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**TITLE:** Gendered power alive and kicking? An analysis of four English secondary school PE departments

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## **Abstract**

Scruton's (1992) ground breaking research highlighted how Physical Education (PE) contributed to the reproduction of gender power relations; more specifically, how three messages around motherhood, sexuality and physicality, reflected through PE's structures, activities and delivery, contributed to young women's sense of self. Twenty five years on, this paper explores how contemporary PE reproduces and challenges gender power relations in four English secondary schools. Data were generated from eighty hours of observations of PE lessons, and eight semi-structured interviews with PE teachers. Guided by Hill Collins' (2000) four domains (structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, interpersonal) underpinning the matrix of domination the findings demonstrate that gender remains a visible organising feature in the structural arrangements of PE. Moreover, teachers' gendered beliefs and assumptions circulating within the hegemonic domain, and actions in the disciplinary domain, ensure that students embody their gender in appropriate ways. Furthermore, a consistency of practice was evident in teachers' pedagogy despite differences in the schools' cohorts. Similar blocks of teaching activities and a performance-based pedagogy failed to include difference. We suggest this is unsurprising and unlikely to change with the current National Curriculum promoting a performative, PE as sport discourse, and teacher training not conducive to developing teachers who can engage with difference and challenge inequalities. As such, PE continues to reinforce gender power relations and gender differences. By drawing upon the matrix, the need for change to occur at different levels and contexts is identified. To this end, teacher training must do better in developing the next generation of teachers who are willing and able to critique the status quo and work with girls to advocate for change. Relatedly, we draw attention to what can be achieved when power is shared through a democratic pedagogy that values girls' voices and recognises them as co-collaborators in curriculum design.

**Keywords:** Gender power relations, Physical Education, matrix of domination

## **Introduction**

Just over twenty five years ago, Sheila Scraton's (1992) pivotal monologue 'Shaping Up To Womanhood' was published. As one of only a few critically informed studies focusing on girls' Physical Education (PE) at the time, it was significant in highlighting the ways in which the subject contributes to the reproduction and potential challenging of gender power relations. Using a socialist feminist lens that acknowledges how gender oppression is created through the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, Sheila highlighted how PE contributes to gender inequalities. More specifically, her work signposted how PE structures, activities, and delivery reinforce key ideologies around motherhood, sexuality and physicality that influence young women's understandings of their self, their bodies, and their place in society. Alongside other early feminist contributions in PE (Hargreaves, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994), Sheila's work laid the foundations for what has become a buoyant area of study. Flintoff & Scraton (2006) and Oliver & Kirk (2015) provide useful overviews of the history and breadth of this area. Scraton (2018) recently reflected back on her original study highlighting how feminist thinking has developed and influenced PE research and practice; for example, the move from macro approaches to micro analyses, a shift from historical accounts, and a focus on identities and differences, rather than inequalities. There clearly remains an appetite to better understand issues concerning PE and gender, and as we outline next, this paper seeks to add to these discussions.

Annette, the paper's first author, was initially introduced to 'Shaping Up To Womanhood' (Scraton, 1992) as an undergraduate student. At the time her appreciation of feminism was growing as she recognised how this thinking could explain some childhood experiences; for example, not being allowed to play football with the boys in PE and considered different for preferring to ride her bike than play with dolls. This initial encounter with feminism was to be the beginning of a journey; one that led Annette to Sheila's door some two decades after

first encountering her work to be her PhD student. Unsurprisingly, these years of contemplation of and engagement with feminism have informed Annette's research and practice, with *Shaping Up to Womanhood* being a key point of reference.

Such has been the influence of Sheila's scholarship and academic leadership that it seemed timely in 2017 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *'Shaping Up To Womanhood'*. A number of activities were planned including the 'Gender, PE and Active Lifestyles' conference at Leeds Beckett University, and a Special Issue of *Sport, Education and Society* – 'Gender, PE and Active Lifestyles: Contemporary Challenges and New Directions' (see 2018, Volumes 7 & 8). Annette also secured a small grant and ethical approval from the University to undertake a study to explore how contemporary PE contributes to the reproduction of and challenge to gender power relations in four secondary schools based in the north of England. More specifically, the following research questions guided the study: (1) In what ways does the structure and organisation of PE contribute to the reproduction of and challenge to gender power relations; (2) How does the content and delivery of PE contribute to the reproduction of and challenge to gender power relations. This paper reports on the findings of this study.

Whilst Sheila's (1992) work was the inspiration behind the research presented in this paper, it should be noted that this was not a replicative study. Indeed, such have been the legislative, policy, and social shifts during the intervening twenty five years that attempting any kind of replication would be impossible. For example, in relation to policy, since the early 1990s there have been five versions of a National Curriculum in PE - the NCPE (Department of Education & Science, 1992; Department for Education & Employment/ Welsh Office, 1995; Department for Education & Employment/ Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, 1999; Department for Children, 2007; Department for Education (DfE), 2014). The NCPE was established to ensure greater consistency between schools and that every student would

receive the same educational entitlement. However, a historically rooted preoccupation with traditional competitive team games has resulted in the marginalisation and alienation of many students from the subject - girls, minority ethnic students and those with disabilities (Herold, 2020; Kirk, 2010).

