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Centralising space: The PE and physical activity experiences of South Asian, Muslim girls.

Sport, Education and Society

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Abstract

This paper explores the PE and physical activity experiences of a group of South Asian, Muslim girls, a group typically marginalised in PE and physical activity research. The study responds to on going calls for research to explore across different spaces in young people's lives. Specifically, I draw on a 'middle ground' approach (Archer, Hutchings and Leathwood, 2001), using Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination and the notion of intersectionality. These concepts offer the possibility to explore the kinds of settings (physical, social, cultural) in which girls undertake PE and physical activity; how these spaces influence experience; and how the girls navigate these spaces. The study is based in a large, urban, co-educational, secondary school in Yorkshire, England (95% of the students are from minority ethnic communities, 91% are Muslim, and 63% live in the top 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country). Data generation involved three phases: observations, creating research artefacts in focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal the diverse ways the girls are physically active. They also demonstrate a complexity to their involvement which is contingent upon space, discourses and people. For example, discourses of competition, ability, and peers, are more significant within PE; whilst family, religion and culture feature beyond this context. The paper concludes by acknowledging the girls' heterogeneity and agency in the ways they strategically navigate spaces in their quest to be physically active on their terms.

Key words: *intersectionality; space; Physical Education; physical activity; gender; ethnicity*

Introduction

Traditionally, feminist research within PE and physical activity has focused upon the experiences of White, middle class, non-disabled girls. Research about these girls has been prolific and wide ranging with early concerns focusing upon opportunities (Leaman, 1984), and the benefits and challenges of mixed sex settings (Scruton, 1992). Later interests have included the relationship between PE and broader physical activity experiences (Flintoff and Scruton, 2001), and identity constitution (Garrett, 2004a, 2004b). Much of this research has ignored the real life experiences of girls from minority ethnic communities, despite Raval's (1989) call over twenty years ago for this ethnocentrism to be addressed. Where research has been concerned with race and ethnicity, an androcentric focus pervades, with issues around stereotyping (Fleming, 1994), and differences (Adair, 2012) being explored. Whilst these studies provide valuable insights into how gender **or** ethnicity influences PE, sport and physical activity experiences, researching issues in parallel can be counter-productive. As Penney (2002) notes, 'single issue' research inhibits understandings and the development of effective policies and programmes to meet young people's multiple identities.

In recent years an emerging body of scholars in England have been grappling with the complexities of moving beyond single issue research exploring the PE and physical activity experiences of Muslim women and girls (Ahmad, 2011, Benn, Dagkas and Jawad, 2011a, Dagkas, Benn and Jawad, 2011, Kay, 2006). Similarly, in other countries significant contributions have been made that explore the needs of Muslim women and girls and the meaning and place of PE and physical activity in their lives (Hamzeh and Oliver, 2012, Jiwani and Rail, 2010, Knez, Macdonald and

Abbott, 2012, Walseth, 2013). This work has made significant contributions in developing understandings regarding Muslim women's and girls' PE and physical activity experiences. Although relatively small in comparison to the research undertaken on White girls, this developing body of work provides useful insights and begins to challenge the pathologisation of Muslim women and girls that has been perpetuated through the media and some of the early research in this area (Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993). Indeed, this early work has been critiqued for viewing Muslim communities through a deficit framework, with religion often cited as being restrictive and the reason behind women's and girls' lack of PE and physical activity involvement (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993). The position taken in this paper is that girls' involvement is supported by Islam, providing certain religious requirements can be met, including modest clothing that covers the arms and legs; privacy in changing, and single sex provision (Daiman, 1995). More recently, research has highlighted the importance of culture; and how differing cultural interpretations of Islam lead to diverse expectations and beliefs, including those surrounding physical activity involvement (Benn, Pfister and Jawad, 2011b).

The paper builds on this developing body of work by exploring the intersections of gender, religion, culture and space. In responding to Wright, Macdonald and Groom's (2003) concerns regarding the disconnect between PE and broader physical activity settings, this paper is situated within, and between, these spaces. In adopting a more holistic approach, Macdonald (2002) believes valuable insights can be gained about the diverse influences that affect young people's PE and physical activity involvement. In focusing upon girls' experiences across different spaces, this paper addresses a number of key questions including: In what kinds of

68 settings are PE and physical activity undertaken? How do these spaces influence
69 girls' experiences? And, how do they negotiate and navigate these spaces?

70 In seeking to explore these questions consideration is first given to previous
71 research that focuses upon South Asian and/ or Muslim women's and girls'
72 experiences of PE and physical activity. The discussion then turns to the theoretical
73 framework informing this study. In particular, attention is given to 'middle ground
74 theorising' (Archer, Hutchings and Leathwood, 2001) using Hill Collins' (2000) matrix
75 of domination and the notion of intersectionality. This is followed by the methodology,
76 focusing on the nature of the school setting, methods used to generate data, and
77 data analysis and re-presentation. After this a number of key findings are discussed
78 and focus on how differences between spaces create diverse and fluid experiences
79 for the girls. The conclusion reflects on how the intersections of social and cultural
80 spaces create challenges and opportunities for the girls who demonstrate their ability
81 to be active, strategic agents in their pursuit of being physical active.

