‘Homing in’ on South Asian, Muslim girls’ and their stories of physical activity

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Introduction

This paper adds to and extends work considering the physical activity experiences of young South Asian, Muslim women by focusing upon the home as a site for the exploration and constitution of their physical identities. Whilst the home is one of a number of contexts for physical activity research, much of this work appears preoccupied with *measuring* activity, linked to concerns about health. Exercise screening, recording TV viewing, measuring heart rates, and analysing the environmental determinants that impact upon physical activity feature heavily. Whilst young people from minority ethnic groups have been the focus of a number of studies, South Asian, Muslim young women rarely feature (see Kaushal & Rhodes, 2014 for a systemtic review).

Despite the popularity of quantitative approaches, physical activity surveys have been criticised for the narrow ways in which physical activity is conceptualised. The focus on a limited range of ‘sports’ activities, and/or those that require regular participation in highly organised settings fails to acknowledge those engaged in more informal, irregular and less sporty pursuits (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Wright, Macdonald, & Groom, 2003). This is particularly pertinent for women and girls, leading to the belief that they are less active than men and boys. A second concern is the way such surveys neatly categorise individuals by gender, social class, ethnicity and disability. In this way, particular aspects of identity become foregrounded and differences within categories become invisible (Stride, 2016). For example, large scale quantitative surveys of physical activity in England explore men’s and women’s participation and those of different ethnic groups. Whilst South Asian, Muslim young women’s data becomes subsumed in both the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘Asian’, data

specific to their gendered *and* ethnic identity in combination becomes lost (see for example, Sport England's Active People surveys). A third concern with quantitative surveys is that they fail to capture *experiences,* that is: the significance of physical activity in people's lives; the meanings they attach to being physically active; the emotions and feelings engendered through physical activity; and the contexts that make involvement possible (Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Wright et al., 2003).

Whilst feminist work has focused upon women's experiences using qualitative approaches, less is known about how the *home* is experienced as a setting for physical activity involvement and the constitution of physical identity. As Merten (2005, p. 19) notes, the belief that schooling and peers become more significant than the home in adolescent girls' 'identity work' ensures 'a great deal is assumed about the role of home but little is reported'. In addressing these concerns, this paper draws from a larger study that explored the school based Physical Education (PE) and broader physical activity experiences of a group of South Asian, Muslim young women based in the North of England (Stride, 2014; 2016; Stride & Flintoff, 2016). It was from this broader study that the home emerged as an important site for these young women's experiences of physical activity away from school. This paper adds to qualitative understandings by exploring: In what ways is the home significant as a site for young women's exploration of their physical identities? What is the nature of the young women's physical activity in and around the home (what forms does physical activity take, with whom and why do they engage)? What are the key issues young women face within the home in the constitution of their physicality? And, how do they navigate and negotiate these issues in their quest to be physically active? To help in contextualising the research, the paper next explores the concept of 'home', changing perceptions about young women's physicality, and links to physical activity.

Gender, the home and physical activity

Research that considers the relationship(s) between gender and physical activity is extensive and varied, particularly in relation to how structural inequalities and/or subjectivities and agency are theorised (e.g. Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton, 2008; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). The focus of many studies has been upon young women who are White, middle class and non-disabled, leaving the experiences of 'others' marginalised or ignored (see Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Scraton, 2018; and Scraton & Flintoff, 2002 for useful overviews of feminist work in PE, sport and leisure and acknowledgement of its failure to consider different differences). Although research on ethnic minority women and girls (and more specifically South Asian, Muslim identities) has increased significantly in the last decade, this still remains in the minority (see Robinson, 2018 for a recent scoping review on religion as an 'othered' identity in PE). Studies have focused upon the conflicts that arise through the structures of school based PE and Muslim girls' embodiment of their religion (Benn, 2002; Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993; Dagkas, Benn & Jawad, 2011; Stride, 2014); the significance of family (Kay, 2006; Knez, Macdonald & Abbott, 2012; Stride @ Flintoff, 2016) and context (Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Stride, 2016); and the diversity within Muslim communities (Benn, Pfister & Jawad, 2011; Walseth, 2015). Others have focused upon the ways in which power operates through the intersections of institutions, organisational structures and hegemonic discourses to position Muslim women in particular ways. Whist Hargreaves (2000; 2007) notes how these conditions and positionings change across local and global contexts to create different kinds of challenges for Muslim women, she also highlights the ways in which they demonstrate agency in their navigations and negotiations of these challenges.