Another significant change since 1992 has been the introduction of assessment and examinations in PE. In part, these developments were to encourage more young people to remain in education and to legitimise an often devalued subject (Casey & O'Donovan, 2015; Lopez-Pastor et al., 2013). Yet, research suggests that examinable PE can also contribute to the marginalisation of some students (see Velija & Kumar (2009) on how GCSE PE reinforces beliefs about the gendered body, and Hay & Macdonald (2010) on the gendering of abilities in Senior PE). In relation to social and legislative changes since Sheila's (1992) study, schools have experienced increases in the 'super diversity' of their student intakes (Dagkas & Pearce, 2014). For example, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 strengthened the right to place young people with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Additionally, the numbers of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds continue to rise contributing to the heterogeneity of many classrooms (DfE, 2019; Hamnett, 2012). Set against this backdrop of social, policy and legislative change, it was timely to re-consider the essence of Scraton's (1992) research within *changing times*.

These marked differences from Sheila's study, notably the diversity now found within contemporary PE classrooms, enabled us to move beyond gender and explore its intersections with ethnicity and disability. Moreover, in addition to girls' experiences of PE, those of boys were also considered. Whilst research has identified the heterogeneity of boys' experiences in PE, there have been less studies that focus upon *both boys and girls*, whether in single sex or mixed sex settings, despite the recognition that masculinities and femininities are constructed

in opposition to each other (Connell, 2008; Gerdin & Larsson, 2018; Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019). England, where our research took place, offers a somewhat unusual context to explore the relationship between masculinities and femininities. Although many countries teach PE in mixed sex groupings, boys and girls in England continue to be taught separately for PE and yet together for all other subjects at secondary school. The debates behind this separation are well rehearsed and are briefly considered in the following section which reviews literature pertinent to this study. This is followed by an explanation of Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination and the significance of its four domains in contributing to the constitution of gender power relations. After this, the methodological considerations framing this research are outlined. The key findings are then discussed including: (a) the (ill)logic of gendered PE structures; (b) gendered beliefs and assumptions; and (c) gender disciplining. The paper then concludes by offering a number of overarching observations and points to the contribution this research makes to understanding contemporary PE and gender power relations.

### **Gender and PE: Theoretical and empirical shifts**

Since the publication of *Shaping Up to Womanhood* theoretical shifts and a burgeoning body of gender and PE research have offered different explanations regarding girls' relationships to PE. Whilst over a decade old now, Flintoff & Scraton (2006) provide one of the most recent and comprehensive overviews in this area. The following section reviews some of the research undertaken since 1992. This timeframe is drawn upon to highlight the longevity of some of the issues raised whilst also signposting the breadth of research undertaken.

Early liberal feminist work in England exploring curriculum content focused upon the demarcation of activities along gender lines. For example, Leaman (1984) noted how separating the sexes ensured boys' limited opportunities to experience dance, netball and gymnastics, with girls afforded little access to 'boy's games' - football, rugby and cricket. In

providing a curriculum of activities for boys that develop strength and aggression and one for girls that promotes attributes associated with femininity, differences between boys and girls are reinforced (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Penney, 2002; Scraton, 1992). Through such practice, PE supports notions of masculinity and femininity as polar opposites, and reinforces stereotypes of women as less physically able, justifying their subordination (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). Yet, opening up all curriculum activities to both sexes is a simplistic solution to a far more complex issue. For example, whilst girls have been offered access to some 'male PE', less effort has been given to boys' accessing activities typically undertaken by girls (Penney, 2002; Scraton, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992). Within mixed sex settings, research has demonstrated how boys' domination of play, controlling of space, and belittling girls' capabilities leads to negative consequences for many girls (Hills & Croston, 2012; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2018; Walseth, Aartun & Engelsrud, 2017) as well as some boys (Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019). Girls have also reported feeling on display and judged by the 'male gaze' (Cameron & Humbert, 2020; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Hills & Croston, 2012; Scraton, 1992). In combination, these aspects have resulted in girls' withdrawal from the subject and being labelled as a problem in PE (Fisette, 2013; Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

Within England, the common practice of teaching PE in single sex settings ensures boys' domination of girls does not occur in these spaces. The separation of the sexes is also justified in some schools based on the needs of their Muslim students (Dagkas et al., 2011; Stride, 2014). However, single sex PE can contribute to the reproduction of gender power relations in other ways. For example, Harris and Penney (2000) note that whilst boys and girls are both offered Health Related Fitness (HRF), this equates to different versions and thus experiences. Boys are often involved in strength and conditioning work with girls more likely to focus upon relaxation, toning and flexibility.