82 **South Asian, Muslim girls, PE and physical activity**

83 In the UK, early categorical and targeted research identified **both** women and girls
84 **and** minority ethnic communities as failing to achieve participation rates in relation to
85 nationally recommended physical activity guidelines (The Sports Council, 1993). In
86 not considering what Penney (2002) describes as 'across the board issues', such as
87 gender **and** ethnicity combined, many individuals, including South Asian, Muslim
88 girls, are invisible in the data (for example, see evaluation reports of the
89 Government's PESSYP¹ strategy). Categorical and targeted approaches also offer
90 little explanation as to why differences in participation occur. Whilst Carroll and
91 Hollinshead's (1993) research attempted to explain such differences, their work has

been critiqued for the 'restrictive' focus on religion and culture, and for not considering the problematic nature of PE. It is claimed their work perpetuates fallacious assumptions such as the passive, frail, and weak South Asian girl (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993). Flintoff, Fitzgerald and Scraton (2008) call for more relational type analyses, exploring how power relations within and between groups create inequalities and difference. In this regard, Benn's research (see for example Benn et al., 2011a, 2011b) makes significant contributions, demonstrating how the structures of PE institutionalise power relations, creating conditions that advantage some whilst disadvantaging others. In exploring the interface of Islam and PE, her work highlights how a monocultural curriculum fails to consider Muslim girls' religious requirements, often causing Muslim girls to disengage from the subject; a situation that ultimately reinforces stereotypical beliefs about their disinterest and inability in the subject.

More recently, PE and physical activity research has begun to consider individual experiences, rather than those of groups. In exploring individual difference, attention is drawn to the importance of discourse, in particular, how discourses are embodied by individuals in diverse ways, leading to multiple and fluid identities (Garrett, 2004a). This theoretical shift moves away from exploring structural oppression and inequalities to acknowledging girls' agency in drawing on alternative discourses in the constitution of their identities and negotiating power relations. For example, the young Muslim women in Jiwani and Rail's research (2010) demonstrate an ability to be strategic and resourceful in meeting their multiple needs whilst operating in a complex network of competing and conflicting discourses. Drawing on discourses of health, obesity, and femininity, they express a desire to be physically active to achieve the ideal body shape; they recite interpretations of the Koran that encourage a healthy lifestyle in articulating their right to exercise, and

seek settings that consider their religious identity. Whilst focusing on individual experiences can contribute to dispelling stereotypes, Hargreaves (2004) notes that attention is drawn away from group experiences that underline the enduring nature of discrimination. In acknowledging these concerns, the importance of adopting a 'middle ground' approach (Archer et al., 2001) to develop more sophisticated understandings is recognised. To help encapsulate and organise some key features of middle ground thinking, the paper draws upon Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination as a conceptual framework and intersectionality as a process.

Middle ground theorising: Key concepts

The matrix of domination

The work of Hill Collins and other Black feminists (hooks, 1982, Mirza, 1997) has been invaluable in moving beyond the single identity marker of gender. In theorising the relationship between gender, race and class, the ways in which women from minority ethnic communities are positioned within society, and how this positioning influences their daily lives can be explored. In her work, Hill Collins' (2000, pg 276) provides a useful framework, the matrix of domination, to explore the overall organisation of power within societies through four domains:

The structural domain organizes oppression, whereas the disciplinary domain manages it. The hegemonic domain justifies oppression, and the interpersonal domain influences everyday lived experience and the individual consciousness that ensues.

For example, the 'structural domain' acknowledges the role that large scale, interlocking social institutions play in reproducing the subordinated positions of girls from minority ethnic groups. The 'disciplinary domain' focuses on the way power

relations are managed through surveillance and bureaucracy to ensure institutional practices are monitored. The 'hegemonic domain' considers how power is retained through the transference of images and symbols via school curricula, religious teachings and mass media to create common sense ideas and unexamined norms. The 'interpersonal domain' explores the everyday practices between individuals and how simplistic notions of difference are converted into relationships of power. The matrix similarly highlights opportunities for individuals to resist and use power in positive and productive ways within the four domains. Whilst the matrix has been used in youth studies (Christopher, 2005) and education (Connor, 2006), this has been within an American context. However, Hill Collins (2000, pg 228) herself argues for its application globally, and across different time periods:

Any matrix of domination can be seen as an historically specific organization of power in which social groups are embedded and which they aim to influence regardless of how any given matrix is actually organized either across time or from society to society, the concept of a matrix of domination encapsulates the universality of intersecting oppressions as organized through diverse local realities.

In acknowledging women's experiential diversity and the plethora of ways in which women differ, the use of the matrix has merit when exploring the experiences of South Asian, Muslim girls in England. However, although the matrix offers a useful framework for exploring structure and agency, I believe it foregrounds structure. The possibilities for more sophisticated understandings develop when it is considered alongside an intersectional lens with its post-structural emphasis on the individual.

Intersectionality

The notion of intersectionality can be traced back to the early work of Black feminists (hooks, 1982) already attuned to the idea of intersecting oppressions, although as a

term it was first coined by Crenshaw in legal studies in the late 1980s (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality recognises the

interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis, 2008, pg 68).

It acknowledges the importance of individuals' multiple identities **and** the wider social structures, whilst recognising how these different levels intersect to produce power relations, difference and discrimination.

Although intersectional analyses have been used for some time in education, it is only recently that scholars have begun to recognise their usefulness in PE and physical activity (Azzarito, 2010, Hamzeh and Oliver, 2012, Walseth, 2013). For example, Ahmad (2011) highlights how the institution of football, through its practices, contributes to Muslim women's discrimination. At the intersections of sport, gender, religion, and ethnicity the women cite stereotypes around domestic femininity, overlaid with governing body regulations banning the wearing of the hijab, as influencing experience. Yet, these women are not passive recipients of their circumstances, rejecting Western, non-Islamic, sports infrastructures and developing safe, alternative spaces such as the Women's Islamic Games. Indeed, intersectional approaches provide an effective vantage point from which to acknowledge individuals as active agents in creating change and determining their social realities. In this regard, intersectionality recognises the importance of space, as it is in and through spaces that discourses circulate, and interactions and power struggles occur, informing identity and influencing experiences.