A related issue to the emergence of work focusing on women and girls from minority ethnic communities, is the corresponding lack of different perspectives being utilised (Toffoletti and Palmer, 2017). We concur with Toffoletti and Palmer (2017) that different approaches are needed to problematise existing sports and physical activity structures and institutions, and

move beyond narrowly defined ways of 'doing sport and physical activity'. New perspectives will enable the exploration of the different ways women from ethnic minority communities are physically active, where and with whom, to offer alternative understandings of their involvement in physical activity. Relatedly, we also note a tendency within the existing literature to focus on women and girls' experiences of Physical Education (PE) within school and/or physical activity away from school, and less on the home itself as a space and context for exploring physical identity. Allan and Crow (1989, p. 1) argue that

> what goes on inside houses is home life, and this is something about which relatively little is known because it is fundamentally a private affair, curtained off from the public gaze ….. but the mundane character and private nature of home life conceal the energies that have to be put into its management and the powerful influence it has in shaping people's lives.

The term 'home' is often confused with the word 'house', but here we draw on Dovey's (1985, p. 34) important distinction,

> although a house is an object, a part of the environment, home is best conceived of as a kind of relationship between people and their environment. It is an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between dwellers and their dwelling places.

The home moves beyond being a physical space to one with social and cultural elements. Thus spaces become socially constructed in particular ways. For example, within the home specific spaces can become demarcated along gender lines, including 'the man cave' or shed and the 'women's domain' or kitchen. However, as individuals move in and through the different contexts in their lives they encounter different social arrangement and diverse cultural practices (Green & Singleton, 2007). Bringing these different ways of thinking and being into the home can lead to contestations over beliefs, identity constitution and practice (Banks, 2005). Consequently, spaces can be in a constant state of flux where traditional power relations, social hierarchies, ways of being, and the socially constructed nature of particular spaces are disrupted (Stride, 2016). This contributes to the diverse and fluid ways

that Allan and Crow's (1989, p. 12) three elements of a home: privacy; security, control and freedom; and creativity and expression are experienced by the home's occupants.

> The contradictions that emerge from the study of the home reflect the existence of tensions between the uses to which the home is put and the complex character of the social relations which make up domestic life …Overall the diversity of people's experience of the home reflects the diversity of family life which takes place there.

In relation to privacy, Allan and Crow (1989) note that privacy is not experienced evenly, with parents often dictating the degrees of privacy afforded to younger family members. Moreover, privacy in the home may be experienced positively by some, but be characterised by feelings of oppression, confinement and isolation by others. The home as a private space has been a key concern for feminist work exploring gender power relations and women's oppression. However, as Walby (1990, p. 201) notes 'women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited' with capitalism bringing women into the public sphere of paid work. These debates are extended when the intersections of race and gender are considered. hooks (1984) contrasts the experiences of White women campaigning to be liberated from the home, to gain employment away from the home, with the concerns of Black women. In servicing the homes of White families, she notes how many Black women wished to spend more time with their own families and in their own homes. These were viewed as sites of resistance, support and solidarity from the racism being experienced outside of the home.

In relation to security, control and freedom, Allan and Crow (1989) note that women often take primary responsibility for creating security and order for the occupants of the home; a situation that has been consistently reported over the last three decades. In taking responsibility for family leisure schedules both inside and outside of the home, women have reduced time and freedom to participate in their own leisure activities, concomitantly often experiencing the home as a site of work and obligations rather than a space in which to relax

(Shaw, 2008; Wheeler, 2013). In relation to Allen and Crow's third element, creativity and expression, 'making a home' is often a project undertaken by women for others and an activity on which they feel judged. Thus, the home becomes an extension of work, rather than a place of relaxation. Strongly linked to beliefs about women's role within the home are assumptions about women's physicality.

