'NON-SPORTY' GIRLS TAKE THE LEAD: A FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of feminist participatory action research (FPAR) within women-only youth and community work settings. The project investigated possibilities for flexible sports participation with non-sporty young women. Underpinned by poststructural feminism, the research considers the complex ways that gendered subjectivities are contested and constructed in relation to sporting embodiment and broader power relations. FPAR's, explicit aim is to affect positive social change. It is: participatory; defined by the need for action; and creates knowledge but not for the sake of knowledge alone. FPAR combines the sharing of common experiences of oppression with collective action. By using FPAR within youth and community settings over the course of 12 months, a group of young mums and a group of young women were encouraged to examine their relationship with physical activity and develop physical activity projects that suited their own needs. Research proceeded through three broad phases: interactive group discussion activities; planning of and participating in needs-led physical activity projects; and project evaluations. This project sought to find new ways of understanding young women's engagement in physical activity and open up safe spaces for them to consider and experiment with new subjectivities and physically active subject positions. The thesis illuminates the highlights and challenges of implementing physical activity through participatory action research in youth work settings. Findings from the study outline the ways in which young women's 'non-sporty' subjectivities are constructed in relation to discursive practices of gender. Young women's critical reflections of previous experiences of physical activity revealed the workings of conflicting perceptions of valued emotional capital. The participatory projects provided opportunities for cross-field experiences, which shifted the social field of physical activity, and readdressed relations of power.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the rationale behind my research interest into young women and physical activity. The chapter provides a brief overview of current agendas within research literature, sets out the theoretical framework for the study and explains what this thesis offers in terms of an original contribution to knowledge.

Personal Reflection and a Rationale for the Study

While working as a youth worker in the South East of England, I became aware of the ways in which young women and young men take ownership of youth work spaces. In my junior club sessions (for 11-12 year olds) the membership was fairly evenly split between girls and boys and all of the young people usually joined in together for a variety of activities such as sports, cooking, arts and so on. The choice of which sport to play in the hall was usually negotiated between youth workers and young people and tended to vary week by week. However, in the senior sessions (for 13-19 year olds) despite being advertised as 'mixed' sessions, young women were in the minority and in many sessions completely absent. While delivering street based youth work in the same neighbourhood I encountered a number of young women that had either never attended youth clubs or had only attended once or twice. I asked the young women why they did not come along to more sessions and the overwhelming response was that they regarded youth clubs as being for young men not young women.

During senior club sessions, large spaces such as sports halls were occupied by young men playing either football or basketball, while young women typically sat in smaller lounge areas talking. In these sessions, the young men generally arrived with a football or basketball and proceeded straight to the hall. The young women were often encouraged by youth workers to join in sports hall activities, however such suggestions were either ignored or unsuccessful, and the young women expressed that they knew the young men 'didn't want them getting in the way'. Struck by the unequal ownership of space in the senior club sessions I often encouraged the young women (who generally arrived first) to choose a sport and get started in the hall before the young men arrived. My suggestions were met with deep sighs and I was

told that there was no point doing this since 'the lads would just hang around watching them' until they felt uncomfortable and gave up.

As a result of these discussions, and my irritation with the marginalization of young women in mixed sessions, I set up a 'young women's group' at the youth centre which came to be popular and well attended. The young women were encouraged to choose projects and seek funding. They carried out drama projects and organized a number of trips. I often suggested sports based activities but the usual reply was that they were not 'sporty girls'. This response did not surprise me, however I found it interesting as many of the young women spoke about previous successes in sport (one young women was even part of the Great Britain synchronized swimming team until she was 15 years old) and yet seemed to accept their departure from sport as 'natural'.

Therefore, my study began with a desire to understand how young women become 'non-sporty'. I hoped to uncover how it was that previously sporty young women came to feel that sport was no longer relevant to them, and came to understand that sport spaces were not theirs to own. Beyond this I hoped, that within the relatively safe space of a 'girls-only' youth work environment, the young women might be able to devise a project in which they could try to recapture some of the enjoyment of their past experiences. I wished to use the projects as a platform for young women to analyse and change their experiences in physical activity, to create a programme that builds on their own interests and values and to politicize, and attract resources to, a project that was organized by young women and for young women.

My experience as a youth worker was instrumental in shaping the structure of my research. I felt that youth and community work settings offered fertile ground for this kind of initiative because they should already be underpinned and driven by core youth work values of voluntarism and choice. The decision to utilize a feminist participatory action research (FPAR) approach was driven by my desires, as a youth worker, to position young women as decision makers, to value the insights that young women could contribute and to encourage young women to take action and challenge their unequal circumstances. Before embarking on my research I worried that I would always regard myself as a 'youth worker who does research' rather than a 'real' academic researcher. Engagement with FPAR has revealed a research approach

through which I need not make such a distinction and where my youth work values are not simply accommodated, but rather, prized, respected and utilized.

The study sought to examine the processes by which young women become 'non-sporty' and explore the possibility for creating safe spaces in which young women might experiment with participation in physical activity. Therefore the primary research questions addressed in this thesis are:

- o How do young women come to define themselves as 'non-sporty'?
- o How do young women negotiate, conform to or resist dominant expectations of femininity and physical activity?
- o What issues would young women consider important in the construction of a physical activity project?
- o How do young women experience participatory physical activity projects?

This thesis explores the lived experiences of a group of young women and a group of young mothers as they engaged in a participatory project, which sought to explore their relationships with physical activity and engage in sports projects of their own design. The main purposes of the thesis are to provide understanding of the ways in which young women construct 'non-sporty' subject positions and the complex relationships between femininity, physical activity and broader relations of power. In doing this, the thesis identifies many of the often hidden mechanisms that impact agency and work to sustain social inequalities.

Young Women's Participation in Physical Activity

The benefits of engagement in physical activity on physical and mental health and well being-are well accounted for within scholarly literature (Fox, 1997; Powell & Pratt, 1996; Batty & Lee, 2004; Batty & Thune, 2000; CMO, 2004; Sport England, 2003). Conversely, the connections between physical inactivity and poor health and well-being have been identified (Keiss, Galler & Reich, 2001). As a result, inactivity has become a focus of substantial concern in Western society (Department of Health, Physical Activity, Health Improvement and Prevention, 2004; World Health Organisation, 2002; Sallis & Owen, 1999). In particular, there is concern for the inactivity of children and young people and the consequent potential for continuing

sedentary lifestyles throughout adulthood (Cavill, 2001). The high drop out of young people from sport, particularly at the end of compulsory schooling, was outlined by the Wolfenden Commission over fifty years ago and continued research highlights that little improvement has been made to remedy this issue (SCCMS, 2005). Recent reports from the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation identify the drop out of young women to be significantly higher than their male counterparts (WSFF, 2011; 2012). These reports explain that young women are half as active as young men, and young women's disengagement from physical activity is a growing trend (WSFF, 2011). Drawing on data from the Sport England Active People Survey 2007-2011, the WSFF found that by 15 years old, half as many girls as boys were achieving the levels of activity recommended for improved health and well-being; less 16-19 year old young women than young men participate in at least one hour of physical activity per week; and by 19 years double the proportion of men participate in regular physical activity in comparison to women (WSFF, 2012). Despite this, their research also shows that a higher proportion of women aged 16-19 and 20-24 years responded that they would wish to take part in more sport, therefore suggesting a 'demand within the young women's market for sport' (WSFF, 2012, p.5).

Reasons for girls' disengagement with physical activity have received increased attention within research (Evans, 2006) however, such studies largely relate to young women's experiences in relation to physical education (Hills, 2006, 2007; Hunter, 2004; Garrett, 2004; Oliver & Lalik, 2004) with just a few examples of research conducted with young women in informal or community settings (Bailey et al., 2004). In addition, research in this area largely offers explanations of young women's relationship with physical activity (Chepyator-Thomson, & Ennis, 1997; Armour, 1999; Bedward & Williams, 2000; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Brooks & Magnusson, 2006) with very few seeking to utilise the research process to effect change. A few notable examples exist that sought to involve young women in curriculum design and delivery in physical education (Ennis, 1999; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) or mobilise older women within community settings (Frisby et al., 2005, 2009). However there is a need for further work that positions young women as decision makers, allows young women to design and implement their own physical activity projects, and conducts research with young women in informal community settings. The overall aim of this

study then, was the collective investigation of young women's experiences of physical activity, which formed the basis of young women-led physical activity projects. As such, this thesis specifically set out to conduct research with young women around and above school leaving age, to explore their understandings of self in relation to physicality and physical activity and to explore how 'non-sporty' young women would design a sport project that accounted for their own needs and values.

Defining the conceptual context of the thesis

This section will locate the study in the context of a broader understanding of relevant theoretical concepts. This thesis combines the theoretical principles of feminist poststructuralism, discourse analysis and Bourdieu's theoretical schema, to reflect the complexity of truths and practices that characterize young women's engagement with physical activity. In the following section, I explore the ways in which these theoretical frames were negotiated within my research processes.

Poststructural Feminism

This thesis takes the stance that feminism is a politics employed to challenge 'existing power relations between women and men in society' (Weedon 1997, p.1). Feminist approaches are numerous, for example, liberal, radical and critical feminisms, and each approach is informed by specific understandings of patriarchy and possibilities for change to the gender order. This thesis is underpinned by poststructural feminism. The inclusion of young women as research partners within the research process and the privileging of young women's voices within studies of sport where they have previously remain silenced, is regarded as key to my feminist approach.

Poststructuralism seeks to investigate the potential for disruption of inequalities and adjustment of power structures by examining 'the social meanings and values which guarantee or contest them' (Weedon 1997, p.12). Poststructural theory promotes the questioning of power relations, and ideology, and the ways in which these are created and reproduced through discourse. This study utilized collective discussion of experiences as a stimulus for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions on femininity and physicality. The process of sharing stories, opinions and memories proved fruitful ground for revealing discursive practices and 'de-naturalising' processes of disengagement and disempowerment.

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Discourse Analysis

Poststructuralism itself is a broad term lacking a single precise meaning, and largely utilizes a range of theoretical foundations. This study seeks to draw from the works of Michel Foucault (1972, 1976, 1977, 1980), which are concerned with possession and relations of power, discourse and subsequent social practices. Feminist poststructuralism rejects liberal humanist and essentialist understandings of gender and instead asserts that femininities and masculinities are socially constructed through discourse (Weedon 1997). Poststructural feminisms repudiate theories that promote biologically based definitions of gender, essentialist thinking that relates female potential to 'motherhood', and those that claim masculine and feminine characteristics are 'natural' to the psyche. This position is adopted throughout the thesis because it provides potential to explore the conflicting discourses that constitute femininity and their relationship to physical activity. Discourses are conceptualized as structured modes of dialogue that convey meanings and values (Foucault 1972, 1976, 1977, 1980; Kress 1988a, 1988b). Discourses supply statements regarding particular phenomenon, which classify and offer structure to the possible ways in which a topic, object or process might be discussed (Foucault 1972, 1976, 1977, 1980; Butler 1990; Kress 1988a, 1988b). The position taken in this thesis is that discourse is socially constructed and individuals are constructed through discourse. Therefore, the design incorporates strategies that allow young women to reflexively consider their experiences and understandings of physical activity.

This thesis contends that the dominant discourses of femininity, physicality and embodiment within physical culture shape the subject positions that are available to young women. It posits that gender and subjectivity are socially constructed and discursively produced in relation to social, cultural, and political circumstances in this case within physical culture. The gendered subject, in this case the young women in this study, is recognised as possessing agency in the sense that subjectivity is not determined by discursive constructions of femininity, but instead is competent of acting on its own behalf (Butler 1990; Connell 1995). Being mindful of the workings of discourse in shaping social practices and available subject positions permits individuals the agency to negotiate between multiple discourses and create possibilities for change. Discourses and the mobilisation of language are central to this feminist poststructural investigation and within this particular study formed a key

component of the projects. Discussions of discourses throughout the phase one activities were stimulated by group activities, memory work and media analysis.

Bourdieu's Conceptual Schema

Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus', 'field', and 'capital' are used widely throughout this study. Bourdieu's critics have sought to characterize his schema as excessively deterministic due to a perceived focus on the pervasiveness of struggles over social dominance and subjugation, and the unconscious compliance of the dominated to relinquish power to the dominant. However, other scholars highlight his concept of the 'habitus' as posing a direct opposition to determinism and, in fact, describe his framework more generally as endeavours to surmount key oppositions such as subjectivism vs. objectivism, micro vs. macro, strategy vs. non-strategy, freedom vs. determinism (Hilgers, 2009).