Space

Whilst space can be conceptualised in many ways it is used here to refer to the physical, social and cultural spaces in which girls undertake PE and physical activity. Physical space can refer to the architectural layout of buildings, amount of physical space available, and the degree to which spaces are public or private. Feminist scholars have highlighted how physical space is important in the exercise of disciplinary power (Gore, 1998, Webb and Macdonald, 2007). For example, buildings such as schools are structured to ensure the surveillance, ordering, and disciplining of bodies. These disciplinary techniques take place in and through relations of power, thus the importance of social and cultural space is recognised. Pratt's (1991) notion of spaces as 'contact zones', acknowledges how social interactions result in contestation over representation and practice, and the establishment of hierarchies. Space is an 'active medium' (Ruddick, 1996) in the process of meaning making, with specific spaces becoming socially constructed in particular ways, for example, gendered, and competitive. Consequently, spaces can be sites of discrimination and exclusion, domination and belonging (Azzarito and Hill, 2012, Green and Singleton, 2007, Phoenix, 2009, Webb and Macdonald, 2007). As Valentine (2007, pg 19) notes:

When individual identities are "done" differently in particular temporal moments they rub against, and so expose, these dominant spatial orderings that define who is in place/ out of place, who belongs and who does not [to] produce moments of exclusion for particular groups. .

Thus, spaces are in a state of flux as individuals move within and through them, encountering different social arrangements and diverse cultures (Valentine, 2007).

The paper now addresses the key methodological issues considered in exploring the importance of space in the lives of a group of South Asian, Muslim girls

living in England. More specifically, in what kinds of settings are PE and physical activity undertaken? How do these spaces influence girls' experiences? And, how do they negotiate and navigate these spaces?

Methodology

Young people and research

In recent years, young people have increasingly been repositioned in research as 'experts' to be consulted with about their lives, evidenced in a growing number of research projects within PE and physical activity (see for example: Azzarito and Kirk, 2013, O'Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010). Like these scholars, I acknowledge the benefits of using mixed, participatory, qualitative methods to capture young people's voices and experiences.

The research setting

The decision to undertake my research in a particular school space was based around access issues and the school's student demographics. Having worked in Stonefields,² a large conurbation in Yorkshire, England, I had a number of contacts in schools, one of whom worked at Woodstock, a large co-educational, local authority secondary school in the inner city. The school consists of approximately 1850 students aged 11-18 (56% male, 44% female); 95% from minority ethnic communities, with 63% living in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. A recent OFSTED³ inspection judged the school to be outstanding, with 56% of students achieving A-C grades in GCSEs.⁴ Whilst schools serving diverse communities are common in England, the high percentage of Muslim students (91%) and those classed as British Asian of Pakistani origin (76%) make this school space

somewhat unusual. The school has made changes to PE practice because of these demographics and consults with its local communities to ensure different needs are considered. For example, PE lessons are delivered in single sex environments; girls can wear long tracksuit bottoms and the hijab, providing it complies with health and safety regulations, and there is no obligation to shower after lesson.

Methods

Data generation encompassed three phases over two years as the girls moved from years 9 to 10 (ages 13-14 and 14-15). Phase one involved observations of all 120 girls during PE over a ten month period. In phase two, 23 girls worked in four focus groups, each group meeting once a week for a month during Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education lessons. This provided opportunities to work in participatory ways with the girls, supporting them to create research artefacts, including posters of their lives, maps plotting their movements away from school, and boxes depicting their PE experiences. An example of the kinds of artefacts produced by one of the girls (Noreen) is provided in figure 1.

Figure 1: Noreen's research artefacts

Artefacts were never left to speak for themselves but used as a trigger for discussions. Phase three consisted of in-depth interviews with 13 girls (Alisha, Bebo, Borat, Fizzy, Hannah, Mariya, Messa, Noreen, Rihanna, Sam, Samina, Sara and Sumera⁵) to gain more nuanced understandings of their experiences. This multi-method approach enabled detailed insights into the girls' lives, and helped with data clarification.

Analysis and data re-presentation

Data analysis was on going throughout the research process with the findings from each phase used to inform and develop later phases of data generation. For example, focus group discussions were listened to and used to construct questions for the following week's focus groups and the interview schedules. Each girl's research artefacts were revisited after the focus groups and, alongside observation data, were used as probes for interview questions. This ongoing analysis led to a pen profile being sketched for each girl, which was developed throughout the period of data generation. To reduce the likelihood of misrepresenting the girls' lives and experiences, I presented them with the profiles to review and refine. On completion of data generation, the profiles and other data sources underwent a double layer of data analysis. This lead to the crafting of a series of critical non-fictional narratives (for examples see Stride, 2013), alongside a more traditional thematic approach.

In crafting the narratives in the first level of analysis, I adopted the position of 'storyteller' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Here a dynamic framework was used to connect each individual girl's disparate data sources in an interesting and explanatory story (Dowling, 2012). For example, each individual girl's pen profile that briefly overviewed all of the data generated was used as the starting point for the narratives. The pen profiles were revisited alongside the in-depth, rich interview. As the interviews were used to clarify and check all previous data sources, the interview data represented a detailed amalgamation of all data generated to that point. Interview data continued to be cross-referenced back to the other data with field notes and memos used to articulate links between the multiple sources. This enabled diverse data to be threaded together to craft the narrative. For example, quotes from the interview data were woven into the storyline, whilst the posters and

285 locality maps were drawn upon to develop the key features of a narrative which,
286 according to Dowling (2012), include contexts, plots and characters.