Physicality is 'not theorized as simply a sex difference, but importantly, understood as part of a wider, unequal power relation between men and women' (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006, p. 772). Gilroy (1997) argues that physicality as a source of power can emerge from involvement in physical activities that enhance skills, improve confidence and lead to empowerment - through the development of physical power, social power is realised. However, Deem and Gilroy (1998) offer a cautionary note that the empowering potential of physical activity can be influenced by gender relations within the home and other institutions. For example, Scraton (1992) identified how girls are taught an acceptable female physicality through school Physical Education (PE); a physicality that prepares them for their future roles as wives and mothers. She argued that the structures, pedagogy and content of PE emphasise girls' physical differences to boys, and the importance of appearance and control through activities that encourage grace, leanness, and a heterosexual femininity.

Conversely, boys are encouraged to develop an assertive, strong physicality epitomised through the embodiment of aggression and competitiveness developed in team games. Within PE, girls learn to be physically different to boys which influences how they experience their bodies, their relationships with boys and their place in society. These kinds of expectations have not remained static. Just as ideas about women's suitability to gain (particular types of) employment away from the home have changed, so too have beliefs about women's physicality. For example, research reflects the ways in which young women are engaging in a broader range of physical activities away from school, gaining pleasure from their bodies

rather than their bodies being controlled (Wright & Macdonald, 2010). However, as Deem and Gilroy (1998) note, whilst physical activity can impact upon the body and identity, this does not necessarily translate to the everyday social realities of women's lives – that is, it may not have an impact upon employment, home life or transform oppressive relationships.

Griffiths (1988) was one of the first (and few) researchers to begin to identify the significance of the home on young women's leisure, identity and physicality. Her work noted how domestic responsibilities, parents' concerns regarding safety, and boys' domination of particular spaces reduced the amount of leisure opportunities available whilst also informing young women of the ways they were expected to behave. However, these young women were not always passive recipients of their circumstances. They joined forces to create a visible physical presence on the landscape of the street, refusing to remain invisible at home. Other work (James, 2001; Merten, 2005) identifies how young women draw upon particular spaces within the home to explore their identities and physicality, through listening to music, engaging in exercise, reading books, and socialising with friends. Bedrooms are perceived by young women as private spaces over which they have some control to express themselves without worrying about the criticism or embarrassment felt in more public settings in the presence of young men (James, 2001; James & Embrey, 2001; McRobbie & Garber, 1976).

Whilst the home can provide a space for exploring one's identity, it can also be a site where narrowly defined gender roles and a particular feminine physicality become reproduced. Leonard (2004) identifies how these ideologies are established from an early age with girls more likely than boys to be involved in cooking, cleaning and looking after siblings. Thus, the home becomes a key site in the continued reproduction of gendered power relations. Away from the home, gendered power also continues to influence women's physical activity opportunities. Flintoff and Scraton (2001) have identified the significance of women only settings as important in providing safe spaces for young women to explore their physical

identities. Studies of young ethnic minority women too have identified the significance of the gendered *and* racialised dimensions of space. For example, Knez et als (2012) research in Australia and Kay's (2006) work in the UK both identify the importance of safe, culturally sanctioned spaces, including the home, that enable Muslim young women to enjoy physical activity in settings that respect their gendered and religious identities. These studies provide a useful vantage point to counteract deficit understandings of South Asian and/or Muslim young women as embodying a frail physicality, and disinterested in physical activity (Carrington, Chivers, & Williams, 1987; Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993).

Azzarito and Hill's (2013) UK based qualitative study joins that of Knez et al (2012) and Kay (2006) to demonstrate how young women from minority ethnic communities are active agents in identifying suitable contexts to explore an active physicality. Rejecting competitive settings and sports based activities these young women actively sought supportive, 'homely' spaces, including bedrooms, living rooms, gardens and the local park to engage in football, badminton, fitness, and activities on the Nintendo Wii. Similarly, the young Muslim women in Green and Singleton's (2007) study managed concerns around the 'risky' nature of outdoor, public spaces by either spending their time in the home or drawing on friends to walk to and from venues that they perceived as 'safe'. However, Green and Singleton's (2007, p. 113) conclusions highlight the fluid and contested nature of the terms 'safety' and 'risk', and the ways in which these are contingent upon the interplay between identity and space. They argue for a 'middle ground' approach (Archer, Hutchings, & Leathwood, 2001) to better understand and explore young women's lives and it is to this theoretical lens that the discussion now turns.