Feminist scholars have criticized Bourdieu for both his lack of attention to gender issues within his earlier writings (McNay, 2000) and his lack of attention to feminist scholarship within his later writings, which do seek to address gender, such as '*The Masculine Domination'* (Bourdieu, 2001). Feminist scholars have described this later work as approaching gender in such a way as to 'reproduce standard binaries of masculine domination and female subordination as if these structures are unitary, coherent and unchanged by and in contemporary social life' (McLeod, 2005, p.53). Despite these criticisms, numerous feminist scholars have found value in Bourdieu's conceptual tools and have attempted to critique them to develop re-envisionings that represent versions appropriate to feminist politics (Adkins, 2003; Krais, 2006; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 2000; Skeggs, 2004; Reay, 2004). Redevelopments of his schema with a focus on gender, offer syntheses with the potential to 'reconceptualise the relationship between gender, power, structure, agency, reflexivity, culture and embodiment' (Thorpe, 2009, p.492). Bourdieu's tools are utilized critically within this thesis in conjunction with these feminist redevelopments and provide a helpful conceptual lens for examining and explaining young women's embodied experiences of physical activity.

Bourdieu's schema is appropriate for use within a FPAR project because the conceptualization of the habitus as possessing transformative possibilities is

compatible with project that seeks to generate change. Bourdieu encouraged sociologists to take steps to challenge social domination (Waquant, 2002) and 'advocates the critical reflexivity of sociologists in confronting underlying biases and producing critical, 'para-doxal' research' (Giulianotti, 2005, p.161). Bourdieu rebuked fellow social theorists for their 'political 'ambiguity', their constant 'surrenders' and 'collaborations' in dealings with neo-liberalism' (Giulianotti, 2005, p.167). As such, his conceptual framework can be regarded as compatible with a research design that values action and change.

Despite worldwide acclaim, Bourdieu's theoretical tools, in comparison to other theorists such as Raewyn Connell, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, are relatively underutilized in relation to research on gender and sport. More recently, scholars have turned their attention to and made use of Bourdieu's frameworks for social critique. (Atencio, Beal & Wilson, 2009; Thorpe, 2009; Hills, 2009, 2007; Brown, 2006; Kay & Laberge, 2004; Hunter, 2004). Therefore, this study offers a useful contribution to this potentially growing field of study.

Combining Theoretical Tools

Within the discussion portion of this thesis, I make use of the conceptual tools of both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. I use a toolbox of theories, which finds use in a Foucauldian notion of power and Bourdieu's approach to structure and agency. I acknowledge the critical tensions here but note that a blended frame enables me to theorize differently aspects of the young women's lives. Both Foucault and Bourdieu provide an analysis of social control though embodiment and both offer useful ways in which academics may bridge the structure- agency gap: Foucault through his conceptualizations of power, normalization and truth; and Bourdieu through his notions of habitus, field and capital (Newton, 2009).

Harris (2004) argues that there are at least two overlapping commonalities between these positions. Firstly, both assert that our actions are chiefly experienced and managed through the body; and secondly, the process of embodiment operates largely outside the sphere of conscious awareness. He argues that there is adequate common ground between these positions to elicit two conclusions 'firstly, our embodied way of

being structures our consciousness and our subjectivity, and therefore secondly, changing our embodied way of being alters that subjectivity' (Harris, 2004, p.1).

This thesis is rooted in the understanding that adopting a rigid framework of discourse analysis would be counterproductive. Instead, I employ discourse analysis as a means of understanding why the young women talked (or acted) about sport and physical activity in a particular way; what motivated them to do so, and what unspoken assumptions underpinned their 'common-sense' understandings of self and the social world. In this way, it is possible to utilize discourse analysis 'to investigate if dominant norms and values are dispersed within acting, within the habitus of certain groups, even if these norms are in fact oppressing them' (Newton, 2009, p.3). My employment of these two theorists within the same study is viable not only because, as I have discussed, there is some compatibility between the two epistemologies, but also because the notions are used within particular confines and at different stages of analysis. Attempting to fit my research material into one coherent framework was fundamentally impossible without obscuring much of its importance. Instead of treating theories like systems that need to be adopted in full, I have utilized them as a toolbox of analysis and experimented with ways to comprehend my findings. Therefore, chapter seven of this thesis uses the notions of discourse, subjectivity and subject positioning to unpack the young women's changing relationship with physical activity over time; while chapter eight considers how previous experiences influence the young women's embodied engagement within their chosen physical activity projects.

The Significance of the Study

The significance of the research lies in its contribution to the current body of knowledge about young women and physical activity. The study addresses three primary areas that have been under-investigated. The first area, as outlined above, is the lack of research on non-sporty young women's construction of non-sporty subjectivities; this research reveals the discursive practices that lead to young women rejecting participation in physical activity. In addition, in contrast to other studies, this research explores the potential of 'discussing discourses' for providing possible shifts in subjectivity and widening the pool of possible subject positions. In this sense, research activities can be understood as potential sites of action, transformation

and change. Importantly, the study also provides the voices, experiences and ideas of young mothers who, save for a very small number of studies (WSFF, 2005) remain silent in research on sport and physical activity.

The second area of contribution relates to the first, which relies fundamentally upon the FPAR approach adopted. This approach provides an original perspective on young women's experiences of physical activity because it allows young women to become partners in the research process, to drive research activities and to amplify previously marginalized voices. Chapter six, offers a reflexive account of the processes undertaken within an FPAR study and critiques the 'participatory' possibilities of such projects. The thesis provides critical understandings of the ethical and political dilemmas that FPAR researchers may expect to encounter, and as such can be regarded as providing methodological contributions to the field.

Finally, the thesis employs an original theoretical tool, 'emotional capital', as an analytical schema. In this way, the study contributes to a small but growing field of sociological research within sport relating to emotions. The purpose of this analysis is to uncover key ways in which young women's experiences within physical culture are mediated by conflicting between sport experts and the young women on ideas of valued emotional capital.

Thesis Structure

This chapter outlined the rationale behind my interest into 'non-sporty' young women and physical activity and set out the theoretical underpinnings of my approach. Chapters two and three ground the thesis in its theoretical basis. Chapter two, introduces feminist interpretations of femininity in relation to embodiment, discourse and subjectivity. It also includes an interrogation of the varying approaches to and understandings of power and agency. Chapter three, seeks to conceptualize the category youth and contains an overview of historical approaches to youth research. Feminist and poststructural critiques are employed to interrogate subcultural, transition and youth led approaches with a particular focus on the ways in which young women's lives have been represented in research. The chapter aims to develop a justification for the approach of this study, which favours a youth-led perspective.

Chapter four reviews the literature surrounding youth sport, critiques current trends in social policy and considers various strategies of engaging young people in physical activity. Following this, the chapter specifically addresses the issue of young women's participation by exploring the different barriers experienced by various groups of young women and some of the strategies that have been employed to mitigate this. Chapter five outlines the epistemological and methodological approach of the study, offers explanations of specific methods and discusses the ways in which ethical implications were considered. Chapter six relates strongly to chapter five and serves as a reflexive account of the project. In this chapter I outline the highlights, challenges and difficulties of carrying out FPAR projects and in particular the illusive nature of 'participation'. Chapters seven and eight present the analysis of the empirical data from this research. Chapter seven documents the findings from the young women's group FPAR project. A key focus is exploration of the discursive practices that influence young women's dis/engagement with physical activity. The chapter highlights the ways in which young women attempt to negotiate acceptable femininity, physical competence and structural inequalities in the construction of subjectivities. It further examines the potential of collective media analysis to elicit new perspectives on femininity, physicality and physical activity. These discussions build towards the young women's design and evaluation of their own physical activity projects. Chapter eight documents the young mothers' FPAR physical activity projecy. The chapter considers that what shaped the young mothers' previous negative experiences of physical activity. It explores the ways in which different perceptions of valued emotional capital positioned young mothers in conflict with the norms and values predominant in physical culture. Finally it considers the ways in which the young mothers' own project sought to rectify these conflicts and create a 'new game' with 'new rules'. Chapter nine is the conclusion, which highlights the core findings of the thesis, the implications for delivery of physical activity projects with young women and identifies areas for future research.

Chapter Two: Young Femininities

This chapter will explore the varying conceptualisations of 'gender' with particular attention to how the literature provides a context for understanding young femininities. This chapter is structured to provide a discussion of feminist and poststructuralist understandings of gender and how this relates to power, agency, subjectivity and embodiment.

Conceptualising Gender

This thesis focuses on gender and its impact on the sporting and social lives of young women. Gender is a term developed by Ann Oakley (1972) to describe culturally and socially constructed explanations of differences between men and women, and to emphasise a distinction between these factors and biological 'sex' differences (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Rejecting the biological explanation of 'sex' as the root of femininity, Simone de Beauvoir famously argues that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (De Beauvoir, 1972, p.295), she also describes the hierarchical positioning of the genders asserting that masculinity is typically positioned as the 'norm' while femininity is measured against this as 'other' (De Beauvoir, 1972, p.295). As a concept, gender developed from noun to verb: 'gendered/ing' can be used to describe the active process of 'doing gender' for example by individuals and groups and within organizations (West and Zimmerman, 2002). The term gender has been utilized by feminist writers to contest the exaggeration and fixed-ness of differences between men and women. Gender studies is a growing discipline which, triggered by second wave feminism sought to redress the androcentric and gender-blind focus of much sociological research and to recognize and explore the gender order and patriarchal society (Bradley, 2007). Gender studies also concerns itself with topics such as the body (e.g. Shilling, 2004; Connell, 2002; Grosz, 1994; Butler, 1999) and sexuality (Foucault, 1979; Richardson, 1998; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993) and feminism remains a key perspective for this discipline.

Biological Approaches to Gender

Biological approaches to gender presuppose that 'natural' differences exist between men and women that generate gender specific attributes and behaviour traits, for

example, aggression in males and nurturing in females. Much of this argument stems from essentialist thinking, 'that assumes that all manifestations of gender difference are innate and transcultural and historical' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 41). Biological approaches such as 'socio-biology' and 'evolutionary psychology' (Geary, 1998) rely on the use of reproductive differences between males and females as the explanation for 'natural' differences between the sexes. These explanations are stretched to offer justification for, among other issues, patriarchy and the sexual division of labour, where women are assumed to be naturally matched to domestic work and child rearing, while men are situated as naturally matched to the public sphere.

Feminists who favour a social constructionist approach, which I shall explore below, chiefly reject biological approaches to the study of gender, however, exploration of biological essentialism has contributed to a body of knowledge examining the perpetuation of a divided or 'separate spheres' society. The term 'separate spheres', originally coined by Alexis De Tocqueville in 1840, and later theorized by second wave feminists, explores the relegation of women to a subordinate or 'private sphere' of the domestic: home and family, whilst advancing men to the 'public sphere' of work and politics.

Feminists have responded in differing ways to this, which tend to fall into three distinct categories and form the basis of the difference/equality debate. Hekman (1999) describes a difference shift in feminism consisting of three strategies: the first strategy sees an effort to erase difference between men and women; the second strategy uses emphasis of differences between men and women and subsequently valorisation of women's attributes; the third strategy seeks to challenge to the usefulness of sex differences by exploring differences between women (Hekman, 1999).

Hekman (1999) describes the first strategy as the attempt to deny or eradicate the difference between men and women. She cites Simone De Beauvoir's (1972) denigration of motherhood and its oppression of women, who counselled that to erase difference women must let go of sentimental attachment to motherhood. Shulasmith Firestone explored biological systems of oppression on women in her work, *'The*

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Dialectic of Sex' (1979) where she proclaimed that women are oppressed due to their biological capacities for pregnancy and childbirth. In this text, she advocates "cybernetic socialism," contractual households, the use of artificial reproductive technologies to remove such differences giving women ownership of their bodies and the opportunity to realize greater equality with men. She also advises the implementation of child rearing "taken over by technology" and abolishment of the concept of childhood. Feminists discarded the suggestion that women's bodies should be regarded negatively and should therefore become more like men's in order to achieve equality. Instead they argued for a more positive perception of the female body, while still regarding it through a biological lens, that women's reproductive capacities should position them as superior to men. These ideas typify what Hekman (1999) describes as 'the second strategy', which emphasises differences between men and women and promotes the 'natural' superiority of female attributes.