In part, teachers' beliefs informed by wider discourses regarding an acceptable femininity and masculinity dictate the kinds of activities deemed suitable, the ways in which girls' and boys' bodies are directed to move, and how they should look in PE to reproduce a heterosexual femininity and hegemonic masculinity (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Fisette, 2013; Hay & Macdonald, 2010; Walseth et al. 2017). Other scholars have noted how the practice of men teaching boys and women teaching girls reinforces beliefs regarding 'natural' differences between the sexes. Men teachers are often viewed as role models with a performance focused pedagogy, whereas women teachers are characterised as maternal, caring and nurturing, more concerned with their students' effort and appearance (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Cameron & Humbert, 2020; Davies, 2003).

Relatedly, other work explores how teachers' beliefs and expectations develop. Indeed, teachers' sporting biographies influence their understandings of, and pedagogy in PE; with disconnections between teachers' and students' life histories negatively impacting upon students' experiences (Rich, 2003; Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019; Williams & Bedward, 2001). Kirk (2010) also highlights the significance of Initial Teacher Training/PE Teacher Education (ITT/PETE) programmes on teachers' philosophies; and how ITT/PETE's interconnectedness with PE influences the way it is delivered in schools. For example, Flintoff (1993) and Dowling (2006) demonstrate how the marginalisation of gender equity issues, sex differentiated practical activities, a focus on technical performances, and lecturers' beliefs in ITT/PETE influence the gendered practice evident in PE lessons. Similarly, Benn (1996) and Flintoff (2015) have highlighted how the structures and practices of ITT are both sexist *and* racist, influencing minority ethnic students' experiences. Even when ITT/PETE programmes promote socio critical thinking around social justice issues, research demonstrates how this knowledge can appear to be quickly forgotten and/or not viewed as important. Sirna, Tinning and Rossi (2010) note how trainee teachers engaged in masculine

repertoires to conform and impress PE departments. Mooney and Hickey (2012) noted that despite the deliberate introduction of two women teachers to an all boys' school in order to challenge the masculine culture, these women often regulated their behaviour to fit in and survive.

Some researchers have worked with practising teachers and/or their students to create more equitable and enjoyable PE spaces and experiences (Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2018). Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) and Fissette (2013) have centralised student voice, enabling young women to identify and critique barriers to their engagement and to reimagine a meaningful PE curriculum. Of course, to enable change also requires the support of teachers. Adopting an activist approach, Oliver and colleagues (Lamb et al., 2018; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010) and Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith (2019) demonstrate how working with teachers and students in curriculum design at a local level can challenge the persistent narrative that girls are the problem (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

In centralising student experiences, research has also troubled homogenised understandings of girls. Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality has illuminated how gender interplays with other identity categories to create different lived social realities. In PE, Stride's (2014, 2016) research with South Asian, Muslim young women notes how gender, religion and culture intersect to create different experiences. Oliver and Hamzeh (2010) highlight how Mexican American young women positioned at the intersections of racialized and gendered discourses face particular sets of challenges in being physically active. In moving the focus towards students, researchers have also noted the many ways young people exert agency to navigate traditional power relations and structures and manage their engagement to avoid negative consequences in PE (Stride, 2014; Walseth et al., 2017); for example, using female friendships and activism to challenge hegemonic masculinity (Cameron & Humbert, 2020;

Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019), drawing upon particular discourses and networks to be physically active away from school (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Stride, 2016), and articulating inequities (Hills & Croston, 2012; Stride, 2014).

In part, these insights draw on re-conceptualisations of power. Indeed, different ways of thinking about power have been pivotal in developing understandings of how gender is reproduced and contested in PE. Whilst earlier feminist work viewed power as top down, directive, and disciplinary, poststructural feminists consider how it circulates, can be productive, and exists in multiple sites (Weedon, 1997). As such, poststructural feminism argues that women and girls can be active in the constitution of their own identities and experiences (Weedon, 1997). However, focusing upon the individual diverts attention away from shared inequalities, widespread discrimination and broader social structures and ideologies (Hill Collins, 2000). As Brah (1995, p. 169) argues, ‘the micro world of individual narratives constantly references and foregrounds the macro canvas of economic, political and cultural change’. Thus, whilst there are examples within the PE literature that demonstrate how gendered inequalities can be addressed at a local level, gender discrimination remains more broadly. In considering these debates, we have found Hill Collins’ (2000) matrix of domination a useful resource to analyse how power operates at different levels within schools, and more specifically within PE classrooms, to influence students’ experiences (Stride, 2014).