'Middle ground' feminism and 'fr/agility'

‘Middle ground’ feminist thinking (Archer et al., 2001) addresses the limitations of adopting *either* a structural *or* poststructural lens in seeking to understand the nature of contemporary gender relations. Whilst earlier feminist approaches provided compelling arguments about the ways in which the wider structures of gender, race, and class influence women’s and girls’ daily lived social realities, these have been questioned for their over-determination, their tendency to homogenise all women’s experiences, and for an insufficient acknowledgment of individuals’ agency (McNay, 1992). Concomitantly, poststructural approaches have been criticised for their over-emphasis on individual identity and/or experience, at the expense of structural inequalities. Poststructural analyses of power fragment the notion of group identities (such as South Asian, Muslim young women), making a politics of resistance based on shared experiences difficult to establish (Hill Collins, 2000; McNay, 1992). Those arguing for a middle ground feminist position recognise the continued significance of the social structures whilst acknowledging agency in navigating power relations and negotiating identities, and experiences (Stride, 2016, Stride & Flintoff, 2016, and Scraton, 2018 provide further discussion on the challenges of using *either* structural *or* poststructural explanations and the usefulness of a middle ground approach). Within this paper, middle ground thinking is drawn upon to acknowledge how South Asian, Muslim young women are positioned within the wider social structures and institutions, and yet continue to navigate and negotiate these to carve out new subject positions.

To reflect middle ground thinking we utilise Archer’s concept of ‘fr/agility’ that acknowledges both the enduring nature of power relations and inequalities, alongside the existence of resilience and resistance. It reflects the difficulties and dilemmas associated with constituting identity, and navigating and negotiating power relations through combining the idea of power and weakness (fragility) with agency and action (agility). Archer (2004) acknowledges that fr/agility is not fixed, or experienced in homogenised ways. Across time

and space, different intersections of oppression create changing conditions, with particular identities becoming more or less powerful and resistance needed in differing forms and amounts (Valentine, 2007). For example, since the attacks in New York in 2001 and London in 2005, issues of racism have become intertwined with Islamophobia creating challenges for Muslim women in relation to the embodiment of their religious identity and expectations around their physicality (Tariq & Syed, 2017). In turn, this has reinforced homogenised and stereotypical beliefs about Muslim women as submissive and oppressed.

Methods

The research setting

The wider study from which this paper is written explored the school based PE and broader physical activity experiences of a group of South Asian Muslim young women based in the North of England. Data generation occurred in one urban based secondary school, Woodstock High[i]. With a significant part of the research focusing upon the young women's lives away from school, the school setting may appear less than ideal as a context for data generation. However, as a White, non-Muslim researcher, Annette was acutely aware that gaining access and opportunities to work with young South Asian, Muslim women within their community could be limited (Watson & Scraton, 2001). Instead, Annette drew on her contacts in local schools, many consisting of large numbers of South Asian, Muslim students. Woodstock High was one such school with 76% of the students of British Asian, Pakistani origin and 91% Muslim. The school is co-educational and caters for 1850 students aged 11-16; with 63% living in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. Annette's contacts provided her with access to all of the PE classes of her chosen age group (Year 9 – 14 to 15 years of age). They also facilitated access to the young women in other lessons to enable the generation of additional data. The school proved to be a fruitful setting in generating data

about the young women's school based PE experiences ***and*** their physical activity away from school through careful consideration of the methods to be used.

Methods

Data generation strategies were unpinned by our beliefs that young people are experts in their own lives (Clark & Moss, 2011), should be consulted with (O'Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010), and that conventional methods require some rethinking if young people's views are to be captured (Flintoff et al., 2008). Initially, Annette spent nine months in the school observing PE classes (phase one of data generation). This enabled Annette to become familiar to the young women which helped with recruitment for the next phase of data generation. In phase two, Annette worked with four focus groups (23 young women), meeting them once a week for four weeks in a class designated for Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education. A series of activities were designed to help open up discussions with the young women about their broader lives. These activities led to the young women creating a number of 'artefacts' including posters depicting aspects of their life that were important to them, and maps plotting their typical movements away from school (Stride, 2014; Stride, 2016; Stride & Flintoff, 2016).