Supporters of Hekman's 'second strategy' include Mary O'Brien (1981) who, while continuing to apply strict gender binaries, begins to elicit ideas on gender as a social process and representation of women's experiences: this approach in turn characterised the 'standpoint' approach. Hekman objects to the second strategy philosophy of femininity as the basis of attainment of subjectivity. It is helpful to quote at length her critique of the usefulness of both the first and second strategy:

> Epistemologically, the first and second strategies are mirror images of each other; their similarities outweigh their differences. Both presuppose essential or culturally imposed differences between men and women; both presuppose a hierarchy of those differences; and both ignore differences within the two categories. The two categories differ only in their valuations of the two sides of the dichotomy (Hekman, 1999, p.16)

Furthermore, 'both strategies assume that the differences between men and women are monolithic and hierarchical' (Hekman, 1999, p.17). Consequently, feminists began exploration of the third strategy, which focuses on differences between women, this had far reaching effects on subsequent approaches to feminist research since 'they discovered that a wide array of differences were socially and discursively constituted, and that to accommodate these differences new strategies were necessary' (Hekman, 1999, p.18). This marked a move towards social constructionist approaches to the study of gender that will be explored further now.

Social Construction of Gender

Social constructionists seek to separate notions of identity, such as gender, from biological determinism, instead favouring approaches that assume that identity is developed through social practices, therefore social construction theory:

> suggests that what we see as "real" (in this case, cultural categories of difference and inequality) is the result of human interaction. Through such interaction we create aspects of our culture, objectify them, internalise them, and then take these cultural products for granted (Ore, 2011, p.5)

Ore develops this further by explaining Berger & Luckmann's (1966) three stage model for 'the social construction of reality. In this model 'the first stage, externalisation, we create cultural products through social interaction. These cultural products may be material artefacts, social institutions of values and beliefs concerning a particular group' (Ore, 2001, p.6). In the case of gender we can understand the assigning of sex categories at birth, dressing the child according to this category and behaving in particular ways towards boys and girls as the process for externalisation. 'The second stage, objectivation, occurs when the products created in the first stage appear to take on a reality of their own, becoming independent of those who created them' (Ore, 2001, pp.6-7) here gender practices become 'taken for granted' and agents fail to account for their own role in the reinforcement of these practices. 'In the final stage, internalisation, we learn the supposedly 'objective facts' about the cultural products that have been created' (Ore, 2001, p.7) in this way, through the process of socialisation, rules, status and roles are attributed to particular genders, 'in this stage we make these "facts" part of our subjective consciousness' (Ore 2001, p.7). As a result of this process: 'members of the same culture share an understanding of reality and rarely question the origins of their beliefs or the processes by which the beliefs arose' (Ore, 2001, p.7). Social constructionist theory provides the theoretical basis for this thesis.

'Doing' Femininities

Mobilising a social constructionist perspective, West & Zimmerman (2002) describe gender as something that is 'done' rather than possessed, defining gender as 'a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment' through which 'the "doing" of gender is undertaken by men and women whose competence as members of society is hostage to it's production' (p.42). 'Masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics are

constructed through virtually all social, political and cultural activities and as such it is impossible to avoid 'doing gender' in one way or another. They describe this as a practice that it carried out in collaboration with others 'as an accomplishment, and achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas' (West & Zimmerman, 2002, p.42). Importantly then, while gender is 'done' by individuals, it is done in the presence of and in relation to others within social situations and is regarded as 'a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society' (West & Zimmerman, 2002, p.42). Therefore, it is essential to consider construction of gender in relation to sport as done both individually and in partnership with sporty and non-sporty others within particular social contexts.

Displaying Femininities

Irving Goffman (1976) uses social constructionist theory in addition to his interactionist perspective of gender and creates the notion of 'gender display'. This is defined as the 'conventionalized portrayals' of 'culturally established correlates of sex' (p. 1). Gender display, encompasses nonverbal behaviors, such as posture, gesture, eye contact, and facial expressions. He conceptualizes these gender displays as codes that differentiate the way women and men participate in social circumstances, such displays are, in general, viewed as 'natural' by both the performer and the recipient of the display. He argues that displays of masculinity and femininity are acquired through socialization, and are patterned, utilized and given meaning in connection to others. He elaborates, 'one might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender. . . .What, if anything, characterizes persons as sex-class members is their competence and willingness to sustain an appropriate schedule of displays' (p. 8). To Goffman, masculine and feminine behavior can be visualized as 'scripts' that are memorized both consciously and unconsciously and delivered in the performance of appropriate roles in society. This sense of patterns of performance is pursued by Judith Butler in her theory of performativity.

Performing Femininities

Judith Butler (1999) asserts that the assigning of genders takes meaning only through performance and iteration. Gender is an active process involving achievement,

performance and enactment (Plummer, 1995). Butler promotes 'performativity' as a key theory for understanding the social, relational and linguistic construction of gender (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997, 2004). Following the social constructionist view that gender is 'done' rather than 'possessed', and done through constant performance, iteration and repetition, gender is 'doing, an incessant activity performed' (Butler, 2001, p.1). According to Butler, gender:

> is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender (Butler, 1990, p.43)

As such gender is never 'achieved' but rather a constant process of negotiation and performance, 'that this reiteration is necessary is a sign that the norms by which their materialisation is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled' (Butler, 1993, p.2). In fact, the process of gendering pre-exists the individual since 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1990, p.25). Further, she likens performance of gender to 'masquerade' or the putting on of a costume, in this sense the individual selects an identity that they wish to adopt and performs the corresponding role. However, Butler identifies the relational nature of identity creation, explaining that 'one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another' (Butler, 2004, p.1). As such: 'gender is masquerade – not that these are roles one can adopt or not at will, but that they are the result of social scripts we actively conform to or reject (always with the possible costs of public censure or worse)' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p.130).

In this way, it is possible to understand the process of performativity as institutionally and contextually constrained. Butler has been criticised for over-stating the potential for individual agency or under-stating the impact of societal forces (Walsh, 2001) however, she does acknowledge the existence of a 'rigid regulatory frame' (Butler, 1990, p.33) and the dangers of negative responses to those that seek to avoid this.

This regulatory frame has also been critiqued as 'too abstract' (McElhinny, 2003) nevertheless, Butler deals with this by stating:

> If I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet …donned that gender for the day and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a wilful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realise that its existence is already decided *by* gender (Butler, 1993, p.x)

In more recent work she further clarifies her position in relation to these criticisms by arguing that

> persons are regulated by gender…this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person. To veer from the gender norm is to produce the aberrant example that regulatory powers (medical, psychiatric, legal to name a few) may quickly exploit to shore up the rationale for their own continuing regulatory zeal (Butler, 2004, p.52)

While the individual does not, therefore, possess sole power in the creation of gender identities, the process of arbitration and negotiation opens up possibilities for resistance and conditions, which may trouble the established gender order (Butler, 1990). Importantly, Butler's concept of performativity utilises a poststructuralist approach to unpack the formation of 'feminine' and 'masculine' identities: 'within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be' (Butler, 1990, p.24–5). Therefore, gender identities are constructed by language, so, rather than identities being the creators of language (or discourse), it is the reverse, discourses are the creators of gender and no subject exists separate from language and discourse (Butler, 1990, p.145).

Drawing on Butler's work on performativity, feminist scholars have identified ways in which groups of young women construct their gendered and sexual identities within particular spaces. Charles (2007) examines 'liminal spaces' within schools in which young women attempt to recreate themselves, she identifies these spaces as sites where 'important 'girling' events occur, in which young women's gendered identities are shaped and articulated' (p.13). By 'girling' she refers to the 'performative constitution of femininity' (p.13) which occurs separately and often in

opposition to interventions from educators. Thomas (2004) similarly adopts performativity as a lens to explore the ways in which heterosexuality is reproduced through repetition and iteration of seemingly mundane everyday activities. Her research analyses narratives of two straight young women and explores how they 'sexualize space and thus make space heterosexual; and, second, how space and spatiality imbue their everyday social and sexual practices and thus exist as a central component of subjectivity' (Thomas, 2004, p.773). Her work 'illustrates how the girls become invested with and perform social-sexual norms and meanings through spatialized practices' (p.773). There is scope for further research to understand how groups of young women use language and bodily performances to repeat patterns of femininity.

Embodied femininities

Notions of 'gender' and 'the body' are inextricably linked, therefore it is impossible to study one without accounting for the other. Studies of 'the body' and it's relation to gender politics are a recurring theme across feminist writings (Firestone, 1979; Kristeva, 1982; Grosz, 1994; Gatens, 1996; Butler, 1990, 1993; Bordo, 1989). This is, of course, a potentially enormous field, as such this part of the chapter seeks only to outline some significant themes and provide a grounding for this study. The body has been conceptualised in three distinct ways. Firstly, the body as a *natural or biological entity*, through which women's difference to men creates inequalities (as discussed earlier in this chapter e.g. Firestone, 1979) or valorises the natural capabilities of women (Sayers, 1982). Secondly, the *socially constructed body* as an object interpreted by social and cultural inscriptions through language and discourse (Goffman, 1976; Butler, 1999). The third approach is *embodiment* which rejects the dualistic notion of the body as *either* purely biological *or* socially constructed, and investigates how interaction between both of these contribute to the production of 'masculine' and 'feminine' bodies: 'the body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice' (Connell, 1987, p.83).

The first two approaches have been discussed above, however, this study favours the final approach, embodiment, and stems from an appreciation for 'embodied subjectivity' (Grosz, 1994, p.19) and an understanding of the material body as unfinished and as historically and culturally situated (Grosz, 1994). The theory of

'embodiment' arises in challenge to criticisms of, what are perceived to be, highly abstract constructions of gender by postmodern and poststructuralist feminists. Such constructions deny the material reality of the body, which is problematic. For example, Klein (cited in Brook, 1999) argues 'the bodies I have been reading about in postmodern feminist writing do not breathe, do not laugh and have no heart' (p.97) while Davis (1997) suggests 'postmodern theorising about the body has all too often been a cerebral, esoteric and ultimately, disembodied activity. The danger is that theories of the body distance us from individuals everyday embodied experiences and, ultimately, from the dangers and pleasures of the body itself' (p.14). Further, Connell (2002) adds, that in its zeal to avoid biological determinism, pure social constructionist approaches are in danger of replacing this with social or cultural determinism. Through the alternative theory of 'embodiment' the body is simultaneously conceptualized as both a natural, physical entity and as produced through cultural discursive practices. Such cultural practices include the application of make-up, clothing choices and other forms of feminine or masculine styling that minimize similarities and accentuate differences between men and women, in addition to projects of the body that shape and make physicality of masculine and feminine bodies (Connell, 2002). She describes the interplay that creates the process of 'social embodiment' thus:

> The practices in which bodies are involved from social structures and personal trajectories which in turn provide the conditions of new practices in which bodies are addressed and involved. There is a loop, a circuit, linking bodily processes and social structures. In fact, there is a tremendous number of such circuits. They occur in historical time, and change over time (Connell, 2002, p.47)

Thereby, asserting the agency of the body in relation to social processes. Grimshaw, however, reminds us of the limitations placed on some individuals to achieve such bodily transformation:

> The idea that we can all choose out own bodies…effaces the inequalities of privilege, money and time to engage in these practices. It effaces addictions, obsessions, botched operations and eating disorders. Above all, despite the frequent popular presentation of bodily change and shaping as a matter of mere individual choice and will, or even as 'fun' and free play, the body women want is highly normalised (Grimshaw, 1998, p.93).

This kind of approach is particularly useful in the case of research on physical activity, which necessarily provides some focus on the possibilities and limitations of bodies for gendered experiences. Chris Shilling's (1993) work on physical capital further reinforces this finding. The concept of physical capital emerges from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, his conceptual schema offers a useful framework for understanding social interactions and his concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus' will be used widely throughout this study; therefore, it is necessary to examine this in some detail here.

