory, these activities which were quite similar to military exercises were still not taken seriously. School administrators hired low paid, untrained instructors, who were intellectually incompetent and the laughing-stocks of the school.

It should also be noted that while the writers of the books we have been studying refer to the unhealthy living conditions of the lycées and collages of early modern France, they do not mention the lack of sports. It is as if this were of no concern to them. Indeed, their attitude towards physical education seems quite similar to that of the educators working in these institutions. Related to this point is Weber's observation that historians have provided little information about sports within these schools. Such an omission may be due to the absence or relatively minor role of sport within educational institutions at this time. It may also reflect, however, the lack of interest by some researchers in this topic because they share the belief that physical education is unimportant for the proper development of a human being.

What we find then are a number of factors encouraging a concern for hygiene and sports including the earlier mentioned arguments of Rousseau and others and the growing popularity for such activities within France itself. Consequently, it is clear that despite the possibilities for, if not the pressures which could have lead to an interest in physical health within the educational system, there have been very strong countervailing tendencies or pressures to ignore this issue.

Of course, the question arises as to why the health of the body has been neglected by educators. The answer is neither simple nor unidimensional. Rather, it is argued, we should take a multidimensional approach, seeking to identify the various factors contributing to this lack of interest. While varied in their nature the impact of these influences has been profound.
A major factor concerns the general set of values and beliefs of this era. As briefly noted by various authors such as Hall, these values were part of a tradition of thought central to French society and education arising from Cartesian Rationalism. One should dedicate oneself to the development of the mind: cultivation of the ability to think, to observe, to reflect. Studies should be of a classical nature where one obtains a 'culture generale' while focusing on logic and rationality. This exclusive focusing upon mental processes, especially rational thought, resulted in a deemphasis on the body and a related fear that concentration on the physical or bodily dimensions of human experience would detract from the development of the mind. Indeed, even in the twentieth century, when concern for the physical dimension of the human being had grown, some sports advocates such as G. Bertier still had to persuasively demonstrate that physical education did not harm the development of intelligence nor prevent students' from successfully pursuing their studies.

Another related element accounting for the lack of interest in physical recreation was based upon the way students were expected to study. In this school system students were instructed to study individually and never interfere with one another while working on their homework. The most common pedagogical techniques involved indepth study of literary texts, Latin compositions and the solution of complex mathematical problems. These types of exercises were highly individualistic and involved rational, analytic thought. Studies or projects involving collaboration and cooperation between students were ignored. Thus, we find an individualistic orientation within the lycée that was antithetical to the concept of group effort and team work which is the foundation of many sports and outdoor, recreational activities.

When sports did become popular within France, especially among the members of the upper classes who were the graduates of the lycées, it is interesting to observe which recreational activities were among the favorites. The most popular sports included horse racing, walking, shooting and fencing. Privileged youth in particular also enjoyed 'La savate' which later was renamed French boxing. None of these sports involved a cooperative, group effort; rather, they were individualistic in nature. A plausible suggestion warranting further investigation would be that the growing fascination with sports was influenced by this individualistic orientation and this was reflected in the content and form of these sporting activities.

These are not the only ways that cultural ideas have influenced attitudes towards hygiene and bodily activities. Another way such influence was felt concerned the effect of certain traditional values upon school
administrators' and teachers' perspectives. Religious, catholic beliefs of France exercised a great influence over the culture in this period. One component of these long-standing beliefs involved the quite prudish attitude that childrens' naked bodies should not be exposed. At the heart of these strict beliefs was the fear that such inappropriate actions might foster physical, sexual desires in children, ideas which persisted into and permeated the state organized lycées and colleges. Such prudery was one ingredient very likely contributing to the reluctance to seriously clean the total body of the child. While washing more than his face and hands or while bathing, the child would be in increased contact with his body. This could have aroused forbidden ideas or feelings, which in the minds of educators could have had dangerous consequences.

This same type of belief may have also led to the denigration of physical education. First, strenuous exercise would quite likely have led to an increased desire to engage in hygienic activities such as washing more thoroughly or changing garments due to increased soiling and wear and damage to one's clothes. From the perspective of the educator these would have been undesirable developments. Secondly, participation in team sports, such as soccer, would have lead to increased physical contact with others, either on one's own team or with the opposition. Again, an occurrence which administrators probably wished to avoid due to their viewing this as a violation of moral boundaries concerning the public and private regions of the body.

Finally, a very different reason for the denial of the body and hygiene concerns the relations of authority within the social organization of the lycées and colleges. Despite persuasive arguments for and the presence of alternative approaches in other european societies, the French response was to interpret such developments as a threat to the formal social structure of the school. For example, in L'Education Analyse en France, de Coubertin argued that sports, specifically team games, had a variety of benefits. Not only were they good for people's health, but they were especially helpful for encouraging children to take initiatives and make decisions. Youth educated in the lycées, who were being trained to become the nation's "chiefs" (i.e., leaders), would profit enormously from such experiences. Moreover, some argued that sporting activities should instill in youth a respect for legitimate authority and the group. As James Walvin explains, team games [such as cricket and soccer which were being played in England] "had a chain of command which reached from the playing field into higher structures of authority...Playing these games...was a means of accepting that structure of authority; obedience to betters/superiors, obeying orders and a commitment to pursuing the interests of the team." French educators,
however, did not see it this way nor were moved by the arguments of their fellow countrymen or any other sports advocates.