These participatory approaches were complimented with individual or paired interviews in phase three of data generation to gain more detailed understandings. Of the original 23 focus group participants, 13 young women were interviewed based on their availability and willingness to participate. These 13 young South Asian, Muslim women reflected the heterogeneity in Muslim communities in a variety of ways. Some of these young women were born outside of the UK, with others being second or third generation. Some lived with their grandparents, whilst others had grandparents living outside of the UK. The young women were also diverse in their degrees of religiosity (Benn et al, 2011) and the

embodiment of their religion. For example, some prayed at home, some visited the local mosque, and others did not pray. At school, some wore the hijab and/or salwar kameez with others not wearing a headscarf and/or opting for the alternative school uniform of shirt, jumper, tie and skirt or trousers. Information about these 13 young women, families and living arrangements has been reported elsewhere (Stride & Flintoff, 2016) but is also reproduced in table 1.

Table 1 – The young women, their families and living arrangements

Data analysis and re-presentation

With data generation taking place over a two year period, data analysis was undertaken after each phase of the research process. For example, after phase one an initial analysis of the observations occurred. Similarly, after each focus group discussion, analysis of the transcript and research artefacts took place. The initial findings from these analyses were then drawn upon to inform the interview schedule in a more detailed and individualised way. For example, specific probes and prompts were added to the generic schedule to clarify and check previous data sources and address any gaps in understandings about each young woman's relationship with PE and physical activity[ii].

The middle ground lens used within this research ensured a double layered analysis took place. The first layer involved repeatedly going backwards and forwards between the different data sets for each individual young woman, cross-referencing interview data with that from the observations, posters, maps, and focus group discussions using field notes and memos to articulate links. This process led to the creation of a coherent narrative that, from a poststructural feminist perspective, reflects the individualised and diverse nature of these young women's experiences. Yet on its own, this level of analysis does not explore across the 13 young women's narratives, and is insufficient in recognising both similarities and points

of departure in their experiences. Thus, in accordance with the constant comparison method, a thematic analysis took place with the narratives coded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Again, notes and memos were used to identify links, leading to the emergence of themes. The following discussion focuses on one such theme - the 'home' as a significant setting in the young women's lives.

Discussion

Physical activity in and around the home

The young women were consistent with their recollections about the localised nature of their physical activity spaces and the significance of the home. Whilst some young women visited a gym, attended youth club, played in parks or used a community centre, these were in the close vicinity of their homes (the maximum distance travelled was one mile). However, the young women also cited bedrooms, gardens and their street as key spaces in which to be physically active. In their discussions they talked about participating in a diverse range of activities as well as their reasons for being physically active. These include forgetting problems, relieving stress and boredom, as well as for fun, and to relax, similar to the findings of Flintoff and Scraton (2001).

> I'm dancing (at home), practicing for the wedding that's coming up. Think that's helped relieve some stress and taken my mind off some of the things going on in my life. I'm exhausted from it all, emotionally, physically, mentally. (Sumera)

> I do stuff when I get home. 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)

> I love my bedroom! It means a lot to me 'cause it's where I feel relaxed and can do whatever I want ….. health related fitness stuff ….. sit ups and press ups ….. dance. (Noreen)

The use of localised, community settings were often linked to the young women's, and their families' concerns, around safety, cost and/or transport, mirroring issues raised elsewhere in the literature (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Green & Singleton, 2007).

> She (mom) wasn't happy when I went to after school dance 'cause I didn't get home till five. Wanted to know where I'd been, what I'd been up to, who I was with. (Fizzy)

In discussing their experiences of physical activity in and around the home, the young women's discussions highlight some of the key elements of the home as identified by Allan and Crow (1989). For example, Noreen admits her bedroom is the part of her home which is her private space; a space where she feels relaxed and where she feels free to explore her physicality. However, for Fizzy the home has contradictory meanings. As a result of her mother's concerns and actions, Fizzy acknowledges the home as a safe and secure setting. Yet, she is also aware of how it acts as a form of control over her freedom, influencing what she can do and who she can see.

The young women's families emerge as significant in providing them with physical activity opportunities. It is through these narratives that particular ideas emerge around 'acceptable' female physicality. For example, Noreen and Messa attend the gym, walk, and run to spend time with their family, but also to accommodate theirs and their parents' concerns about becoming overweight.