Bourdieu (1986), drawing on a Marxian perspective, argues that all facets of life are essentially class based and therefore represent avenues to economic capital. Other forms of capital are accumulated and reproduced as a result of historical power relations. Bourdieu's schema (1984) avoids the pitfalls of vertical models of social structure by locating social groups within an intricate, multi-faceted space as opposed to a linear scale. His work emphasized the role of practice and embodiment or forms in social dynamics and worldview construction, often in dialogue and opposition to universalized Western philosophical traditions. In relation to capital Bourdieu asserts:

> The social world is accumulated history, and if it is not to be reduced to a discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibrium between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles, one must reintroduce into it the notion of capital and with it accumulation and all it effects (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241)

He emphasizes that accumulation of capital is unequally available to individuals and groups. Capital is thus used to create and reproduce, and therefore protect, divisions between peoples causing categories of inclusion and exclusion and therefore allowing those in power to protect their position. Bourdieu regards social capital as one resource among a matrix of other forms of capital as set out in his chapter '*The Forms of Capital*' (Bourdieu, 1986). He believed that the forms of capital are mobilized by the dominant classes to perpetuate inequality and maintain their position. He postulates that 'it is what makes the games of society- not least, the economic game- something other than simple games of chance' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241). He maintains that the structure of the social world is displayed, understood and maintained by the structure and possession of the differing kinds of capital. These capitals mark the distinction between the classes, as do their ability to enable actors to competently

move through space and across and within 'fields'. Bourdieu asserts that capital can be presented in three guises, economic capital, cultural capital and social capital (1986, p.243). He also introduces the idea of symbolic capital and I shall explore these 'capitals' in further detail now. 'Economic capital' includes direct access to income, wealth, assets such as property and financial inheritances. Bourdieu (1986) stresses that economic capital is at the root of all other forms of capital and takes the least amount of time compared to other forms of capital to transfer to other actors.

'Cultural capital' was a major subject of investigation for Bourdieu (1984) and his discussions were presented at length in '*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*'. Bourdieu explains that cultural capital exists in three forms: 'in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long lasting dispositions of the mind and body: in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods and in the institutionalized state… as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243). He tells us that 'embodied' cultural capital displays external wealth that, over time, becomes embedded in the 'habitus' of the individual. The habitus, located within the body, is an internalized form of class conditioning that reflects the social locations of the individual, providing them with an often taken-for-granted world view, that facilitates predisposed ways of dealing with particular situations; in this way individuals tend towards the reproduction of class norms (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital also manifests in the concept of 'taste' or the appropriation of choices, preferences and lifestyles that are rooted in economic restrictions (Bourdieu, 1984) dominant groups are at an advantage because they enjoy tastes that are deemed to reflect higher class status. Bourdieu (1984) explains that 'bodily hexis: manners and mannerisms, posture and bearing, body shape and presentation, and accent are all deeply embodied, mostly unconsciously reproduced and represented in many situations, and thoroughly revealing of social origins and position' (Warde, 2008, p.109) thus providing a further example of how cultural capital can manifest in ways that describe many layers of status. Cultural capital 'cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244-5) and by its very nature, it requires an investment over a considerable period of time, its transmission is more secretive and disguised than that of economic capital (allowing it to become recognized as legitimate competence).

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'Social capital' describes 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.445) referring to memberships of groups consisting of individuals that each bring with them a certain degree of capital. This is significant because 'the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248-9). The network of relationships necessary for accumulating social capital require investment and constant maintenance of 'durable obligations subjectively felt' as Bourdieu (1986, p.250) points out, the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed thus explaining social capital as a constant and dynamic process.

Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic capital' to refer to reputation, status and prestige, and describe forms of capital that are legitimized as valuable, often unrecognized as capital but instead recognized as legitimate competence or authority. Skeggs (1997, p.8) describes it thus: 'legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power. Cultural capital has to be legitimated before it can have symbolic power.' Bourdieu alludes to several other 'subcategories of capital which operate within particular fields such as 'linguistic', 'academic', 'intellectual', 'information' and 'artistic' capital' (Thornton, 1995, p.11). A variety of other scholars have utilised Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' and extended it to encompass other attributes for example 'emotional capital' (Reay, 2004). Bullen & Kenway (2005) explain that:

> These forms of capital are as critical as economic capital in determining and reproducing social positions within the power structure of the market. In fact, what ultimately defines these other forms of capital as capital is their 'convertibility' into economic capital (Bullen & Kenway, 2005, p.52)

Bourdieu tells us that investigating the relationship between and within the various forms of capital provides us with a framework for understanding the micro-politics of power (Skeggs, 1997). This thesis will attempt to do just this within the context of

gender and physical activity and as such the concepts 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field' will be further explored throughout this thesis.

Shilling elaborated Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital in an investigation into the body and how it may be regarded as a commodity in modern society, not only as a vehicle for labour power but also in the sense of 'the development of bodies in ways which are recognized as possessing value in social fields' and which is converted through 'the translation of bodily participation in work, leisure and other fields into different forms of capital' (Shilling, 1993, p.127).
 Shilling elaborated Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital in an investigation into the body and how it may be regarded as a commodity in modern society, not only as a vehicle for labour power but also in the sense of 'the development of bodies in ways which are recognized as possessing value in social fields' and which is converted through 'the translation of bodily participation in work, leisure and other fields into different forms of capital' (Shilling, 1993, p.127).

Bourdieu's work creates space for understanding the role of the body in relation to class, he helps us to recognize that different groups and classes tend to cultivate different types of body. They adopt different bodily techniques and engage in different bodily practices and therefore bodies bear the mark of social class (Bourdieu, 1978). Therefore it is appropriate to say that all people do not enjoy equal opportunities for creating body forms that will be symbolically valued or convertible into other resources (Shilling, 1993). Shilling (1991) emphasizes that this is particularly the case with regard to gender and describes where we must delve deeper than Bourdieu's own work.

We can situate the classing of bodies within Bourdieu's framework of interrelations between social locations, habitus and taste as described above with respect to embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Just as forms of cultural capital are cultivated throughout life, beginning in early childhood, so too is physical capital through mostly unconscious acts of modification such as diet and attitude to exercise. Shilling (1993) argues that class will affect how people choose to engage in sport and that working class people who engage in manual labour will 'have little time for what they see as 'pretensions' of jogging and health and fitness centres' particularly

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women, who often combine work commitments with domestic chores and tend to have less time for sports. Economic constraints will impact choices of foods purchased and prepared (Shilling, 1993). Thus, the bodies of the different classes will reflect these practices. Bourdieu stipulates, that bodies are 'unfinished' and continue throughout time to be affected by cultural, economic and social processes (Bourdieu, 1985). Shilling reveals the significance of this:

> Social differences become incorporated as 'natural' differences, and are misrecognised as such, and it becomes more or less automatic for people to participate in different forms of physical activity which are themselves invested with unequal social value (Shilling, 1993, p.136)

Bourdieu outlines that ability to convert physical capital into other forms is also related to class. He tells us that channelling working class children into sport may negatively affect ability to gain ground in areas such as educational achievement, he also points out that this is doubly detrimental because relatively few people are able to turn their sporting abilities into lasting careers. The unequal and often changing nature of physical capital will be easier to navigate for those who also possess power to bestow value on particular body forms, conversely those with low stocks of social capital will be less aware of ways in which physical capital can be converted (Shilling, 1993, p.141). Shilling sums up that 'the development of symbolically valued bodies is subject to both a more disguised, but also a more risky, transmission process than is the case with economic capital' (Schilling, 1993, p.144). In terms of young women's gain and use of physical capital it is important to note that acceptable female bodies are most often depicted as gaining physical capital most easily within the context of ideas of emphasized femininity (Gorely et al., 2003; Hunter, 2004; Shilling, 2004). It can be concluded, therefore, that young women may find it demanding to reconcile traditionally masculine pursuits such as sport, with the cultural and social expectations of femininity.

Liz Frost (2001) considers the ways in which the process of gendered embodiment impacts young women's lives, finding that 'biology, sexuality, sexual reproduction, and appearance, in other words the body and it's workings and presentation, are the areas to which young female subjectivity can be usefully traced' (Frost, 2001, p.71).

Further, the very process of adolescence and 'growing up' means that young women are 'inhabiting 'new' or changing bodies, and must therefore on some level adjust their perception of embodied selfhood' (p.54). In fact, the process of 'becoming woman' comes to be characterised as a paradoxical state:

> This contradictory construction of female as almost synonymous with body on the one hand, but as a object, in the way that it is defined by others as an object: in other words, the lived contradiction of the body as somehow self and not-self, may be precisely what growing up introduces (Frost, 2001, p.71)

She elaborates this point by drawing on the work of Young (1990) to describe how changes to body size and shape, and the subsequent sexualisation of the body, can impact upon young women's use of everyday space, limiting their self expression, inhibiting their physical movements. she regards this process 'of identity change, then, of newly acquiring a set of adult meanings, relates quite specifically but not conterminously with a changing body' (Frost, 2001, pp.54-5). Despite this however, some young women choose not to conform to such prescribed forms of femininity, alternative strategies applied by young women are described in a subsequent section as transgressive femininities.

Emphasised femininities

Connell (1987; 1995) produced a social theory of gender that incorporates the 'gender order', and examines the relationship between gender and the body. The gender order 'is a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between men and women are made, and remade, as meaningful' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p.61). Connell (1987) describes three dominant structures of gender relations: labour, power and cathexis, which together intersect to create a particular gender order, in a particular society at a particular time. As such, gender relations are in a constant state of flux, subject to conformity as well as resistance and therefore affording opportunities for change through human agency. Connell argues that through such acts of human agency 'crisis tendencies' occur in the gender order. Through collective action, (for example, the women's liberation and gay liberation movements) such crises can be utilized towards eradicating systems of inequality. Connell (1995) proposes that gender is simultaneously and continuously recreated by human agency whilst acting as a force

to constrain individual agency through institutional and structural levels of society. Building on Gramsci's (1971) ideas on hegemony, a theory of how social relationships affect the gender order is developed which introduces 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasized femininity' where particular forms of masculinity and femininity are positioned as superior. Individuals are able to 'win the consent' of others through legitimation of behaviours, conversely other forms of masculinity and femininity are subordinated or marginalised.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a society's general agreement regarding the ideal performance of manliness and is most often associated with whiteness, heterosexuality and middle-class status. Therefore, marginalized masculinities are often represented among men that belong to subordinated classes, gay men or non-white ethnic groups. Gender hegemony operates through the subordination of these masculinities and through the subordination of femininity through 'the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women' and, of course, other men (Connell, 1987, p.185). Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 1995, p. 77). These masculinities are legitimized by continued embodiment and reinforcement over time. It is important to note that Connell believes that there are no femininities that can be described as hegemonic since 'all forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men' (Connell, 1987, p.187). The term 'emphasized femininity' is used as a frame for analysis. Connell states:

> One form [of femininity] is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation (Connell, 1987, pp. 184–185)

Emphasized femininity is characterized by the performance of femininity that receives the 'most cultural and ideological support at present' (Connell, 1987 p.187) and refers to the inflated presentation of those traits most stereotypically associated

with western femininity. Women who perform emphasized femininity are complicit in their subordination by conforming with their secondary status and 'accommodating the interests and desires of men' at the expense of their own advancement (Connell, 1987 p.183). Connell elucidates that emphasized femininity is preserved by 'practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation' (p.188). Dianne Reay's (2001) study of the relational formation of gender identities in primary schools offers an interesting example of how such gender relations play out in social life. Reay categorizes four positions taken up by girls in relation to traditional femininity: '*spice girls*' (proponents of 'girl power' were sexually aggressive and non-passive); '*nice girls*' (quiet, compliant, studious, and sexually restrained girls); '*girlies*' (ultra feminine girls well practiced in the art of hair and make-up) and '*tomboys*' (who denigrate girls and 'girly' activities, preferring the company and activities of boys). However, she observes that all of these positions, in one way or another, are as Connell suggests, seen to be complicit in their own subordination by shoring up the power of the boys. The 'girlies' practiced emphasised femininity by placing importance on maintenance of heterosexual relationships and were positioned by their male and female peer groups as 'dumb' or 'less intelligent' (Reay, 2001, p.158). The 'nice girls were constructed as 'boring' and 'nerdy' and deemed unpopular because of their virtuous and hard working natures (p.158). The 'spice girls', akin to the 'girlies', enthusiastically upheld heterosexuality but differed in their taking on of 'masculine' approaches to this such as 'rating the boys' for attractiveness (p.160). Finally, the 'tomboys' reinforce the inferiority of more traditionally feminine identities, however Reay does stress that this position identifies some limited opportunity for transgressive constructions of femininity (p.161).