287 Crafting such individualised stories captures the diversity of each girl's
288 experiences at a particular time and space. It is also argued that narratives offer a
289 medium through which silenced voices can be heard (Bruce, 1998). However, like
290 Fitzpatrick (2011), I recognise that whilst the girls' voices are centralised in the
291 narratives, the stories are my reinterpretation of their data and thus I am co-
292 implicated in the findings. Whilst this level of analysis may be sufficient from a post-
293 structuralist feminist perspective, a middle ground approach requires a second level
294 of analysis whereby the influence of structures, incidences of discrimination and
295 inequalities are acknowledged. In recognising that individuals lead both individual
296 and socially storied lives, Dowling (2012, pg 39) notes:

297 our individual stories say something not only about us as individuals but equally
298 something about the context in which we live and work; micro stories about
299 individual lives are therefore also stories about macro societal relations.

300 In the second level of analysis I adopted a 'story analyst' position (Smith and
301 Sparkes, 2008) involving a more traditional form of thematic analysis. Following the
302 constant comparison method, the narratives were coded, leading to the development
303 of more sophisticated themes and sub-themes across the girls' stories (Lincoln and
304 Guba, 1985). Three key themes emerged from the data: 'difference and sameness',
305 'discourses of gender, religion and culture' and 'agency and change'. From these
306 three themes the importance of family, peers and space emerged. It is this latter
307 concept that is the focus of this paper. As it is beyond the parameters of this paper to
308 include the complete version of all 13 of the girls' stories, illustrative excerpts are
309 included in the following discussion.

Discussion

Contextualising the girls' active involvement in physical activity

A traditional PE curriculum of netball, rounders, hockey, athletics, dance, gymnastics, badminton, health-related fitness and volleyball is followed at Woodstock. During observations, all the girls were active in their PE learning experience, although in different ways. The PE department's policy states that girls unable to take part in the physical aspects of the lesson, for example, games, performances or skills must change into PE kit and be given other learning tasks (refereeing, analysing peers' performances). In observing over sixty hours of PE I noted less than a quarter of lessons that had only one or two girls asking to be excused from the physical aspects, with these girls always given other duties. These kinds of expectations are clearly communicated to the students by the PE department,⁶ reflecting the hegemonic domain of Hill Collins' (2000) matrix. This domain intersects with the disciplinary domain where careful monitoring of this policy and consistent application of disciplinary procedures⁷ influences girls' expectations and actions at the interpersonal level in lessons.

Away from school, all of the girls continue to be physically active across public and private spaces including community centres, youth groups, gyms, parks, playing fields, bedrooms and streets as seen in the following extracts from the girls' stories:

I'm always outside with me little brothers and sisters up the park playing tig and hide and seek. I'd be bored stuck in all the time (Rihanna).

Loads go to this youth group, a real mix of boys and girls Lee and Nigel who run it are like proper professional break dancers. Teach us body popping and all sorts. I just love it (Borat).

334 I search in the fading light for the football, spotting it trapped between the pot
335 plants. Hitting the outside switch a harsh glare lights up the balcony. I practice
336 keepy ups for a while, trying to beat my score of 25, before the dark and cold force
337 me back inside (Fizzy).

338 Although diverse, these spaces are less formal, local settings, reducing concerns
339 over safety, fears of racism (Azzarito and Hill, 2012, Green and Singleton, 2007),
340 costs and transport (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001). The girls differ in the frequency of
341 their involvement with some taking part in physical activity daily (Fizzy, Alisha,
342 Hannah, Mariya, Messa and Sara).

343 I do summat every day, even at weekends, at the Saturday girls' club up the road;
344 dance of course, and cricket, soccer, netball, badminton (Alisha).

345 Every day, get home, do some homework. Then, when I get bored come out to
346 play, clear my head, chill a bit. Playing helps me to get fresh so I can come back
347 and finish it off after tea (Sara).

348 Others take part in physical activity regularly but less frequently (Bebo, Borat,
349 Noreen and Rihanna), and some have more sporadic experiences (Sam, Samina
350 and Sumera). The girls also demonstrate diversity in the kinds of activities engaged
351 in; some walking to and from school (Rihanna, Borat, Fizzy, Sumera, Hannah,
352 Samina, Messa, Mariya), others highlighting activities taught within PE being drawn
353 upon (Alisha, Bebo, Borat, Fizzy, Noreen, Mariya, Sam and Sarah). Similar to other
354 studies (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001, Knez et al., 2012), a number of girls challenge
355 gendered and racialised assumptions through their involvement in football, cricket, ju
356 jitsu, kick boxing and basketball, as seen in Bebo and Fizzy's stories:

357 I've been practicing (rounders) loads with my cousins and friends and brother in the
358 street after school if there's not enough to play rounders me, my dad and
359 brothers usually play cricket and football (Bebo).

360 Mom didn't even want me to do ju jitsu. Said I'd end up with a big body like her
361 'cause she did martial arts when she was young. I'd try them all if we did them after

362 school. Kick boxing, tae kwon do, boxing, karate. As long as they were girls only
363 (Fizzy).

364 Whilst the girls' stories reflect an active involvement in both PE and physical
365 activity, they also reveal a complexity and fluidity to their involvement that is
366 contingent on a number of aspects, including discourses and key individuals.
367 Moreover, these aspects significantly differ across their school based spaces and
368 broader settings. For these reasons, the girls' experiences of PE within school and
369 physical activity away from school are discussed separately. For example, the
370 research shows discourses of competition and ability, and peers to be significant
371 within PE. In broader contexts, family, community members, religion and culture
372 feature more in their stories. Yet, as will be seen throughout the following discussion,
373 the girls often exert their agency, finding ways to strategically navigate and negotiate
374 the different kinds of challenges and opportunities they encounter in their quest to
375 best meet their physical activity needs.