> Last summer we'd go to the women's only bit at the gym next door, me, mom and my sister, but this summer we're in Pakistan ….. I walk everywhere there and you don't eat much it's so hot, so I'll lose weight. (Messa)

> I haven't been running for a while. Well, not since last weekend with mom, running laps round the park, 'cause dad says she's getting fat. (Noreen)

These discussions reflect how the young women and their female relatives embody traditional Westernised beliefs about female physicality. Moreover, Noreen's account is suggestive of the ways in which gendered power relations operate in the home to encourage this embodiment. However, through their stories the young women also offer a counter narrative. In engaging in activities like boxing, baseball, weights, and ju jitsu, they trouble gendered and racialised stereotypes of South Asian, Muslim women's physicality as frail, their lives as

oppressed, and their disinterest in physical activity (Carrington et al., 1987; Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993). However in some cases, parents' expectations of the young women within the home in relation to household responsibilities reinforced traditional roles, which at times limited their opportunity to be physically active.

'Fr/agility' and household responsibilities

The young women in this study demonstrate 'fragility' within their narratives in relation to their positioning within gendered power relations, traditional beliefs and expectations around women's role within the home. For example, they noted expectations to look after siblings, cook, clean and shop (expectations not placed on their brothers), which influenced their opportunities to be physically active, echoing the findings of Griffiths (1988).

> I missed not going last week (to break dance club). Had to take and pick Adi (brother) up from mosque and then give him his tea 'cause mom and dad were busy picking up my older brother from summer camp. (Borat)
>
> I'm so tired all the time with all the running about I do here. Especially now I have to get up earlier to get my sisters fed and off to school, what with mom's health being bad. (Sumera)
>
> And I've done ju jitsu, before I had to start babysitting my little sister and brother. That was just so cool. Like, you'd get thrown around and all sorts. (Bebo)

The home, as a site of security, control and freedom, emerges as complex and fluid. In taking care of their siblings, Bebo, Borat and Sumera are aware that this sometimes leaves them with little time and/or energy to be physically active in ways that are meaningful to them. What is interesting to note here, is that whilst these young women are expected to embody appropriate gender roles they do not always passively accept these positionings reflecting their 'agility' and agency. For example, Borat critically reflected upon how 'All the girls do all the work and the guys rarely do anything, apart from play on Xbox'. Such was her frustration she had protested to her parents about the unequal division of household chores between her and her older brother, resulting in him being tasked to do 'the odd bit of

hoovering [vacuuming]'. For some young women like Sara, household duties are strategically used as a bargaining tool. Similar to the young women in McRobbie and Garber's study (1976), Sara secured freedom each evening to play cricket, rounders and badminton by ensuring she helped around the home and completed her homework.

> Mom's great. As long as homework's done, we help round the house, tell her who we're with and where we're going, she don't mind us playing out.

In addition to the gendered nature of household roles, further gendered divisions emerge from the young women's narratives in relation to the parent most likely to oversee these responsibilities. Many of their discussions resonate with those of the young women in Kay's (2006) research in that mothers are the parents most likely to monitor and prioritise these kinds of duties.

> Mom'll go mad if she sees the mess (in her bedroom) and I'll be on cleaning room duty this weekend if I'm not careful. As if I'd wanna do that instead of Saturday club. (Alisha)

> I'll get home late (because of detention), have to catch up on the cooking and cleaning and they'll be no time to play. Mom might make me do extra cleaning if it's really bad and that could mean no free time for the rest of the week. (Bebo)

Whilst it can be argued that the young women's mothers are contributing to the reproduction of gendered power relations, this should be considered in relation to South Asian, Muslim women's fragile positioning within wider structural ideologies of power. Through a complex web of legislation, education, employment, policies and hegemonic discourses, particular beliefs and stereotypes emerge about South Asian Muslim women as frail, oppressed and weak (Hill Collins, 2000; Mirza, 1992). The strength of these belief systems and stereotypes is realised when research demonstrates these women's fragility in a system that deems them suitable for a narrow range of roles, including homemaker, and part time, low paid jobs (Brah, 1995).

Within our study, ten of the young women's mothers are full time housewives, and their actions could be interpreted as them preparing their daughters for similar roles. However, on further exploration, alternative narratives emerged in discussions around education and careers. These young women and their families demonstrate their agility in their resistance to reproducing existing structural inequalities, using education as a means to achieving other possibilities that lie outside the home. As discussed previously, these young women (and their families) move through and between different spaces in their lives including school and the job market. In so doing, they encounter different ways of thinking and being, some of which offer them alternative subject positions to those occupied by their mothers and grandmothers. However, as will be seen in the following section, focusing on schooling and their careers ensures they juggle multiple priorities in their lives, which in turn can influence opportunities to be physically active.