Reay's (2001) study discusses how young women employ agentic practices in an attempt to transgress normative femininity through the pursuance of 'tomboy' characteristics:

> it is important to recognise the transgressive qualities of identifying and rejecting traditional notions of femininity… the empowering aspects of being a 'tomboy' also masked deeply reactionary features…Implicit in the concept of 'tomboy' is a devaluing of traditional notions of femininity, a railing against perceived limitations of being female (Reay, 2001, p.163)

The provision of a particular label for these girls is problematic because 'these names seek to control excessive displays through censure and marginalization' (Mallan, 2000, p.1). Nevertheless, despite such attempts at control 'women and girls continue to transgress the bounds of 'proper' femininity and feminine decorum' (p.1). Mallan explains that 'tomboy' behaviours are regarded as a phase. Martin (1996) further expands the critique on the acceptability of 'tomboy' behaviours as being age specific, tolerated during childhood but discouraged during adolescence when 'tomboys are expected to naturally transform into feminine beauties' (p.12). Mallan clarifies the significance of such behaviours for non-transgressive observers, by conceptualizing the bodies of tomboys as sites of pleasure for the individual, but also for other women who experience gratification by 'seeing female bodies performing in ways which are denied to them' (p.1).

Responses to transgressive femininities vary according to the age of the woman displaying the transgressive behaviour, and the level of perceived transgression. Transgressive bodies often generate 'abject' responses from both males and females (Kristeva, 1982). Abjection is defined as:

> an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from the inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of impossibility of doing so (Kristeva, 1982, p.135)

Strong deviation from 'emphasised femininity', for example in the case of female body builders (Johnston, 1996) results in such abject responses. Several criticisms have been levelled at the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, for example, Moller (2007) claims that Connell's description of masculinity as dominating overstates the lived experiences of most men. He argues that Connell's theory fails to account for the intricate and complex practices and motivations of many (Moller, 2007, p.263). Demitriou (2001) faults Connell's concept for failing to 'account for the reciprocal process of the historical formation of hegemonic masculinity' (p.337) and criticizes the binary representation of non-hegemonic and hegemonic masculinities. Finally, Lusher and Robins (2009) outline theoretical concerns such as the 'inadequately detailed interdependencies between

structural, individual and cultural factors with respect to masculinities, and the lack of contextualization of masculinities in specific relational settings' (p. 387). Connell and Messerschmidt's article *'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept'* (2005) seeks to address these criticisms, they deny the reified or essentialist nature of the concept of masculinity in research and refute claims that hegemonic masculinity represents a model of social reproduction and emphasise possibilities for resistance to dominant forms of masculinity. However, they acknowledge criticisms of gender when it is presented as rigid. They 'review what has been confirmed from early formulations (the idea of multiple masculinities the concept of hegemony, and the emphasis on change) and what needs to be discarded (one dimensional treatment of hierarchy and trait conceptions of gender)' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.829). In this work Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further articulate the need for more theory and research on femininities:

> The concept of "emphasized femininity" focused on compliance to patriarchy, and this is still highly relevant in contemporary mass culture. Yet gender hierarchies are also impacted by new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially among younger women-which are increasingly acknowledged by younger men. We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities
> (p. 848)

This thesis seeks to fulfil this recommendation to some extent by explicitly exploring the construction of femininities within physically active settings.

Discourses of Young Femininities

There is a growing body of literature which examines the construction of femininities using Michel Foucault's theory of 'discourse'. Discourse can be understood as:

> concerned with statements that coalesce within specific social contexts and have some particular meaning or effect. The *effect* refers to a momentary production of a phenomenon, such as the production of objects, subjects or conceptual understandings
> (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p.29)

The notion of discourse is useful for unpacking the connection between forms of socially constructed, power and truth and the interplay between these and subjectivity, subject positions and social practices. Discourse is not confined to conversation between individuals, but also refers to the ways in which meanings are created through routine social practices (Foucault, 1979). As such discourses create, not only the objects they describe, but also have wider implications for 'the body' and embodiment through the constraint or enablement of particular practices (Markula, et al., 2008). The workings of discourse are of particular importance to poststructuralist feminist scholars because they offer further scope for the 'de-centering of the subject' and have consequences for how individuals produce ideas of available subjectivities or 'subject positions' (Weedon, 1997). Davis and Harre describe subject positions as incorporating

> both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 46).

Weedon (1997) outlines the potential of understanding subjectivity as "precarious, contradictory and in process" (p. 33), in addition, deconstructing subjectivity opens up the possibility of change by providing new ways of assigning meaning to social experience. In this way, through attention to feminist discourses, previously internalized 'individual personal inadequacies' can be re-envisioned as the result of socially constructed reality and 'can lead to a rewriting of personal experience in terms which give it social, changeable causes' (Weedon, 1997,p. 33). This understanding of subjectivity as shifting and multiple makes it a more useful concept for poststructuralist researchers than notions of 'identity' since it makes possible an analysis that accounts for contradictory, context specific and intricate understandings of self (Lovell, 2000). It is the transformative possibilities of discourse that offer new insights for feminists. Through the identification, deconstruction and reconstruction of gendered discourses women may be enabled to create new 'subject positions' for themselves (Weedon, 1997). Feminist poststructuralists have investigated how young

women take up differing subject positions within the competing discourses of gender that are made available to them (Davies, 1993; Walkerdine, 1997). The ways young women are located in discourses of gender are influenced by various issues such as age, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Aapola, Gonick & Harris (2005) Specify and explore two competing discourses of girlhood that, they argue, shape the construction of contemporary young femininities: 'Girl Power' and 'Surviving Ophelia', or 'girlhood as crisis'. The girl power discourse promotes a 'new version of femininity that can be seen as an assertive and individualised expression of power' (Kehily, 2007, p.35). Rooted in feminist movements such as 'riot grrrl' then adapted and promoted by girl bands this discourse presents contradictory and wide reaching discursive effects and multiple interpretations. While the original movement represents a feminist sense of a contemporary, empowered young woman with agency and a strong sense of self, more recent marketing approaches offer young women 'an image of young femininity which is about possibility, limitless potential and the promise of control over the future' (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005).

This 'watered down', neo-liberal version of feminist politics presents little challenge to the status quo, girls are encouraged to 'identify girl positive feelings with a non-political discourse and to think about girlhood in cultural ways rather than as a space for social and political action' (Aapola et al., 2005, p.30). Contrastingly, the 'Reviving Ophelia' discourse (drawn from a book of the same name by Pipher, 1994), depicts a crisis of girlhood and is created through the interplay of discourses surrounding vulnerability and risk such as pregnancy, drug taking, eating disorders and sexually transmitted diseases. These discourses relate strongly to hormones, the body and emotions, and are linked to 'moral' and 'social' concerns for contemporary young women. Pipher (1994, cited in Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.46) describes the ways in which she observes how young women's bodies affect them negatively: 'Everything is changing- body shape, hormones, skin, hair. Calmness is replaced by anxiety. Their way of thinking is changing'. Thus reproducing Hall's 'storm and stress' model and portraying young women as at the mercy of their raging hormones and adding in that such behaviours are viewed as responses to internalised structural inequalities. The authors express disquiet at the individualising implications of such a

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discourse, which creates expectations for girls to carry out work on themselves individually to counteract socially produced problems. What is interesting is the ways in which these 'seemingly opposite discourses emerge simultaneously' (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 40), in fact both discourses 'emphasise young female subjectivities as projects that can be shaped by the individual' (Aapola et al., 2005, p.54). In contrast to this understanding, the research in this thesis holds collective sharing and action central to possibilities for effecting change.

Different Femininities

The acknowledgement of differences between women- race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability- inevitably emerged in challenge to feminist discourses of 'sisterhood' that claimed to speak to the heterogeneous experiences of all women. Black feminists highlighted the hazards of promoting feminism as a united movement predicated on the experiences of largely white and middle class women's experiences. They further drew attention to the ways in which this made invisible White women's part in the oppression of Black women (McClintock, 1995, p.6). As a result of such analyses and a subsequent explosion in feminist subgroups (e.g. black feminist, lesbian feminist) an era of identity politics emerged in feminist discourse. This disrupted traditional feminist approaches and 'opinion remained divided over whether the differences between women make the assumption of shared concern less credible, or whether such differences can strengthen associations between women by demonstrating the breadth of female experience and their potentiality for greater achievement' (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p.28).

Concern arose that identity politics spelled the 'death of feminism', that as a concept, was predicated under the assumption of sameness and sisterhood, therefore it was feared that to abolish this would leave no solid basis for feminism. In addition, concerns about an emerging hierarchy of oppression and related discourses of 'authenticity' meant that some feminists views and experiences could be viewed as more legitimate than others.   Coupled with this, was an obligation to declare one's own identity in it's entirety before proffering argument. Poststructuralist theorists offer a counter to such forms of identity politics, they claim that in addition to being unhelpful to discussion, forced disclosure of identity is a near impossible task because

what it means to be a woman, white, a lesbian, and so on is unstable, therefore such identities must be regarded as culturally and historically diverse.

Dangers of utilising 'additive' approaches to analysing oppression were identified. Hill Collins (1999) is critical of such approaches, which she argues, depend firstly upon dichotomous thinking which positions people and ideas as opposites, forexample, man/woman, White/Black, and secondly on the ranking of these differences, conceptualising one as subordinate to the other. This approach is unhelpful because 'if you add together separate oppressions, you are left with a grand oppression greater than the sum of its parts' (p.762). Other scholars echoed these concerns that the 'pitting of anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles against one another allows some vocal fighters to dismiss blatantly the existence of either racism or sexism within their lines of action, as if oppression comes in separate monolithic forms' (Trinh in Ashcroft et al. 1995: 268). Hill Collins posited an alternative to the additive approach by drawing on Harding's (1986) model of oppression as structured through three dimensions: the institutional, the symbolic and the individual. Importantly, this approach offers the opportunity to examine how all actors (men, women, Black people, White people) are affected by interlocking systems of oppression. This has significant implications for how individuals are encouraged to view themselves within systems of oppression and privilege:

> As a result of our institutional and symbolic statuses, all of our choices become political acts. Each of us must come to terms with the multiple ways in which race, class and gender as categories of analysis frame our individual biographies (Hill Collins, 2011, p.767).

Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) outline the significance of this for the study of young women's lives, explaining that considerations of girlhood must incorporate other categories of social difference and how they intersect. Understandings of femininity therefore, must consider how 'girls become girls through their negotiation of raced, classed and sexed femininities' (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p.3). According to Hill Collins (2011), such examinations make it possible to engage in genuine dialogue and work towards genuine change through the building of 'coalitions around common causes' (p.770) and 'empathy' (p.771). However, relatively few studies advise on how to unpack the messy and complex relationship

between differences.   Jana Sawicki (1991) values the recognition of differences between women as a good basis for defining the common interests of a diverse group and avoiding the homogenization of experiences into already determined models. She suggests that 'difference can be a resource insofar as it enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to the many relations of domination that circulate through the social field'.   bell hooks furthers this idea when she states: 'women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression' (1986, p.138). This thesis values the possibilities of this kind of collective research approach and acknowledges the potential for such approaches to highlight diverse and shared experiences within physical activity.

Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the relationship between theories of gender and conceptualisations of the body, power, agency and subjectivity with particular emphasis on feminist and poststructuralist critique. Relational, discourse and difference approaches to the study of young femininities have been examined and the ways in which these influence young women's social practices have been identified. The next chapter considers sociological conceptualisations of the category youth, the ways in which young people's lives have been research and the research approach of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Researching Youth

This chapter will explore the varying conceptualisations of 'youth' with particular attention to how the literature provides a context for understanding young women's experiences. This chapter is structured to provide a discussion of the historically and socially constructed approaches to investigating 'youth' and particular attention to feminist and poststructuralist perspectives form the basis of this chapter. The chapter aims to develop a justification for the theoretical approach of my own study.