### **Hill Collins’ Matrix of Domination**

Hill Collins’ (2000) matrix is rooted in the Black feminist movement and was developed to explain the position and experiences of Black women in American society. Importantly, Hill Collins believes there is merit in utilising the matrix to better understand global issues that encompass different time periods. This call by Hill Collins has been taken up in a range of

contexts, for example, Christopher's (2005) research within youth studies and Connor's (2006) exploration of education. The research reported in this paper also foregrounds education but specifically attends to the ways in which power operates within PE.

The matrix consists of four interconnected domains concerned with power: the structural domain focuses on how power is organized; the disciplinary domain explores how it is managed; and the hegemonic domain attends to how power is justified. The interpersonal domain explores how everyday interactions are converted into relations of power. More specifically, the structural domain considers how large scale institutions - religion, education, legislation, the labour market and the media - intersect and through policies, laws and regulations create disadvantage (Hill Collins, 2000). For example, in centralising competitive team games, the NCPE in England privileges some students whilst marginalising others. The disciplinary domain is concerned with mechanisms such as surveillance and how this reproduces orderly individuals, and an effective system that serves the interests of those in power (Hill Collins, 2000). For example, within PE the monitoring of attendance and performance ensures that young people learn to behave in particular ways. Change in this domain requires those in positions of authority challenging practices that contribute to inequalities.

Within the hegemonic domain, the transference of ideas, images and symbols via school curricula, religious teachings and mass media contribute to the (re)production of 'common sense' ideas and stereotypes that (in)form 'truths' and shape individual consciousness (Hill Collins, 2000). Within PE, posters in school corridors depicting White, non-disabled men's sporting achievements send out clear messages to all students about who is valued.

Resistance here requires critical reflection that recognises how knowledge is created and contributes to maintaining the status quo. The interpersonal domain considers how these

beliefs and philosophies are enacted in both disciplinary and productive ways in the everyday interactions between individuals (Hill Collins, 2000). Whilst Hill Collins' (2000) explanation of the four domains considers each separately, she acknowledges that in reality they are interconnected, working together to maintain privilege and advantage, discrimination and disadvantage. Using the matrix in this paper enabled an exploration of the operation of gendered power within four English secondary school PE departments with specific reference to the structure, organisation, content, and delivery of the subject. Further details of how the research was undertaken are discussed next.

## **Methodology**

Whilst a number of schools were approached using our professional and personal networks, the four chosen were based on their willingness to be part of the study, their close geographical proximity to each other, and their different school demographics. All schools are co-educational, three based in Stonefields<sup>i</sup>, a city experiencing high levels of social deprivation, and one in a neighbouring and affluent town, Highmarket. Elmhurst High and Woodside Secondary, situated in the inner city of Stonefields, have predominantly South Asian, Muslim students, and above average Pupil Premium<sup>ii</sup> numbers. Willetts Park, based in Stonefields' suburbs, serves a student population that is approximately one third South Asian, two thirds White, with above average Pupil Premium numbers. All have a larger than average student intake and are deemed not to be meeting OFSTED's standards<sup>iii</sup>. Bliss Hill, close to Highmarket's town centre, has a lower than average, predominantly White student intake, and is classified as good by OFSTED standards. For easy comparison of the schools' demographics, table 1 is provided.

### **TABLE 1: The schools**

## **PLACE TABLE 1 HERE**

The study utilised two data generation methods - observations of PE lessons and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Like most English secondary schools, PE is taught to single sex groups in these four schools. Observations of one boys' and one girls' PE lesson per week were undertaken at each school across two five week periods (eighty hours of observations) to cover different activities. Similar to other secondary schools in England, PE is taught in discrete blocks of seasonal activities in these four schools. For example, hockey, football and rugby are offered in the autumn and winter and athletics, cricket and rounders delivered during the spring and summer. Following Robson's (1993) guidelines on recording observations, descriptive field notes were taken during the lesson and typed up immediately after to aid in accuracy. For consistency purposes these field notes were generated using Spradley's (1980) social situation dimensions – space, actors, activities, objects, actions, events, time, goals, and feelings. For example, data were generated on where lessons took place, the focus of the session, who was present, what activity occurred, the organisation of the group, language used, and the behaviour of students. Drawing on the work of Larsson, Fagrell and Redelius (2009), initial analysis of these data focused upon the teachers' 'work in action' - how lessons were organised, the kinds of activities offered, teachers' pedagogy, and teacher-student interactions. Detailed notes and memos were created and further analysis took place using Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination. This led to examples of the ways in which the daily routines of a PE department influence power relations, experiences and difference. These examples were then used to develop and inform the subsequent interviews.

All teachers from the four schools were invited for interview with eight accepting (five women, three men). These teachers varied in age (early 20s - early 60s), years of experience (newly qualified teachers - over 30 years of teaching), and their other responsibilities within

the school (e.g. Assistant Head, Head of Year, Head of Girls' PE). Semi-structured interviews focused upon 'reflections in action' (Larsson et al., 2009) - teachers' thoughts on the aim of PE, their experiences of teaching boys and girls, and the challenges they experience in their work. These interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, were tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim shortly after taking place.