376 *Navigating PE spaces and negotiating experiences*

377 Although all of the girls are involved in PE, some of their stories suggest this is not
378 always through choice, nor does it imply they enjoy the lesson. As Hannah suggests:

379 I just hate PE, everything about it I mean, what's the point? And the things
380 they make us do. It's boring, not my cup of tea Like hockey and netball, I just
381 hate them, I wish the ball comes nowhere near me Ha, I just hang at the sides
382 of the pitch where the ball never comes if I had a choice I wouldn't choose to
383 do them.

384 As this extract illustrates, Hannah is not a compliant dupe of the school's structural,
385 disciplinary and hegemonic domains (Hill Collins, 2000). Although subject to the
386 school's regulatory mechanisms and ability centred discourses, she demonstrates
387 her agency and meets her needs at the interpersonal level by strategically

388 minimalising her active involvement in some activities by adopting peripheral
389 positions. Whilst Noreen is generally more positive than Hannah about PE, she also
390 reveals how she astutely avoids negative PE experiences in some team games
391 through the positions she occupies:

392 In rounders, I go deep field so the ball doesn't come by me. 'Cause if you don't
393 catch it they [other girls] start screaming, so it's best to stay at the back.

394 This research also demonstrates discernible differences within the group of girls. For
395 example, in contrast to Hannah and Noreen, many of the girls (Alisha, Bebo, Borat,
396 Fizzy, Sam, Mariya, Messa and Rihanna) appear enthusiastic about PE, embodying
397 competitive and ability centred discourses:

398 I always make sure I get my position. Goal defence in netball 'cause I'm good at
399 defending, or one of the good spots in rounders, like back stop, so you get to catch
400 the ball a lot I'd have more competition and time in PE. Double lessons, 'cause
401 sometimes it's like gone, so fast, and we never get to finish or score anything
402 (Fizzy).

403 Although these, and other girls in this study, demonstrate experiential diversity
404 in their active learning and the ways they navigate PE, their tales also demonstrate
405 similarities. For example, many of the girls' stories suggest their PE experiences are
406 contingent on their ability in particular activities, and their interactions with peers:

407 I don't get them girls. They be too lazy and bothered about their appearance, d'ya
408 get me? They think their hair's gonna get messed up. They don't know how to
409 enjoy themselves like us. They scream over little things. You know like, they fussy
410 about stuff. If it's cold they don't wanna go out. Then they don't wanna be
411 separated (Sam).

412 The group I'm in is terrible. Especially in netball they pick on you for all sorts,
413 missing the ball. That's why I prefer hockey. I feel more comfortable doing it 'cause
414 I'm alright at it (Samina).

415 Indeed, many of the girls emphasise the importance of competence; they
416 enjoy the activities in which they feel most competent, or where the teacher enables
417 their development of skills. Moreover, the stories of Hannah, Noreen, Samina, Sam
418 and others draw attention to peers, rather than teachers, endorsing these discourses
419 of competency and monitoring their abilities. Many of the girls are acutely aware of
420 the different strategies that peers use when imposing power over them and the
421 various ways this influences their relationships and identities (Gore, 1998). For
422 example, Sumera notes how her classification by peers affects her active
423 involvement in lessons, confidence and decision to discontinue a qualification:

424 I dropped Sport Science 'cause I was with the snobby people Like, they laugh
425 if you do something wrong and that's really off putting. That's when I go all quiet
426 and my confidence goes down the drain and you don't wanna take part.

427 Within this PE space, specific hegemonic discourses, and the
428 disciplinary actions of teachers and sporty girls with extensive friendship
429 networks intersect, positioning girls like Hannah, Noreen, Samina and
430 Sumera as non-sporty and 'other' (Hill Collins, 2000, Valentine, 2007).
431 Consequently, many girls talked about the desire to work in friendship
432 groups to ensure their PE needs are met. For example, Noreen and Sara
433 emphasised the role friends play in creating supportive environments
434 (Azzarito and Hill, 2012, Garrett, 2004b):

435 I'd prefer it if all my close friends are around the trampoline in PE. Then I'd be
436 bouncing and trying to do flips and the hard stuff. But there's only three trampolines
437 and the whole class watches everyone, so I stick to the simple stuff and don't
438 experiment (Noreen).

439 It's still better to work in friendship groups. You learn more 'cause you don't feel as
440 nervous or scared, 'cause your mates help you, motivate you you be less

441 comfortable to do it in front of people you don't talk to 'cause they might laugh and
442 stuff (Sara).

443 Similarly, for Messa and her friends, who embody discourses of competition and
444 ability, working with their 'crew' is important for other reasons:

445 It's not the same when we be splitted up. I always get put with the ones who don't
446 wanna play and then you lose 'cause you don't have a good team [other girls]
447 don't have the right kind of crew to work with. That's why we like PE, 'cause we got
448 like a big crew, we be with all our mates and friendship's important to us.

449 As illustrated in a number of the girls' narratives, the PE space depicts a
450 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1991), with girls embodying discourses of competition and
451 ability in diverse ways. This produces conflicts influencing their thoughts about PE,
452 identities, and relationships at the interpersonal level (Phoenix, 2009, Ruddick,
453 1996). Whilst PE sites are well documented in the production of gendered (Scruton,
454 1992) and racialised (Dagkas et al., 2011) power relations, within the all female,
455 predominantly South Asian, Muslim PE space at Woodstock, power relations are
456 enacted around other differences. Indeed, the significance of physical ability
457 illustrates the continued reinforcement and reproduction of dominant PE discourses
458 around performativity (Walseth, 2013).