Conceptualising 'Youth'

In this section, the social construction of the category 'youth' is explored. The social constructionist approach will be used as an analytical lens throughout the rest of this chapter and it will be evident from all subsequent discussions of approaches to youth studies, that young people's lives are regarded as constructed through historical, structural and cultural influences (Jones, 2009). Philip Aries, in his work '*Centuries of Childhood'* (1962), proposes that 'youth' is a relatively modern concept. He argues that it was only since the mid 17th century that 'young people' started to be seen as both dependent on adults and as having special characteristics of their own. Before 1830, social institutions regarded children primarily as belonging to their parents and, in the case of working class children, a source of cheap labor. The concept of childhood and youth as distinct stages of life or social categories that afforded political and social rights was absent. In the early nineteenth century however, factors such as the burgeoning middles classes, increased urbanization, and industrialization produced new attitudes about children and young people, and adult's obligations to them (Mintz, 2008).

Nunn (2002) argues that 'youth' is defined as 'other than adult, and by their construction, they also produce the meaning of adulthood' (p.679). The meaning of their 'otherness' is, in addition, produced by adults definitions of appropriate rules and conditions for the process of growing up (Nunn, 2002). Wyn & White, (1997) concur with this analysis and envision youth as a 'relational concept' because 'it exists and has meaning largely in relation to the concept of adulthood' (p.11) at once recognized as a state of 'becoming' and as a state of deficit in relation to adulthood.

Wyn & White contend that 'understanding youth as a relational concept brings power relations to the forefront' (1997, p.11). It is these power relations that are of interest in understanding youth as a category that remains largely interiorized, young people remain relatively underprivileged in terms of economic, legal and social rights, as well as political representation (Frost, 2001). From a poststructuralist perspective 'young people will also be understood as object, rather than active subjects in the circulation of definitive meanings. Young people are 'deviant' to the norm of adulthood, and the object of adult definition' (Frost, 2001, p.55) thus making the child-adult dualism a powerful force in the construction of young people's lives. Furthermore, age can be viewed (in a similar way to class, gender and ethnicity) as a facet of inequality because 'it involves the construction of social differences, which in turn brings differential access to social resources, such as wealth, power and status. In our society there is an age elite of middle age-groups, with the young and old being relatively powerless' (Bradley, 1996, p.147). Pierre Bourdieu (1978) reminds youth researchers that seemingly arbitrary age divisions in fact conceal manipulative power relations in which 'both youth and old age are socially constructed in the conflict (lutte) between the young and the old' (Jones, 2009, p.3). This research seeks to acknowledge and challenge unequal power dynamics by seeking to position young people as powerful agents of change.

The study of 'youth' as a category of social interest may be regarded as a history of paradigm shifts. The changing conceptualisation of youth over time and how this has been structured through the social sciences has been summarised by Alan France as shown in Table 1. These paradigm shifts and their implications for the study of youth will be explored in more depth in this chapter. The category 'youth' is understood throughout this thesis as a social construction that seeks to solidify a subject position between childhood and adulthood. In this way, 'youth' will be conceptualized as a social and cultural notion. As we shall see below, feminist researchers have critiqued youth research for its ignorance of the experiences of young women, finding that young women are often absent from or invisible in youth research (McRobbie, 1978, 1996, 2002; Griffin, 1988, 2004; Hey, 1997), a core objective of this research is to join other feminist scholars in redressing this balance by placing a focus on young women and their lived experiences.

Table 1: *Conceptions of youth over time (France, 2009, p.16)*

Time Period	Social Science Influence	Influences and Concerns	Impact
Early modernism eighteenth/ nineteenth century	Psychology and Positivist Criminology	- Enlightenment movement - Victorian Bourgeois Society - Anxieties over youth delinquency/ immoral behaviour	- Discovers adolescence as natural stage - Constructs storm and stress as explanation of youth problem
Early twentieth century inter-war years	Positivist Sociology and Environmental Criminology	- Concerns over impact of urbanisation and youth delinquency	- Introduces influence of environment on behaviour - Youth culture as separate from adult culture
Post-war – 1960s	Functionalism	- Concerns over the impact of the war on integration	- Constructs youth as a social institution - Age grading defined as natural order - Youth culture as alternative process of integration
1960s - 1970s	Marxism and Cultural Studies	- Lack of class analysis to understanding social change	- Introduces notion of resistance to youth cultural studies - The importance of consumption to youth identities
Late modernity 1980s – present day	Feminism/ post structuralism	- Failure to explore previous theories to understand diversity of youth - Impact of social change and growth of consumption	- The importance of young people's voice - Youth as agent - The central role of new technology and consumption

In the following section, I will discuss the changing face of youth studies and associated debates as well as consider how influential theorists have approached the explanation of young women's lives. These discussions develop the approach of the thesis by arguing that biological notions of youth are unhelpful, transitions and subcultural approaches can useful if critically applied and contemporary methodological approaches have much to add to current studies of young people's lives.

Youth Research

The concept of 'youth' in social science can be traced back to the birth of modernity. The Enlightenment was an eighteenth century intellectual movement that was driven by a shift in thinking from myth, religion and tradition to rational and scientific understanding and technological advances. The period was characterized by political upheaval, a developing belief in the political subject and appreciation for individual rights and freedoms (Nesbet,1967; Delanty,1999). This section however, explores the study of youth within the social sciences.

Biology Versus Culture

Despite these early beginnings Victorian Britain was the site of a 'modern approach' to the study of youth viewed through a lens of the emerging discipline of psychology (Davis, 1997), this approach utilised the term 'adolescence' defined as a universally occurring, biologically determined life stage between childhood and adulthood (France, 2007). A prominent figure at the time, G. Stanley Hall, is regarded as the founder of the study of adolescent development and was the first social scientist to comment specifically on adolescence (Jones, 2009). In 1904, he published the first text on adolescence, a two volume work entitled: '*Adolescence: Its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education*'. Hall intended his study of adolescence to develop an understanding of the 'youth problem', by: 'providing an explanation of why youth were problematic and constructing solutions that would help maintain the social order and status quo' (France, 2007, p.26). He anticipated that his recommendations would inform state regulation and control of young people. Griffin (2004) argues that development of theories of adolescence had far reaching consequences, she states:

> the 'discovery' of adolescence also marked a key moment for social relations around gender, sexuality, 'race' and nationality. The emerging ideology of adolescence marked out a biologically determined norm of youthful behaviour and appearance which was white/Anglo, middle class, heterosexual and male (Griffin, 2004, p.11)

While, according to Hall, both genders were regarded as equally vulnerable to tumultuous emotional states, there were differentiations in how these were expected to manifest and how these should be managed: 'young men had to be steered towards more 'normal' adult heterosexual relationships and monogamous marriage...Girls were plagued with having to manage menstruation' (France, 2007, pp.26-7). At the 1903 National Education Association (NEA) conference, G. Stanley Hall asserted: 'in savagery women and men are more alike in their physical structure and in their occupations, but with real progress the sexes diverge and draw apart, and the diversities always present are multiplied and accentuated' (1903, p. 446). As a consequence, the recommendation to educators was to develop more 'manly' boys and more 'womanly' girls (Lesko, 2002).

Hall launched the study of adolescence with a theory that saw this life stage as one marked by 'storm and stress' (1904). His prominence in American psychology provided opportunity to influence 'common-sense' discourses on youth that scientists – and society – had of adolescence, as a time of upheaval and stress. Other scholars studying adolescent development adopted, in their theories, Hall's idea that adolescence was a necessarily stressful period. For example, Anna Freud (1969) viewed adolescence as a universal period of developmental disturbance that involved upheavals in drive states, in family and peer relationships, in ego defences, and in attitudes and values. Similarly, Erik Erikson (1970) spoke of adolescents as enmeshed in an identity crisis, although feminists critique this research as it centres around the experiences of boys only (Archer, 1992). In short, scientists defined young people as "at risk" for behaving in uncivilized or problematic ways and therefore as being dangerous to themselves and to others. Simply, adolescents had a deficit in their behaviour – their inherently "wild" and uncivilized behaviour – that meant they were "broken" or in danger of becoming "broken" (Griffin, 1993). For the first half of the 20th century most research about adolescence was based on this deficit conception of young people. It is argued, that the term 'youth' (as opposed to 'childhood') has become synonymous with problems and risk. Discourses construct young people (in contrast to children) as 'potentially threatening and disturbing' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008: p.11) with strong links to anti-social behaviour and 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972; Hebdidge, 1979, Hall & Jefferson, 1976). Thomson argues that ''youth' tends to be seen as a problem: young people are beset by predominantly negative images, are seen as either a source *of* trouble or *in* trouble' (emphasis in original, Roche & Tucker, 1997, p.1).

From Hall's time onwards the primary concern of youth studies centred around 'problem' boys whilst 'girls tended to be ignored, although when they were included they tended to be sexualized and linked to biological dysfunction, this being seen as the driving force for their behaviour' (France, 2007, pp.154-5). Feminist scholars observe that, particularly in terms of problem behaviours, society perceives young women and young men in radically different ways. For example, Christine Griffin describes how the two genders are perceived within the 'youth as a social problem' debate. She postulates that young males are typically regarded as 'actively deviant' while young females are portrayed as 'passively at risk' (Griffin, 2004; Griffin,

1993). Despite the wide take-up of the 'storm and stress' model, critics emerged and refuted both the inherent emotional disturbance of adolescence and subsequently the emphasis of such studies on 'nature' rather than 'nurture' (Jones, 2009; Bandura, 1959; Bowlby, 1953; Winnicott, 1964). Study of adolescence takes a categorical approach characterised by a focus on age as a defining feature. Wyn & White argue that this kind of approach is unhelpful because it homogenises the experiences of diverse and differing young people, normalises white, male, middle class experience and 'gives insufficient weight to difference, process and change' (Wyn & White, 1998, p.13). This thesis, in line with poststructural and feminist critiques, rejects notions of biological essentialism and the existence of intrinsic differences between boys and girls, refutes categorical studies of adolescence and seeks to highlight diversity in young people's experiences.

Investigating Youth Culture and Subcultures

The study of youth culture prompted a change in terminology away from the term 'adolescence' better suited to biological and psychological understandings of young people, to the term 'youth' (Kehily, 2007). Subcultural studies emerged from two separate and distinct sociological traditions. The first subcultural studies were carried out by sociologists at the 'Chicago School' between 1920 and 1950, however the scholars involved in this research did not identify themselves specifically as subcultural scholars (Williams, 2007). The second tradition is best described as an explicitly subcultural approach to the study of groups of working-class young people and was developed at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the1960s and 1970s. Blackman suggests that 'the concept of subculture at its base is concerned with agency and action belonging to a subset or social group that is distinct from but related to the dominant culture' and offers insights on groups that present behaviours and values alternative to mainstream culture (2005, p.2). Concepts of 'subculture' and 'deviance' are inextricably linked throughout the literature.   In this section, I will briefly examine some of the historical and theoretical underpinnings, core findings and critiques of these two traditions of research, and then examine insights developed by feminist, poststructural and postsubcultural thinkers.

The studies of the Chicago School arose in response to and challenged the dominant psychological interpretations of deviance that analyzed deviance in relation to

'criminal personalities' (Lombroso, 1899). The approach was driven by functionalist theories of strain (Williams, 2007) and early studies focussed on deviant lifestyles among the marginalized urban poor (Thrasher,1927; Cressey,1932). The Chicago School attempted to apply an ethnographic context derived from normal conditions of urban social life to develop an understanding of young people (Downes & Rock 1982). Chicago School theorists argued that deviance should be understood within a socio-cultural context as socially situated and determined by cultural norms (Garratt, 2004) and they regarded deviance as a 'normal' response to particular social circumstances (Bennett and Khan Harris, 2004). It was postulated that deviant subcultures could be useful to normalize forms of deviant behaviour (Blackman, 2005). What followed was an extensive period of study of deviance and young people, with emphasis on 'delinquent boys' (Cohen, 1955), 'social relations in secondary schools' (Hargreaves, 1967), and 'gang delinquency' as a feature of 'lower class culture', which is considered deviant only in relation to middle class norms (Miller, 1958). Cohen argues that 'members of a subculture come to share a similar outlook on life and evolve collective solutions to the problems they experience' (Kehily, 2007, p.24).