In adopting a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), Ruth and Sabrina as the interviewers and Annette as the lead researcher repeatedly read each transcription to aid with familiarisation of the data. Coding then took place with each researcher independently annotating the transcripts with their initial observations. All three researchers then met to discuss these codes and any patterns emerging across the data set. Cognisant that 'data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) we interrogated each other's interpretations and the ways these may have been shaped by our prior knowledge, experiences, biographies and positionality to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis process. All three researchers have extensive experiences of working with young people albeit in different contexts (e.g. football coach, secondary school teacher, and further education lecturer). And, whilst all three researchers have a heightened awareness of gender related issues, this varied across the team and reflected differing personal and professional experiences. At any junctures in our interpretations we would probe, whilst also drawing upon our theoretical understandings to move the data from being descriptive in favour of an analytical approach. In adopting a more 'theoretical thematic analysis' rather than an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), our existing knowledge of literature, and prior use of Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination, were influential. For example, this enabled us to develop more sophisticated themes from our initial thoughts around 'interactions' and 'relationships'. Alongside considering what our data had to offer the field we revised and

defined our final themes as follows: (a) the (ill)logic of gendered PE structures; (b) gendered beliefs and assumptions; and (c) gender disciplining.

### **Findings:**

As discussed previously, Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination as a conceptual tool consists of four separate domains. In practice these are mutually constitutive, reinforcing each other to create an intricate web of advantage and disadvantage, privilege and discrimination. Guided by the analysis and for clarity purposes, the findings are presented here to reflect the three domains of structural, hegemonic and disciplinary and how each contributes to the constitution of gender power relations, experiences and difference. Each of these is discussed and considered in relation to the interpersonal domain as it is through this domain that the other domains become enacted and/or justified.

*(a) The ill(logic) of gendered PE structures: 'I don't know why it is ... It's never been explained to me.'*

Reflecting the structural domain of Hill Collins' (2000) matrix of domination, PE was organised around sex in all four schools. Similar to others' findings (Berg & Lehalma, 2010; Scraton, 1992), this was evident in: the activities taught; the grouping of students; and the organisation of teachers. Table 2 presents the different activities offered only to boys or girls, and those taught to both boys and girls, albeit separately.

### **TABLE 2: Activities offered**

**PLACE TABLE 2 HERE**

Whilst there still remain some demarcations in the activities offered to the sexes, the data suggests that there have been some modest shifts leading to a greater range of activities for



girls (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2018). For example, sports typically classified as ‘boys’ (e.g. football and cricket) have begun to be offered to girls. However, little has changed for boys who are rarely given opportunities to experience those undertaken by girls (Leaman, 1984). When first questioned on activities offered, many teachers articulated a view like Rosie’s (Woodside) – ‘Generally they’re quite similar’ and Ash’s (Woodside) – ‘I think there’s not a massive amount of difference’. In essence, teachers believed content to be the same or similar for boys and girls and that they had equal opportunities. Yet, on further probing differences emerged.

Boys don’t do netball and girls do, ... the girls didn’t do rugby ... when the boys are on table tennis, the girls will be on activities that are outside, ...when the girls come in, they should probably really do table tennis ... but they just generally do badminton. I don’t know why it is ... It’s never been explained to me. I’ve never argued it to be honest because I’m not very good at table tennis ..... I’d much rather teach badminton. (Rosie)

Also, equal access does not equate to equal opportunities (Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019; Hills & Croston, 2012; Leaman, 1984; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2018; Scraton, 1992). Even when boys and girls were offered the same activity different kinds of experiences ensued, as demonstrated in our observation field notes of Health Related Fitness lessons at Woodside:

The boys’ fitness lesson consists of a cardiovascular challenge. Mr Coulson encouraged competition, stopping the group at times to announce the current leaders and those in last place.

The girls’ lesson revolves around calories and learning how to count them. Girls are given a sheet with information about how many calories are burned per repetition, or per minute doing an exercise.

Similarly, the lesson focus was different for boys and girls in gymnastics.

... they both do gymnastics, it will just be pitched at ... like the girls will be a bit more creative where the boys will be using a lot more apparatus and doing more challenging things like that to interest them. (Beth – Woodside)

This change in emphasis – girls being creative and required to moderate their bodies, and boys being encouraged to push their bodies and be physically challenged – imparts a clear message about boys' and girls' physicality. Resonating with Hills and Croston (2012), boys appear to be given more opportunities to improve physically and achieve success, particularly in relation to strength, muscularity, and speed. These physical improvements can lead to enhanced confidence, self-esteem and empowerment (Gilroy, 1997). Thus, it is through physical power that social power is realised (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006).