459 Yet, some girls demonstrate their agency through their resistance within the
460 hegemonic domain (Hill Collins, 2000). They critically reflect on the messages
461 around competency and achievement, delivered through teachers' and peers'
462 actions and PE practices:

463 I mean PE should be a bit more relaxing. We can work and have fun at the same
464 time but I don't think the teachers see it like that (Sam).

465 In developing these critical understandings about PE, many of the girls demonstrate
466 some degree of agency by not automatically embodying and transferring these
467 discourses into broader physical activity spaces. Moreover, they demonstrate
468 agency further by not always accepting the ways their physical identities are shaped
469 in PE by their teachers and peers. Instead, they demonstrate a resistance in the
470 ways they create their own physical activity practices away from school, as
471 discussed in the following section.

472 *Navigating physical activity spaces and negotiating experiences*

473 The girls' narratives suggest they have different out of school physical activity
474 experiences to those in school. This experiential diversity appears, in part, to be
475 related to the circulation of different discourses in these spaces which both enable
476 and challenge the girls in being physically active. Like the young women in Walseth's
477 (2013) research, the girls in this study draw attention to discourses of ability and
478 competency as influencing their experiences of PE, whereas religious and cultural
479 discourses are more prominent in their tales away from school. Additionally, whilst
480 the girls are not subject to teachers and peers imposing power over them outside
481 school, in some cases these are enacted by parents, extended family, neighbours
482 and wider community members. Despite being positioned within these discursive
483 relations of power, the girls continue to exert their agency. For example, outside
484 school they create their own practices of physical activity to meet their individual
485 needs. Indeed, their silence on key problematic issues associated with PE in their
486 physical activity stories demonstrates their ability to address these concerns in their
487 out of school spaces. However, whilst the girls appear to have more autonomy away
488 from school regarding with whom they undertake physical activity, what they do, and

489 how they choose to undertake it, these experiences are still enacted within fluid and
490 multiple relations of power.

491 Similar to others (Kay, 2006, Knez et al., 2012), the girls' narratives reflect the
492 significance of their families⁸ in relation to broader physical activity opportunities.
493 Many of the girls' stories uncover the different ways in which their family supports
494 their involvement. For Borat, her aunt provides weekly transport to her break dance
495 club; Rihanna discusses how her siblings provide someone to play with, and Messa
496 and Noreen have taken part in activities with their mothers. Some girls also note new
497 activities they have been introduced to by their family, including those traditionally
498 viewed as non-feminine in this Westernised context. For example, Borat, Mariya and
499 Sam discuss playing and football with different family members:

500 I play rounders sometimes with my aunts and nephews and nieces, and then we
501 go to the fields by my gran in the summer and play football (Sam).

502 I sometimes play cricket and rounders with the family and friends, cousins like. And
503 I'm alright 'cause of what we learn in PE. Like the girls don't know how to bat and
504 when they run they get tired. But I can run for longer, and quicker (Mariya).

505 Tired and happy I collapse on the grass, after finally being caught out I'm
506 exhausted, running up and down the pitch for half an hour, and then playing
507 cricket. But I'd be right bored if I didn't do any active stuff. I listen to my tunes as
508 shouts from my uncles and cousin brothers carry over the music. The bruise on my
509 leg from the tackle begins to throb. They don't do me any favours 'cause I'm a girl
510 (Borat)

511 Just as the girls discuss how family enables them to be physically active, they
512 also suggest ways their family can restrict their agency and limit opportunities. Like
513 the girls in Kay's (2006) research, positioned at the intersections of family, gender,
514 religion, culture and age, many of the girls in this study recognise how certain
515 expectations are placed on them, as young, Muslim women, to embody discourses

516 around modesty, respect and family honour. Sumera acknowledges how her
517 responsibilities influence her friendships.

518 My family's different. We have good status 'cause of my granddad and girls have to keep up
519 that respect, that holy reputation. Do their work, study hard and get a good job, don't go out
520 uncovered, don't mess about, no boys or smoking or bad things like that. Just respect
521 boundaries, innit? It gets on my nerves a bit 'cause I can't do what I want.

522 Hannah discusses how her grandmother's beliefs influence her actions and
523 opportunities at the interpersonal level (Hill Collins, 2000).

524 Don't be seen with boys, don't play out in the street, think about what you're doing, think
525 about where you're going, don't bring any shame.

526 At times these boundaries can shape some of the girls' physical activity opportunities
527 as seen in previous studies (Kay, 2006, Hamzeh and Oliver, 2012). For Noreen,
528 swimming with her dad and brothers, and boxing with young men, present her
529 religious identity with too many challenges for her to participate in these activities.
530 Whilst her family have not explicitly vocalised these expectations she is acutely
531 aware of them and develops her own set of boundaries to operate within. Although
532 Borat regularly plays rugby and football with male family members, swimming
533 presents additional barriers. Undeterred, she contemplates ways to overcome these:

534 I'd love to go swimming but I can't go with all the guys 'cause of religion and stuff. I
535 just wouldn't feel comfortable and neither would they. I could get one of them
536 costumes that cover your belly and legs and stuff but I dunno where I'd get one. Or
537 I could go to one of them women only sessions but I'm not sure where they do
538 them.