The cultural studies approach to youth subcultures can be largely attributed to the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which built upon socio-cultural work of the Chicago School and their method of local ethnographies. Key scholars, Hall & Jefferson (1976) define subculture thus:

> Sub-cultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their 'parent' culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of artefacts, territorial spaces etc., which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture (Clarke et al. in Hall & Jefferson, 1976, pp.13-14)

Research in this tradition was grounded in Marxist theory and social class was theorized as a pivotal factor in understanding young people's participation in youth subcultures. Studies associated sub-cultures with 'working class' youth (male) and deviance. Their seminal text '*Resistance Through Rituals*' (Hall & Jefferson, 1976) utilizes Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony', a theory developed from Marxian underpinnings, that regards the maintenance of 'social authority' over subordinate

groups (Frith, 1984) by means other than coercion or direct imposition of rules. This is facilitated by winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural (Hall, 1977). They therefore position youth subcultures as significant and expressive forms of resistance to capitalism and hegemonic culture, which form a continuous struggle over the distribution of 'cultural power' in society (Kehily, 2007). In contrast to Miller (1958) who argued that young people express deviance as a 'natural' part of their 'lower-class culture', the CCCS contended that 'deviant stylists weren't simply reflecting unconsciously existing working class norms, but using them as the basis of a form of resistance to the expectations of school and leisure and workplace (Frith, 1984). The work of the CCCS has been subject to heavy criticism, not least from within, Paul Willis highlighted issues with the term 'subcultural' by declaring that 'there has not been a vigorous analysis of the status of culture a sub-culture is supposed to be 'sub' to. The notion implies a relative positioning which seems to give an altogether misleading sense of absoluteness and dominance of the main culture' (Willis, 1979, pp. xlv-xlvi). Dick Hebdidge (also a member of CCCS) critiqued the validity of the sub-cultural theorists' work suggesting that 'it is highly unlikely, for instance, that the members of any of the subcultures described in this book would recognise themselves reflected here' (1979, p.139). Some argued that this tradition of youth research failed to acknowledge that 'fun' may be at the heart of many subcultural affiliations and that the political intentions of members of subcultures had been overstated with little evidence to suggest this was the case. In summary subcultural studies:

> concentrated on the more spectacular and visible activities of the few, those deemed to be the most troublesome and the most problematic. Notions of difference and diversity, alongside the everyday and ordinary activities of the young, were marginalized and given less significance (France, 2007, p.154).

Arguably the strongest critique was levelled by feminist researchers regarding the omission and invisibility of young women and the gender blind, 'malestream' approach of subcultural theorists (with minor exceptions: Willis, 1977; Cressey, 1932) and youth research more widely (Griffin, 1993). Feminist scholars such as McRobbie and Garber (1976) have suggested that the absence of women from the sub-cultural literature may be explained by the different cultural attitudes and behaviour expected from girls. While maintaining a focus on social class, Angela McRobbie 'gave more emphasis to how production relationships helped construct a

sexual division of labour that separated girls from the public into the private spheres of life and socially reproduced femininity' (France, 2007, p.53). McRobbie & Garber, (1976) explore the ways in which this was constructed in a number of ways, for example, girls experiencing lower wages than their male counterparts meant less disposable income to 'buy into' subcultures. In addition, dominant gender norms surrounding respectable behaviour and reputation resulted in a limitation to girls' freedom to engage in street culture. This virtual confinement to the private sphere led to a 'culture of the bedroom' a culture based around romance, fashion and the private domestic space of the girls' bedrooms features of which include: experimenting with make-up, hair styles and clothes; discussing and comparing romantic feelings towards boyfriends and reading and discussing the contents of magazines (e.g. 'Jackie') (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). They argued that the valorization of activities conducted in the public sphere led subcultural theorists to pursue male subcultures and ignore those of girls (McRobbie, 1980).

McRobbie and Garber outlined three dominant images of female participants in subcultures: the hippy girl, the mod girl and the motorbike girl, they problematize these in terms of the tendency to define such girls by their sexuality in relation to attractiveness and availability. Their conclusions led to a recommendation for researchers to 'look at the ways in which young women interact among themselves to form distinctive cultures of their own' (Kehily, 2007, p.35). This thesis seeks to do just this by focusing on young women-only youth work settings and the intricacies of their experiences. One feature of bedroom culture that McRobbie and Garber explored was the 'teeny bopper' the focus of which was usually a particular pop star and involved the purchase of magazines, posters, record t-shirts and pictures. Brake describes the appeal: 'It requires only the use of a bedroom, a record player and a friend. There are no exclusion rules, entrance qualifications, no risk of sexual or social failure' (1980, p.143). Whereas McRobbie and Garber describe the 'teeny bopper' subculture as 'a meaningful reaction against the selective and authoritarian structures which control girls' lives.' (McRobbie & Garber, 1976, p.220). Similar studies have emerged more recently which reaffirm the relevance of 'bedroom culture' in the lives of young women and as a means of self expression (Lincoln, 2001; Bloustein, 1998; Blackman, 1995). However, this work too, can be criticised for over-homogenising the experiences of girls and for reproducing heteronormative

assumptions.   There was a need for work that examined young women's subcultural experiences outside of the private sphere.

In her more recent research into the participation of girls in rave culture, in the UK and Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, McRobbie (1994) suggests there has been a dramatic shift since the 1970s in the interplay between social structures and gender practices because 'there is now a greater degree of fluidity about what femininity means and how exactly it is anchored in social reality' (p.157). While in previous studies she observed young women on the margins of male-dominated subcultural activities, she observed female 'ravers' as fully immersed alongside young men, and the mutually shared, hedonistic pursuit of pleasure elevated the status of young women. In particular, dancing:

> carries enormously pleasurable qualities for girls and women which frequently seem to suggest a displaced, shared and nebulous eroticism rather than a straightforwardly romantic, heavily heterosexual "goal-oriented drive" (McRobbie, 1984:134).

However, feminist scholars warn against such generalisations remarking that 'cultures such as rave are not bounded or homogenous but are infinitely nuanced and diverse' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, p.57). Inspired by similar critiques a new wave of study into youth activity termed 'postsubcultural study' emerged underpinned by postmodern and poststructural critiques of the CCCS's work.

Founded by Redhead (1990) & Muggleton (1997, 2000) who argue that structurally grounded conceptions of subculture are (and possibly always have been) redundant, scholars began to identify that relationships between style, music and identity could be regarded as weakening and becoming more fluid. This was demonstrated in the rave/club scene; by young people's interest in retro culture; by 'glocal' access to identity through technology and the combining of different subcultural styles, innovation and style mixing (Redhead, 1993; Melechi, 1993; Rietveld, 1998; Miles, 1998; Malbon, 1999; Muggleton, 2000; Bennett, 2000; Muggleton and Weinzier, 2004; Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004 and Jackson, 2004). These scholars 'document the significance of global media cultures and patterns of consumption as key changes

in young people's lives, producing fragmented and ephemeral youth groupings rather than full-blown subcultures' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, pp.12-13).

 Maffesoli (1996) for example promotes the term 'Neotribes' which he states emphasizes the fluid and unstable nature of social relations in contemporary society, neo-tribalism is characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal without 'pretensions of universality'. Steven Miles (2000) & Andy Bennett (2000), disaffected by the term 'subculture' elaborate 'lifestyle' in it's place. They argue that: 'consumerism allows young people to construct alternative lifestyles through local and global strategies where young people in local settings can use, appropriate and transform cultural commodities for their own authenticity' (Blackman, 2005, p.13). Here the focus is on consumer creativity, acknowledging how commodities function as cultural resources inscribed with collective meanings. Contrastingly 'scenes' are often related to musical cultures, production and consumption delivered on a local or trans-local basis, 'Scenes actualize a particular state of relations between various populations and social groups, as these coalesce around specific coalitions of musical style' (Straw, 1991, p.379). They may be regarded as anti-essentialist as membership relates more to musical taste than specific identity characteristics and the term is broad enough to encompass a wide range of cultural practices (Bennett and Khan-Harris, 2004).

However, of most use to this study is Thornton's (1995) study of contemporary dance culture, which argues for the acknowledgement of subcultural capital. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, and in particular his concept of 'cultural capital' she identifies the appeal of 'subcultural capital' to young people. She developed the term 'subcultural capital', which she describes as conferring status or 'hipness' and which is displayed, like cultural capital, in 'objectified' and 'embodied' forms. As highlighted earlier, capitals are so named because they can be seen to be convertible into economic capital, subcultural capital (which by it's very nature exists deliberately separately to the capital economy) would appear to contradict such a definition. However, Thornton argues that 'it is possible to observe subspecies of [non-institutionalized] capital operating within other less privileged domains' (1995, p.11). Her work explores how this process operates within youth culture and specifically 'club cultures' as 'a means by which young people negotiate and accumulate status within their own social worlds' (p.163). Subcultural capital is displayed through acts of

'distinction' which, in contrast to other capital studies, does not rely heavily on social class, and in fact 'relies, in part, on a fantasy of classlessness' (p.12). In youth subcultures 'age' becomes the 'significant demographic' closely followed by gender. Thornton explains that young women experience greater difficulty in attaining reserves of subcultural capital and that their engagement in subcultures alongside male counterparts often requires them to 'acknowledge the subcultural hierarchy and accept their lowly position within it' (Thornton, 1995, p.13).

It is possible therefore, to observe the way in which subcultural capital operates by signifying the difference between 'true subculturalists' and 'the mainstream' in a negative sense, those without subcultural capital are thus inferior and lack taste. This method of developing subcultural hierarchies requires the manipulation of 'the axes of age, gender, sexuality and race, all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupation at bay' (Thornton, 1995, p.105). There is a need for more research that explores young women's subcultural experiences, particularly women-only subcultures within which young women might be conceptualised as powerful agents. Studies that explore embodied experience of leisure and physical activity might provide a useful contribution to this field. Postmodern critiques served as the catalyst for a new branch of youth studies and a shift in focus from youth cultural studies towards a 'social problems' lens (Griffin, 1993). This marked a move away from theoretically-driven, ethnographic studies of youth sub-cultural style and resistance towards more empirically and policy oriented accounts of school-to-work transitions (MacDonald et al., 2001) and it is to this approach we turn for the next section of the chapter.

Youth Transitions

In the mid 1980s the study of youth transitions emerged and this differed from the cultural studies approach described above and the emphasis on self-expression and identity, because it was 'concerned with the impact of state institutional structures (the apparatus of bureaucratic knowledge) on young people's ability to define their own lives' (Jones, 2009, p.84). Empirical studies sought to quantify and profile young people's experiences in education, training, employment or unemployment and how these occurred (Roberts, 1997). Initially research focused on young people's

experience of school-to-work transitions however later studies also considered the transitions relating to housing, family, income, consumption, and relationships (Coles, 1995; Jones and Wallace, 1992). These varying transitions often occur independently of one another allowing young people to achieve autonomy in one sphere of life but not in others (Jones & Bell, 2000), however the progression of each type of transition will inevitable affect the progress of the others. More recent studies seek to explore the interplay of social structure, individual circumstance and agency and how resulting experiences are diverse and varying (Irwin, 1995; Wyn and White, 1998). Youth transitions in late modern society are regarded as progressively more heterogeneous and non-linear (Thomson et al. 2002). These changes to youth transitions are attributed to socio-economic changes such as the diminishment of mass scale manufacturing, expansion of service, communications and technology industries and subsequent impact on the labor market. In parallel to this 'political developments since the 1980s, representing on the whole a move to the right, with a growing emphasis on individualization and differentiation rather than equality, and on free market thinking, rather than welfare ideology' (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.58). These wide reaching changes to the labor market and political ideologies, in turn, resulted in educational restructuring with an emphasis on marketization of schooling and closer links between teaching and industry. Consequently school-to-work transitions were disrupted and as a result of these changes it has become increasingly difficult for young people to realize independence from their families and make successful 'domestic' and 'housing' transitions (Coles, 1995; Jones, 1992; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Iacovou, 2001; and Heath and Cleaver, 2003 cited in Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, p. 10). Further:

> Changes in the sequencing of the three transitions (school to work transitions, domestic transitions and housing transitions) have led to changing family dynamics. For some, this new space is characterized by a freedom that is unencumbered by the responsibilities of adulthood while for others it is best seen as a frustrating limbo characterized by powerlessness and a lack of resources (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, pp.10-11)

However, this is not to say that the new era of individualism offers such opportunities indiscriminately. Roberts (2003, p.19) remarks that 'in the course of making school-to-work transitions social class, gender and ethnic divisions among young people widen, deepen and are consolidated…These divisions are then reproduced'. This is

where the dangers of individualism (typified by the individualization thesis presented by Ulrich Beck (1992, 2002) and Anthony Giddens (1991, 1994) become more evident, and where we begin to recognize an 'epistemological fallacy' (France, 2007) wherein young people negotiate their lives in the belief that they are afforded real opportunities and, therefore, failure to achieve becomes a personal rather than collective responsibility (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Feminist scholars of transition have sought to understand why, despite this age of individualism, certain transitional outcomes appear fixed and predictable. Ball et al (2000) utilized Bourdieu's framework to explore how transitions are reproduced, they found that:

> the relationships a young person has with the local area and the adult way of life are important in shaping the routes that are taken. This provides a 'framed field of reference' alongside their own knowledge and experiences, which then informs them of the decisions they should make to 'get on' (this is then their habitus). Social and economic capital, alongside emotional capital in the shape of friendships and support, operate to help them make this investment in their transitions (France, 2007, p.73)

These findings are echoed by Walkerdine et al. (2001) in reference to young womens chosen pathways, subjectivities and transitions and the ways in which these are shaped by cultural processes and reproduction. They evidence this by pointing to the different choices adopted by middle and working-class girls and suggesting that causation can be traced to differentials in possession of social, economic and cultural capital.