These gendered structural arrangements in PE also extended to the grouping of students with boys and girls predominantly taught separately across all four schools. Within teachers' explanations for teaching PE as single sex was a focus on boys' physical superiority.

Let's just say it's football for example, and it just happens the four girls might be the worst ... the boys might get angry with the girls. (Marcus – Elmhurst)

The boys brought on the top end of the girls ... It was also beneficial because the non sportyish girls, some of them were a lot brighter and a lot more switched on. So there was a balance when we [came to] the classroom. (Anna – Willets Park)

Within such statements there is an implicit assumption that the boys' ability is the pinnacle of achievement – something for the girls to aspire to but rarely achievable (Berg & Lahelma, 2010). These ways of thinking reinforce binary notions of homogenised groups that assume

*all* girls are less able, less physically competent, and inferior to *all* boys (Hills & Croston, 2012; Oliver & Kirk, 2015; Vertinsky, 1992).

Similarly, the third structural arrangement of these PE departments that involved sex differentiation, men teaching boys, and women teaching girls wherever possible, began to uncover some binary gendered assumptions about men and women teachers and their students. As will be discussed next, when these assumptions become solidified into taken for granted truths about the sexes that circulate within the hegemonic domain they justify and strengthen the structural arrangements in PE (Hill Collins, 2000).

***(b) Gendered beliefs and assumptions: ‘Girls are very different ... they need the empathy side.’***

In relation to students being taught by members of the same sex a variety of explanations were proffered by the teachers (Berg & Lahelma, 2010). Some focused upon the alleged different qualities of men and women teachers (Cameron & Humbert, 2020; Mooney & Hickey, 2012).

I think the women would have more confidence dealing with any sort of women issues that the girls might come up with, and it’s down to that really. (Ash)

I don’t know if it’s that girls are very different, you know, if they get upset, or something, they almost need the empathy side. (Marcie – Bliss Hill)

Focusing upon the different needs of their students and the different qualities that men and women teachers bring to PE contributes to the reinforcement of these socially constructed differences as innate and biologically determined (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Vertinsky, 1992). Gender roles become naturalised, reinforcing narrowly defined ways of how to be a man or

woman PE teacher. For women teachers the expectation is upon caring, rather than an ability to demonstrate physical and technical skills (Berg & Lahelma, 2010).

The women teachers did not always accept this situation unquestioningly.

It's a bugbear .... there's a lot of us [women] now that are not only able but competent enough to teach football and rugby ... we teach the theory but we're not good enough to teach the practical .... it's very important that boys see girls in a male environment and realise that they are just as competent. (Anna – Willets Park)

Whilst Anna highlights the importance of women teachers challenging stereotypes by delivering activities typically associated with men, such critical reflections were not common. Yet, critical reflections within the hegemonic domain are essential to challenge the gender order (Hill Collins, 2000). Larsson et al. (2009) call for a 'queering' of PE to expose how the practices of teaching constitute traditional gendered subject positions. However, we are cognisant that critical social justice work that enables this 'queering' to occur has been marginalised within ITT programmes in recent years. In part, this kind of social justice work has fallen victim to reductions in curriculum time as programmes attempt to become more cost effective. But also, beliefs that equal opportunities have been achieved in society have contributed to changes in curriculum content (Dowling, Fitzgerald, & Flintoff, 2015; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018).

Another reason posited for the need to match women teachers with girls in PE was religion and culture. Clare (Elmhurst) argued

... it was mostly a very high Muslim school, it was really complicated. Like if the girls were being taught by a male teacher, they were going to have to have their head

covered, not have their arms on show, not wear shorts in lessons ... trying to do dance classes ... they wouldn't dance if there was a male teacher in the room.

Schools that fail to recognise how students are differently positioned at the intersections of gender, religion, and culture and adapt their practice accordingly create challenges for Muslim students leading to girls' disengagement with PE (Benn et al., 2011; Dagkas et al., 2011). As identified by Benn (1996) over 20 years ago, with an inclusive outlook, consultation, and planning, small changes to the organisation and delivery of PE can enable Muslim girls' active involvement in lessons. Moreover, as highlighted by Stride (2014), the needs of Muslim girls are often not dissimilar in some aspects to their non-Muslim peers. Once again, a 'queering' of PE would question why particular dress codes and activities remain when they have been identified as problematic for a range of different girls. It would appear that despite decades of research critiquing PE and its inflexibility to meet the needs of its diverse student body, little changes (Oliver & Kirk, 2015).

Meanwhile, Phil (Woodside) focused on the need to have a teacher of the same sex as the students present during changing, whilst Marcus attributed the arrangement to staff specialisms.

As a male teacher, I'd probably say my two least comfortable things to teach are probably dance and gymnastics.