539 In Noreen and Borat's stories religion is not the reason they are unable to
540 engage in these activities. As discussed earlier, this research is underpinned by the
541 position that girls' participation in physical activity is supported by Islam, providing
542 religious requirements can be met (Daiman, 1995). Rather, it is the nature of the

environments that the activities take place in that creates problems. Similar to other findings, the gendered and racialised nature of these spaces do not provide the girls with suitable contexts to respect their religious identity (Dagkas et al., 2011, Jiwani and Rail, 2010). Getting the right context is a complex process, considering the girls' multiple identities, and the girls are active agents in creating these kinds of environments in less formal settings. For example, Alisha negotiates with her PE teacher free usage of the school's dance studio after school. This private, single sex space enables her and her friends to dance once the school day is over. Noreen, not wishing to box in the presence of young men at a local club, chooses to pursue her interest by using her brothers' punch bag in the privacy of the garage at home. However, when the girls' involvement in an activity requires a more organised, formal route their agency is compromised. For example, for Noreen and Borat, swimming in a Eurocentric sports infrastructure provides additional barriers over which they have less control, and currently prevent them from taking part. Indeed, researchers have advocated for physical activity providers to acknowledge the multiple, diverse ways women embody their religion (Benn et al., 2011b, Green and Singleton, 2007).

It is important to note that challenges are not always confined to formal, organised, Eurocentric spaces. The girls' narratives suggest they are also encountered in community settings because of different cultural interpretations of their religion. These contribute to the multiple ways in which Islam is embodied, the diversity of expectations of the girls, and the physical activity opportunities available to them. A number of the girls are acutely aware of the role that culture plays in conflicting beliefs and the subsequent repercussions. For example, during one discussion with Mariya, Messa and Sam, a heated debate ensued around the appropriateness of Muslim girls' involvement in the combat sport of boxing:

568 In Islam, a Muslim girl being a boxer is not right for some people. They can do it,
569 they are allowed, but it can look bad on a Muslim family and you want respect for
570 your family. Bebo's parents might agree with it, but with this city and culture thingy,
571 people talk. Messa's theory is it's to do with where you live and where you
572 were born. Like Messa's mom was born in Pakistan and thinks a bit differently to
573 Messa who was born here But it's not that simple. It causes a whole heap of
574 trouble when people don't agree and gossip (Sam).

575 Similar to other research (Green and Singleton, 2007, Kay, 2006), the girls'
576 stories indicate members of the community and extended family are significant
577 mediators regarding expectations of religious embodiment. These wider networks
578 portray the extent of the structural and disciplinary domains of power and how these
579 operate effectively through the hegemonic domain to restrict agency at times and
580 ensure compliance at the interpersonal level (Hill Collins, 2000). Surveillance and
581 gossip are two common disciplinary mechanisms that ensure the girls monitor their
582 actions. For example, Noreen is acutely aware of some of the older women living in
583 her locality observing her whilst she runs, as well as the 'male gaze' from passing
584 cars (Azzarito and Hill, 2012, Scraton, 1992). Yet, she demonstrates her agency by
585 negotiating these challenges and chooses to run when it is dark. Sumera similarly
586 recognises that surveillance by relatives and neighbours, combined with
587 expectations to 'maintain yourself like a woman' and to not bring shame on her
588 family and faith, restricts her agency and limits the activities she can do:

589 I can't just stop in the street and talk and have a laugh with boys, or go and play
590 cricket with them like Nisha. It'd get back to my parents with all my relatives and
591 the ladies in the street So, you end up living the way other people want you to.

592 Sumera's, and other girls' stories, continue to reflect the notion of spaces as
593 'contact zones' of cultural contestation, where issues of representation and practice
594 are challenged and negotiated (Pratt, 1991). Their stories illustrate the different ways

they, and their families, practice and embody their faith because of multiple cultural interpretations of Islam. Moreover, their tales depict the complexity, messiness, and fluidity of intersectionality as it plays out in everyday lives (Valentine, 2007). As the girls move within and between spaces they encounter different cultural beliefs and practices. These intersect with their gendered and religious identities creating fluid, diverse opportunities and challenges for being physically active.

Conclusion

I conclude by considering how PE and physical activity spaces provide different kinds of challenges and opportunities that influence the girls' experiences; and highlight how they demonstrate their ability to be strategic agents in their navigation of and negotiations in these spaces. In so doing, I highlight the heterogeneity within this group of girls in relation to agency and other aspects of their lives. Finally, I will reflect on the theoretical and methodological contributions made by this study.

As highlighted at the beginning of this paper, viewing PE as distinct from other physical experiences is problematic and a number of scholars advocate for research exploring the complexity of influences affecting young people's involvement (Macdonald, 2002, Wright et al., 2003). The research discussed here emphasises the multiple influences on the PE and physical activity experiences of a group of South Asian, Muslim girls. The girls' stories reveal how simultaneously, yet in different ways, culture, religion, competition, performativity, family, teachers, community and friends are significant catalysts that inscribe discursive messages and associated practices which may re(produce), challenge and enable opportunities for physical activity. This study found that religious and cultural discourses are more prevalent within family and community contexts, whilst competition and ability

619 discourses dominate school based PE. Although the girls are not subject to teachers'
620 and peers' imposing power over them away from school, for some, this occurs
621 through the actions of parents, extended family, neighbours and wider community.
622 Whilst there are discernible differences between the girls' school PE spaces and
623 broader physical activity settings, the two are interconnected. As girls move between
624 and within these spaces their prior knowledge and skills follow, informing their
625 identities, relationships, thoughts and opinions.