'Fr/agility', education, schooling and careers

All young women in our study articulated the importance of their education and recognised the contributions this would make to future job opportunities. The young women rarely discussed motherhood or marriage, focusing instead upon their career goals which included childcare, social work, careers advisor, psychiatry, clothes designer, travel journalism, the business, legal or medical professions, or further study. As students of a high achieving school, it is perhaps unsurprising that these young women would embody the school's discourse of achievement; discourses that were shared by their families. The following comments from Sumera and Bebo reflect their academic priorities.

> My family's different. We have good status 'cause of my granddad and girls have to keep up that respect, that holy reputation. Do their work, study hard and get a good job, don't go out uncovered, don't mess about, no boys or smoking or bad things like that. Just respect boundaries, innit? (Sumera)

> I want to get good qualifications and a career, like a barrister or solicitor or probation officer. I wanna get somewhere in life. We want our children to be happy. Not right now like, but children are the future for their parents, so if I was a parent I would want the best for my children. (Bebo)

In terms of employment, the narratives of the young women and their families clearly reflect Archer's (2004) concept of fr/agility. Past research highlights the powerful legacy of assumptions and stereotypes created by the arrival of minority ethnic women to the UK in the 1970s and 1980s (Mirza, 1992) and the difficulties these continue to generate for second and third generation women (Tariq & Syed, 2017). Although the young women in our research face a different economic climate, labour market and legal, political and education systems to that experienced by their mothers and grandmothers, they face other kinds of challenges. For example, new forms of racial discrimination have emerged in the 21st century in the form of Islamophobia with Muslim women particularly vulnerable (Tariq & Syed, 2017). Thus, whilst second and third generation South Asian, Muslim women are increasingly well qualified, both at school and university level, racialised and gendered inequalities are still evident in the actual employment status of this group. Indeed, Pakistani Muslim women remain one of the highest unemployed groups in the UK, and are a priority group in the local area's employment strategy, reflecting their fragility in the current job market (Brown, 2017). Despite these challenges, the young women in this research demonstrated their, and their families', agility in resisting gendered and racialised discourses that suggest that they are only suitable for particular jobs.

Whilst education is important to the young women, their data demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of their decision making in relation to their education and the other priorities in their lives. Bebo had chosen to stop playing for the school rounders team in order to study for an additional qualification.

> ….. I've started to do Information Technology now after school, instead of rounders, 'cause I'll get a qualification out of it, and education comes first.

Conversely, Fizzy favoured physical activity over catching up on coursework in a subject she recognised she had fallen behind in. For Sumera, her goal of achieving academically, coupled with responsibilities at home, left her little time or energy for other activities.

> I can't be bothered these days (to do physical activity), what with housework and homework and school ….. I could go to the gym with mom now for free but there's plenty of time for that when I'm older. I don't need to be fit for school. It's not like I'm fat or anything.

Some of the young women recognised the value of physical activity in *complementing* their academic studies. For example, Sara acknowledged that physical activity provides a break from homework, enabling her to refocus, and Noreen noted how punching on her brothers' boxing bag offers a welcome distraction.

> ... there's so much homework at the minute. It's better when you can break it up a bit. I've got a good routine. Every day, get home, do some homework. Then, when I get bored come out to play, clear my head, chill a bit. Playing helps me to get fresh so I can come back and finish it off after tea. (Sarah)

> My brothers laugh at me and say "You're soooo slow. You're doing it wrong", when I punch at their bags in the garage, but it feels good, especially after a day of the boring lessons, like Sociology. What is that all about? (Noreen)

For Sarah, choosing to participate in physical activity at home ensures she has flexibility and freedom over when to engage in her academic studies. Similarly, Noreen's choice to exercise at home was based on recognition of the benefits of physical activity for her academic studies and the difficulties encountered in finding suitable opportunities in her community. She too, had demonstrated her agility through her agency and creativity in creating a private and safe setting at home (Allan & Crow, 1989). Whilst tensions between balancing school work and finding time to be physically active have been reported by young White women (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001), these tensions are perhaps heightened for South Asian, Muslim young women. Situated in a racialised and gendered labour market, these young women are acutely aware of the need to work hard at their academic studies to help them realise their career goals.