What others saw as positive qualities of sports were perceived by these educators as impediments to the functioning of the school which would only detract from their ability to accomplish their duties. The "freedom" to take initiatives provided by sports did not in their view contribute to creativity and advance pedagogical goals. Rather, it meant that the teacher would not be able to make decisions about his student's work. As G. Vigarello notes, by giving freedom of thought to his student, "the teacher would think that he has lost his authority."24

This is also why French teachers, if there should be games, were not to be included in them. "Teachers should not be asked to step off their podium onto a playing field where they could be outrun by their charges or splashed with mud."25 Again, teachers saw their involvement or co-participation as a threat to their authority; to be put on the same level as their students would imply that they were "equals." The blurring of roles and reduction of the social distance that existed between students and themselves were unacceptable consequences which they felt would result from the incorporation of group sports within the curriculum.

Of course, what this implies is that due to various historical and social influences the educational system of this period was characterized by a very rigid and formal hierarchical structure of authority and prestige (the origins of which space does not allow us to adequately address here). Within this context the opposition to physical education was in part motivated by the desires of certain groups of individuals to retain their sphere of influence and maintain their claims to status superiority. Indeed, the creators and perpetrators of the pedagogical and moral ideals previously discussed held absolute claim to a status value and social authority both within these institutions and society as a whole. Paralleling their exclusive right to transmit or instruct these cultural ideals was their privileged position within a rigid hierarchical social structure. To become involved or perhaps better stated, implicated, in the physical play and sport, i.e., bodily realm, of the student was interpreted as a violation and direct threat to the group's position and worth in this fixed social arrangement.

Conclusion

In closing, we find that concerns for sports, hygiene, and the body within the educational system of early modern France were absent or of minor importance. While certain historical sources have briefly commented
on or alluded to these issues many others have not. So too, we find that
literary records have certainly not been utilized to their full advantage to
examine these issues and understand how the experiences of youth were
shaped by these attitudes concerning the body. The present discussion has
focused upon this dimension of the educational experience using historical
and especially literary texts to more explicitly and systematically delineate
how concerns with students' physical being were downgraded.

This absence of interest is even more evident in light of developments
within France which would have strengthened efforts to incorporate the
"body" into its educational programs and goals. Clearly, strong
countervailing forces contributed to the resistance to arguments, social trends
and alternative approaches advocating a concern for hygiene and physical
development. It is suggested that this negative orientation within the
educational system towards the physical dimension of students' lives was
derived from various sources found throughout French society which in some
cases became intertwined with each other.

Cultural ideals involving an emphasis on logic and analytic thought and
a distinct pedagogical approach toward study centered on individual effort
combined to promote an approach exclusively focused on the development of
students' mental capacities with a corresponding neglect of their corporal
existence. Religious, moral ideals also intermingled with these beliefs to
reinforce a dislike, if not aversion, to bodily activities involving hygienic
practices, physical exertion and contact group sports. Of course, these beliefs
were expressed and reinforced by actors who were grounded in a concrete
social setting with a distinct organization of authority and status. To become
engaged or interact on the same level with students was interpreted as a
violation of educators' unique moral worth, rank and right to exercise power.

The result of such influences was the distinct set of attitudes and
practices towards the body documented in this paper. Educators of French
public schools acting on principles and motives that undoubtedly seemed
justified to them were resolute in their unique mode of instruction and
treatment of students throughout the nineteenth century. The strength of
these traditions and the elements contributing to them are reflected in their
enduring quality through this period and even into the twentieth century
where even a cursory glance tells us changes in these customs have been slow
in coming.
ENDNOTES

1 This study is part of a long-term project examining the secondary educational system of early modern France, its historical and structural antecedents and the creation of a youth society within that context utilizing literary and social historical methods of analysis.


4 Vigarello, Le Propre et le Sale 212.

5 Louis-Ferdinand Celine, Mort à Credit (Paris: Gallimard, "Le Livre de Poche", 1952) 183.


10 Pierre Guiral and Guy Thuillier, La Vie Quotidienne des Professeurs en France de 1870 à 1940 (Paris: Hachette, 1982) 50. All quotes from the French works are my own translation.

11 Isaac 40.

12 Mayeur 483.


14 Mayeur 483.

15 Duhamel 189.


18 Weber 76.

19 Weber 70.


21 Mayeur 588.

22 Quoted by Vigarello, Le Corps Redressé 251.

24Vigarello, Le Corps Redressé 249.

25Weber 74.