Implicit within Marcus' assertion and his practice is that particular kinds of activities are only appropriate for girls. The gendering of these activities continues into adulthood, legitimising which activities he can teach as a man. These kinds of arrangements ensure that from an early age boys and girls receive clear messages about how their bodies should move, look and behave. When such messages are embedded within everyday interactions and practices they

go unquestioned and the status quo remains intact (Hill Collins, 2000; Kirk, 2010; Walseth et al., 2017).

Such a disparate set of reasons (staff specialism, culture and religion, discipline in changing rooms, and the qualities each sex brings to PE) could be seen as a weakening of the argument for PE being structured in this way. However, we suggest that this complex web of policies, beliefs and practices operate in the structural, hegemonic and interpersonal domains to strengthen the justification for these gendered arrangements (Hill Collins, 2000).

In reflecting the diversity of contemporary PE classrooms, our observations also demonstrated how teachers' gendered assumptions intersected with racial, cultural, classed and ableist beliefs to influence Muslim and disabled students' experiences at the interpersonal level.

I think it is trying to get the kids as active as possible just due to the culture of our kids being sort of predominantly Asian and not very active outside of school ... because again, against their culture, they're not necessarily into it that much. (Beth)

One girl does not participate in the physical aspects of PE due to her disability, although she is involved through coaching and refereeing. The supply teacher told her to 'run the register to the attendance officer, we will make you useful'. (Woodside observation)

Terms such as 'making her useful' and 'against their culture' emit strong messages that circulate in the hegemonic domain and reflect the limiting beliefs and expectations teachers have in relation to their disabled and Muslim students (Hill Collins, 2000). In turn, these beliefs and expectations influence the disciplinary language and actions used with students at the interpersonal level.

*(c) Gender disciplining: ‘This is horrible girls. You need to wash your kit and you need to wash yourselves.’*

Teachers’ beliefs about boys and girls influenced the expectations they had of their students. These contributed to not only the different pedagogical approaches discussed earlier, but also how teachers disciplined their boy and girl students (Davies, 2003). For example, during a HRF class at Woodside the following were observed.

The teacher would force boys to have another go if he thought they could do better: ‘Come on, I know you can do better than that’ or ‘Don’t be lazy’. The boys who got the highest scores got merit stamps at the end.

Over the lesson they are asked to record how many calories they burn. Everyone gets merit stamps at the end of the lesson [from teacher] for ‘really good effort and engagement’ [teacher’s words].

In disciplining boys’ and girls’ bodies differently, teachers ensure gender is embodied in appropriate ways. Boys are encouraged to work towards a hegemonic masculinity by physically challenging themselves through competition. Through surveillance by the teacher particular bodies are celebrated for being different and attaining a target not achieved by all, through the rewarding of merit stamps. Conversely, girls are encouraged to engage in self surveillance of their bodies with the emphasis on counting calories, rather than any aspect of fitness. PE for girls provides an opportunity to engage in ‘practices of femininity’ that encourage them to conform to expected norms, rather than to be different. These norms centralise appearance and effort over performance and achievement and thus all girls are rewarded with merit stamps for effort (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Walseth et al., 2017)

This differential disciplining and system of achievement reflects Larsson et al.'s (2009) notion of 'benevolence as restraint' whereby women teachers feel obliged to take pressure off girls to physically perform in the same ways as boys. As such, gender becomes 'a "liability" in the process of ability construction because of the expectations of their [girls'] relatively inferior physical capacities' (Hay & Macdonald, 2010, p. 283). In not enabling the girls to learn how to use and experience their bodies in the same ways as the boys, opportunities to experience enhanced confidence, self-esteem, empowerment and social power are reduced (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Gilroy, 1997; Harris & Penney, 2000; Hills & Croston, 2012). Further gendered disciplinary practices in relation to appearance were observed in the changing rooms in relation to expectations around hygiene.

The girls' group get their uniform checked as it's 'disgusting to wear school uniform for PE, especially at your age' (states the teacher). Numerous boys are seen wearing their school shirts and shoes for PE. (Willets Park observation)

As students were getting changed the changing rooms began to smell. Miss Clark had to intervene and give all three classes a bit of a lecture about the importance of hygiene, saying 'This is horrible girls. You need to wash your kit and you need to wash yourselves'. She mentioned this to a male teacher as they were walking out. He said 'The boys' room always absolutely stinks. I don't bother [intervening] I leave them to it'. (Woodside observation)

These examples reflect the ways in which Hill Collins' (2000) disciplinary domain intersects with the hegemonic domain to ensure girls receive and embody particular messages regarding responsibility for their own bodies, their physical (in)capabilities, and the value of appearance over fitness – messages that clearly differ to those received by the boys (Velija & Kumar, 2009).



In recognising the diversity inherent within contemporary PE classrooms our data also suggested that as teachers' beliefs shift about students differently placed at the intersections of gender, race, class and disability so too do their expectations and the ways students are disciplined.