Conclusion

Our research points to the home as a significant space for young women's exploration of their physical identities. Alongside bedrooms, living rooms, and gardens, other contexts in close vicinity of the home are identified. The young women are also different in their motivation for engagement, and their choice of physical activities. Their narratives tell of fun, relieving stress, spending time with family and friends, preventing boredom, and learning new skills. Playing on the Wii, basketball, boxing, football, dancing, fitness, rounders, running, and walking are just some of the activities they engage in. As such, these young South Asian, Muslim women differ very little to young White women, who too have highlighted the need for safe, private spaces in which to be physically active. This finding is significant in itself - too often, South Asian, Muslim young women are labelled as different to White women, more deficient and in need of intervention, the 'problematic other' to be fixed. Rather, our research adds to other recent studies (e.g. Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Knez et al., 2012) that question these kinds of beliefs, and trouble notions of South Asian, Muslim women's physicality as frail and weak.

In our other work (Stride, 2014) we have also highlighted the ways in which South Asian, Muslim girls may have qualitatively different kinds of experiences to White girls because of their positioning at the intersections of gender and religion. Interestingly, within this theme of the home, religion did not emerge as significant to the girls' physical activity experiences. We suggest that this may be because of the shared belief systems operating within the home regarding Islam, young women and physical activity. However as we (and others – see Benn at al, 2011; Hargreaves, 2000; 2007) have reported elsewhere, different cultural interpretations of religious requirements can create a series of challenges for young Muslim women wishing to be physically active. As these young women move within different spaces in their lives, including schools, community settings, and public sports centres and swimming

pools, they encounter different belief systems and/or environments that challenge their right to embody their religion and be physically active. Our research thus highlights the importance of recognising the diversity, complexity and fluid nature of context.

Whilst contestations over religion did not emerge within the immediate home, the young women's discussions reflect other ways in which the home can pose a challenge to being physically active. As a physical space, the home offers young women privacy, security and some degree of control and freedom over the ways they choose to express their physicality (Allan & Crow, 1989). However, the home is not an isolated entity. As a dynamic social and cultural space the home's occupants' actions and beliefs are influenced by powerful discourses mediated by and through schooling, the media and other large scale institutions. This can result in contradictions and tensions for family members (Allan & Crow, 1989). For example, for many of the young women in this study, gendered beliefs about domestic duties and expectations about future careers tested their resolve to be physically active. However, they demonstrated their agility by actively navigating and negotiating these challenges to map out possibilities for being physically active, reflecting their resourcefulness in managing the multiple priorities in their lives.

This study joins others in acknowledging the importance of moving beyond quantitative, large scale surveys that attempt to categorise 'experiences' in simplistic (and uni-dimensional) ways. This paper offers a counter narrative to quantitative research that enables South Asian, Muslim young women's experiences to 'fall through the gaps' rendering them invisible within the data. We also reiterate the importance of adopting a broader definition of physical activity to recognise more informal, unstructured activities. As demonstrated by the young women in this research, they can, and do, challenge gendered and racialised expectations around the kinds of activities they are involved in. Yet, without an expanded

definition of physical activity, stereotypes of South Asian, Muslim women as inactive and disinterested will continue to be perpetuated.

Finally, in offering a counter narrative to that typically promulgated about these young women's physicality we believe this paper to be a useful point of reference for Physical Educators. Whilst PE can provide crucial opportunities for young women to develop physical skills and correspondingly, social capital, this is often overwritten by the physical performance agenda. Indeed, this was the case for a number of the young women in this study. However, rather than passively accepting this situation, these young women looked for different kinds of physical activity opportunities away from school. More often than not, these could be found within the home, supported by family and friends. We would encourage Physical Educators to work more closely with the young women, their families, and wider community to explore ways they can better support these young women in their endeavours to be physically active.

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[i] All names used in this article are pseudonyms

[ii] For example, when reviewing the young women's posters of their lives outside of school they often included images of sports equipment (for example cricket bats), or particular spaces in (for example bedrooms) and near the home (front yard). These served as prompts in the interviews to ask the young women why they had included that image and to get them to expand upon the kinds of activities they engaged in, where, how often, with whom and why.