626 Despite being positioned within discursive relations of power, the girls in this
627 research demonstrate agency in diverse ways. This enables them, at times, to
628 strategically navigate a number of the challenges faced within and across spaces.
629 For example, a number of the girls demonstrate resistance to the official discourses
630 of the school and critically reflect upon how these are inconsistent with their own
631 views of PE, as demonstrated by Sumera:

632 There's too much pressure in PE. In all the other subjects there's pressure to get
633 work done and stay ahead but PE should be different. The teachers are good, not
634 like some subjects. They help if you're struggling and you can laugh and joke with
635 them, but it's still 'We have to do this, we must cover that'. There's so much to
636 cram into one lesson. Sport's supposed to relieve stress, not add it on. It should be
637 more fun and relaxed.

638 In developing these kinds of critical understandings, many girls develop their agency
639 further by not embodying the school's PE discourses in their broader physical activity
640 spaces. Rather, they create their own practices of physical activity that best meet
641 their individual needs. As Sara discusses, discourses of competency and
642 competition are not embodied in the games she plays at home:

643 Why can't rounders in PE be this much fun? I can put the skills I learn into practice
644 here. In some games in PE you hardly touch the ball, especially when you get put
645 with people you don't know. They just pass to their circle of friends. Then there's

the cheaters who wanna win so bad, think that winning is the only thing that matters. Like now. make a mistake, there's no arguing or blaming, just carry on, laugh about it, no big deal. Everyone gets on. There's no fights, no cheating.

Associated with the different ways the girls demonstrate agency, is the heterogeneity evident within this group of girls in a number of aspects of their lives. Being South Asian and Muslim are not indicators of a homogenous group. As Hill Collins' (2000) notes, such views contribute to the creation of stereotypes that limit the life chances of girls from minority ethnic communities. The girls in this research provide evidence of their heterogeneity in their cultural interpretations of Islam, embodiment of their faith, their friendship and family groupings, and what PE and physical activity mean to them. These intersections create unique sets of challenges and opportunities for each girl, influencing their PE and physical activity experiences in complex, fluid and multiple ways. Situated at various intersections, these girls are well placed to trouble limiting stereotypes and map out alternative understandings of what it means to be a South Asian, Muslim girl. For example, the girls in this study dispel notions of them as fragile, weak and restricted from engaging in physical pursuits. Rather, they demonstrate their ability to be strategic and resourceful, resisting the ways they are positioned, and actively navigating the dynamic spaces of their lives in their pursuit of being physically active. In this regard, there is a need for more research that explores the diverse ways in which South Asian, Muslim girls demonstrate their agency within the physical, social and cultural dynamics of different spaces in their quest to be physically active.

As the findings of any research are a product of the theoretical approach adopted and the methods employed to generate data, it is worth reflecting on the ways these have contributed to this study. Using Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination and intersectional analyses a middle ground approach enabled insights

into the fluid, oppressive and productive nature of power. They also highlighted how individual biographies are inextricably linked with wider social structures, and how the girls' experiences of PE and physical activity are shaped in complex and fluid ways. These concepts also helped to develop current understandings of gender by moving beyond 'single issue' research (Penney, 2002), recognising how various categories of difference intersect to influence the girls' daily lives. In addition to the theoretical contributions, the use of multiple, participatory approaches enabled insights into the girls' lives that can be more difficult to capture through traditional methods (O'Sullivan and MacPhail, 2010). For example, the research artefacts enabled glimpses into the girls' bedrooms, their streets, and the parks in which they play; the importance of particular family members, and their likes and dislikes about PE. A combination of the artefacts, observations and interviews provided for a more authentic dialogue and holistic understandings of the diversity, complexity, and fluidity of their experiences, the importance of space, and the continued significance of social structures in their lives (Valentine, 2007). Moreover, they enabled insights into the girls' agency, and the different ways in which they resist power relations and problematise stereotypes regarding South Asian, Muslim girls' disinterest in PE and physical activity. The girls featured in this paper have important insights to share about PE and physical activity spaces, and I would argue that we need to continue to engage with, and learn from, their experiences. More specifically, we need more research that explores the diversity of spaces these girls occupy in their daily lives; the kinds of barriers, challenges, enablers and opportunities they encounter regarding physical activity, and the multiple and varied ways they demonstrate their agency across these settings in their desire to be physically active.

¹ The aim of the Government's Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links strategy (later known as the Physical Education and Sports Strategy for Young People) was to increase physical activity opportunities for 5-16 year olds. Targets were set to ensure each child was offered a minimum of five hours of high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum (Department for Education and Skills/ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2003, DCMS/ Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). Annual evaluations by organisations such as the Institute of Youth Sport and Taylor Nelson Sofres report on the progress made towards these targets.

² The names of the location, school, teachers, girls, their friends, family members, and other members of their communities have been changed to protect identities.

³ OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) is the non-ministerial government department responsible for inspecting and monitoring services including state schools.

⁴ GCSE is the acronym commonly used for the General Certificate of Secondary Education, an academic qualification awarded in specific subject areas, including PE, and generally taken by students aged 14-16.

⁵ These pseudonyms were chosen by the girls.

⁶ Students are informed at the start of the academic year and each teaching block of the expectations regarding PE. If students wish to be excused from the physical aspects of the lesson they must bring a note from parents/ guardians giving a reason and change into PE kit to assist in the lesson, if able to do so.

⁷ Should a student fail to provide a note from parents/ guardians twice in a four week block they are given detention. If a student does this more than twice a letter is sent home.

⁸ All the girls, except Fizzy, live with their mother, father and siblings. Grandparents and other relatives also live with Borat, Hannah and Sam. All of the girls' families, except Fizzy's, have three or more siblings.

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