She turned to me [research assistant] while one [Muslim] girl was getting told off by the main teacher 'It doesn't matter, she will be married off in a couple of years anyway'. (Woodside observation)

[A student and teacher get in an argument] 'I have had enough of you. You are pathetic, get outside now'. I [research assistant] asked her about this after the lesson and she said 'I've tried ringing parents before but they don't really give two shits about him or what he does. He's one of the kids we have from a rougher background ... so the way I deal with him is just to get him out my sight. (Bliss Hill observation)

We argue that these different learning experiences in PE are suggestive of a pedagogy of limited opportunities which contributes to lower levels of ability and performance for some students, strengthening teachers' initial assumptions (Hay & Macdonald, 2010). This self-fulfilling prophecy confirms beliefs about 'naturally' occurring differences, reinforcing stereotypes and solidifying 'truths' about the 'oppressed Muslim girl', the 'incapable disabled student', and the 'un-aspirational working class'.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to re-consider the essence of Scraton's (1992) research within *changing times* and we bring it to a close by offering some observations. First, gender remains a visible organising feature of PE in the structural arrangements of the subject and a consistency of gendered practice across all four schools. Moreover, a performance-based

pedagogy pervades with girls and boys encouraged and disciplined differently (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Davies, 2003; Harris & Penney, 2000). Such is the established nature of these processes they go unquestioned, providing a level of security and familiarity that ensures the gender order is acknowledged as natural and remains (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Kirk, 2010). As such, we suggest that this stability in relation to the organisation, delivery and content of PE since the publication of 'Shaping Up To Womanhood' is more reflective of *(un)changing times*. How power can be, and is, mobilised is key to understanding this sustained presence. Indeed, our use of the matrix in this study demonstrates why this may be so. Such is the intricate interconnectedness of the four domains, change needs to occur at all levels and across different contexts to be effective (Hill Collins, 2000). Reimagining how PE is structured, for example, women teachers taking boys' classes and teaching a range of activities, including those traditionally classed as activities solely for boys as well as those restricted to girls, would go some way to challenging assumptions, beliefs and stereotypes in the hegemonic domain. Changes in this domain could also lead to both students and teachers questioning their gendered expectations and why boys' and girls' bodies are differentially disciplined.

Our second observation relates to teachers' engagement with difference other than gender. Classes in three of the four schools consisted of SEND students, those from minority ethnic communities and/ or students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Whilst teachers acknowledged these differences, this often reflected deficit ways of thinking, with particular students' inabilities to behave accordingly and/or participate highlighted. Teaching traditional, performatively assessed activities did little to include all students to achieve positive learning outcomes. Yet, Hill Collins (2000) does signal some possibilities for change. For the teachers in this research this would initially require *change to be mobilised* through critical reflection. However, like Berg and Lahelma (2010), we argue that critical reflections

at the interpersonal level cannot be divorced from broader social, cultural, and structural arrangements. Indeed, our application of the matrix in this research highlights the need for teachers to recognise how power operates at different levels within society and in schools, creating particular conditions that advantage some students whilst marginalising and discriminating against others. This requires teachers to critically reflect upon their own and others' practices, as well as wider discourses and conditions - Who has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo? How does this occur through curriculum content and seemingly innocuous every day practice and interactions? How and why do girls and boys, White and minority ethnic students, and those that are disabled and non-disabled get treated differently? And what role do we all play in both challenging and enabling these inequities?

Such reflections must be encouraged during ITT/PETE which appears to ill prepare teachers for engaging productively with difference (Flintoff, 2015; Dowling et al., 2015; Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2018). We suggest that ITT/PETE needs to work harder to offer trainee teachers opportunities to engage in a 'queering' of PE (Larsson et al., 2009). And, in so doing, connect individual assumptions and practices with broader social, cultural and structural arrangements (Hills and Croston, 2012; Kirk, 2010). What achievements are celebrated in schools and in society more broadly? What qualities and attributes are valued over others? Which physical activities are prioritised in schools and through national and international events? Which bodies are admired and promoted through the media? And how might PE and teachers disrupt these taken for granted beliefs and practices to reimagine the organisation, delivery and content of PE? In developing practitioners with a sensitivity to difference, we would argue that ITT/PETE must encourage teachers to work in more democratic ways with their students. We have seen what is possible when power is redistributed, girls' voices valued, and curricula negotiated (Cameron & Humbert, 2020; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Fisette, 2013; Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2019; Lamb et al.,

2018; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010). As we have argued elsewhere (Stride, 2014), girls are experts in their own lives, able to articulate the inequities they face, but schools and teachers must do better at providing opportunities for them to be consulted with and their voices heard.

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<sup>i</sup> All names for places, schools and teachers are pseudonyms.

<sup>ii</sup> Pupil Premium is a sum of money given to schools each year by the Government to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children.

<sup>iii</sup> OFSTED - The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills is the official body for inspecting schools in England.