A number of feminist scholars (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005; Griffin, 1985; Walkerdine et al., 2001) have used the 'transitions model' of youth research as a tool to explore the lived experiences of girls. In terms of managing transitions from school to work, early research into girls' transitions found that 'girls did not just think about their lives as manual workers but were forced to manage competing economic and social pressures located in the family' (France, 2007, p.54). Therefore girls were forced to maintain a balance of preparation for the labour market and the 'marriage market' (Griffin, 1985). In light of current economic and labour market structures it is commonplace to observe discussions surrounding the effect of de-industrialisation on working-class young men as contributing to a crisis of masculinity (Heath, 1999). Changes to workforce expectations, which increasingly privilege personal

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characteristics more commonly associated with femininity (Adkins, 2002) coupled with the success of feminist achievements in improving gender equity in both education and the workplace are purported to have created a 'genderquake' (Williamson, 1994) represented as 'damaging to young men and unproblematically advantageous for young women' (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.62). Research into young women's aspirations supports the view that, in comparison to previous generations, young women today have higher expectations for securing paid employment and feel entitled to participate in the economy (Wicks and Mishra, 1998) and display more optimism about their economic prospects than young men (Miles, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). In education too, young women are perceived to be powerful with young women matching, and in many cases, exceeding the achievements of their male counterparts (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1999; Jarvinen & Vanttaja, 2001). In response to this debate surrounding the 'problem' of girls outperforming boys, feminists contend that the argument stems from a backlash against feminist achievements and suffers from an oversimplification of 'the issues surrounding gender and achievement, by presenting a homogenous category of successful young women who are denying opportunities to an equally homogenous but victimised category of young men' (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.66). Assumptions surrounding the genderquake fail to take account of differences within gender categories such as social class, race, culture and ability or of statistics that reveal that womens success in education is not replicated in career progression or pay (Kenway et al., 1998; Arnot et al., 1999).   Recent studies reveal that young women that do not possess educational qualifications suffer more significantly than their male peers due to the loss of unskilled work opportunities (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) have carried out extensive work on gendered aspects of youth transitions and outline a number of ways in which girls' transitions have been affected by changes to the job market (such as de-industrialisation and globalisation). They argue that young women's experiences here are polarised:

> many have reaped the benefits of the 'feminisation' of the labour market as well as social changes brought on by feminism, both of which have enabled them to take up rewarding positions in the new economy…a large number of young women in particular have been deeply affected by the rise in youth unemployment and have negative experiences of the new emphasis on training and skilling (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.56)

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A huge contributing factor to this polarisation of experiences is social class and in particular, access to reserves of social capital, and this remains a key indicator for girls in relation to success (Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody, 2001). Working class young women's job opportunities are also more likely to consist of casual, part-time, short term positions with little opportunity for promotion or progression (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Further studies suggest that those young women who do achieve qualifications are often funnelled into 'feminized' career paths (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1999) and are not guaranteed access to prestigious careers (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). Young women of colour and disabled young women experience additional barriers to achievement in education and careers due to professional's perceptions of appropriate aspirations (Mirza, 1992; Froschl, Rubin & Sprung, 1999).

Youth researchers have explained that during times of economic decline and low employment opportunities young people turn to other aspects of their lives to develop identity and prioritise importance. These areas include leisure, community, family, relationships and religion (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Miles, 2000; Ball et al., 2000) as 'a means to keep at bay loss of status and poverty in this changing world' (Walkerdine, Melody & Lucey, 2001, p.8). Aapola, Gonick & Harris, (2005, p.77) stress: 'this is not a 'choice' between two equally available options, but a prioritizing of one in light of reduced opportunities to achieve the other'. Young people's development of tactics and coping strategies remain influenced by power differentials and personal circumstances, however by creating these new priorities young people can also be viewed as active agents in their own transitions and the pursuit of symbolic capital (Bell, 2001). In response to New Labour policies that allow school-to-work transitions to dominate, youth researchers recommended greater attention be paid to alternative forms of citizenship and transition including 'family careers' (Jones, 2002), housing transitions (Heath, 2002) and personal relationships (Thomson et al., 2002). It is to these other options that we now turn our attention and in particular young women's domestic transitions.

The family, as a social institution, has traditionally been associated with girls and women. Recently, an increase in the number of women in paid employment; the divorce rate; the proportion of non-traditional or alternative families and the number of young people delaying or refusing marriage, has radically altered the landscape of

British family life (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). In addition to this, young women are grappling with the choice between career and motherhood, often finding it impossible to consider aspiring to both. Despite this, young women still experience limitations to their sexual freedom with the priority often being to prevent early sexual experience even where this is desired and sought out by the girls themselves (Thompson, 1995). Here we can see the ripple effects of the 'youth as a social problem' debate discussed earlier and the perception of young women as 'passively at risk'. Related to this is the concern (by parents, educationalists, social workers, policy makers and politicians) surrounding the recent rise in teenage pregnancy (Bullen et al., 2000) often associated with poor sex education or negatively constructed through problem-centred discourses such as disturbed development or attempts to bypass the welfare system and gain access to benefits and housing (Nathanson, 1991). We can view the disapproval levied at young mothers as a direct response to their perceived resistance to what McRobbie (2007; 2008) describes as a 'new sexual contract', which expects young women to 'come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications, to control fertility and to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture' (2008, p.54). She describes how moral judgments of young mothers are based on the interplay between class, culture and successful femininities situated within the neo-liberal state and it is worthwhile to quote her at length here:

> Young motherhood [...] carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity... Middle-class respectable status requires the refusal of early motherhood and much effort is invested in ensuring that this norm is adhered to [...] The concept of 'planned parenthood' emerges in Western liberal democracies as an address to young women so that they may postpone early maternity to accrue the economic advantages of employment [...] and thus contribute to the solving of the crisis of welfare. Single mothers are seen as feckless or are accused in the press and in other moralistic discourses of depriving a child [...] those young career women who have followed the advice of New Labour, and have postponed childbirth until they have secured wage earning capacity, become deserving subjects (McRobbie 2007, p.731-732)

Bullen et al. argue these kinds of discourses situate teenage mothers as deficient, deviant, in need of correction or transformation into economically active and self-reliant subjects via their (re)immersion into education or the labour market as quickly as possible (Bullen et al. 2000). Because of their perceived lack of resources to

adequately support their children, full-time mothering is dismissed as a valid 'choice' for young women (Kidger 2004).

In her study on 'young mothers' Ann Phoenix states that while those young women discussed earlier deliberate over the choice between careers and parenthood, young women that have lower expectations for academic and career success have little reason to defer motherhood (Phoenix, 1991). She further postulates that this may account for the higher proportion of teenage pregnancy occurring within working-class communities, thus arguing that, rather than being understood as individual pathology, teenage pregnancy should be viewed as a result of 'large-scale structural social problems that cannot be solved by blaming the young women who choose early motherhood' (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005, p.103). Bullen (2000) further stresses that for many young mothers, early motherhood fits within expected norms of femininity where heterosexual relationships and parenthood are regarded as integral to the growing up process. Further studies have revealed that early motherhood, far from being an inevitable catalyst for social exclusion, can in fact, be experienced positively (Clemmens, 2003; Macintyre and Cunningham-Burley, 1993). In a UK study conducted by Lisa Arai (2009) young mothers revealed numerous positive outcomes of young motherhood, they describe motherhood as 'joyful', as helpful in overcoming adversity experienced earlier in life and as a channel for bringing about positive change to family relationships (Arai, 2009). There is a need for more literature that explores the lives of young mothers and the ways in which they engage with discourses of femininity and motherhood. Despite these insightful examples of transitional study the acknowledgement of the diversity of young people's experiences raises an argument for the debate surrounding the usefulness of the concept of 'youth transitions'. A vehement critique of transitions exists, as Jeffs and Smith, for example, comment:

> The field of study has produced little of substance and certainly nothing fresh or original for nearly two decades. It has become more inward-looking. As a sub-discipline it is unlikely to disappear (although perhaps it should) as too many have invested too much in it...[but] it is likely to become increasingly irrelevant. Exhausted, reduced to picking over the minutiae of young people's lives and reworking its own tired models [of transition] it will stagger on
> (Jeffs and Smith 1999, p.59)

A critique of the 'transitions' approach is provided by Mizen (2004) who discusses what he sees as the 'myth' of transition. Mitzen understands youth as a political construct and as 'a product of state and government' (Mitzen, 2004, p.xiii). He claims that the use of age as a categorizing agent allows governments to manipulate a number of political dimensions. Mizen argues that there is no essentially 'transitional' quality to youth; rather youth must be understood, he suggests, as constituted by age rather than transition: "… age criteria still provide the principal means through which [young people's] lives are organized into something approaching a coherent and meaningful category. It is on the basis of their age, for example, that young people are assigned to those institutions that we have come to recognize as characteristic of youth" (Mizen, 2004: 9). Thus, it is young people's age that locates them, not some underlying and essential 'transitional' property of their lives. Jones (2009) applies this same argument to all generalised studies of 'youth' and emphasises that as a group, young people are not homogenous, she argues that youth is most usefully conceptualised as an age-related process and this is reiterated by Wyn & White (1998):

> the focus on youth is not on the inherent characteristics of young people themselves, but on the construction of youth through social processes (such as schooling, families or the labour market). Young people engage with these institutions in specific ways, in relation to historical circumstances
> (Wyn & White, 1998, pp.8-9)

This study, while acknowledging these critiques finds use in the metaphor of youth transitions and seeks to explore how, in you women's lives, transitions might impact on embodiment and participation in physical activity.

Contemporary Approaches to Youth Studies

The sociology of youth continues to be a growing area of research (Jenks, 2005). Increasingly popular with contemporary critical approaches seeking to break down constructions of children and young people as passive receivers of socialization and to begin to understand how children and young people can be 'active social agents who, at least at the microlevel, shape the structures and processes around them, and whose social relationships are worthy of study in their own right' (Morrow, 2006: p.130-1). Key ideas such as 'empowerment' and 'participation' are explored in this section with reference to how they are reflected in feminist and 'youth-led' research.

Feminist Youth Research

I have already discussed, in some depth, feminist youth research as it relates to the particular paradigms above, and I shall continue to draw on the work of feminist youth researchers in the next chapter, however it is important to note here the specific contribution that feminist researchers have made to the field of youth studies. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of feminism on all disciplines in the social sciences, including research into young women's lives. As explained in the previous chapter, feminist researchers challenged essentialist and biological understandings of difference by envisioning gender as socially, politically and culturally constructed (Oakley, 1972; Sharpe, 1981). In addition, they sought to challenge previous 'male as norm' research by ensuring that young women were no longer silenced or made invisible in youth research (Griffin, 1993). By placing gender at the centre of research into young women's lives, claims to gender blindness were destroyed (France, 2007). In addition feminist researchers encouraged young women to talk about and explore 'what it means to be a girl' in their own words (Griffin, 1985; Lees, 1986), this represented a radical shift in methodological approaches to youth studies which offered fresh perspectives on social processes at work in young people's lives. While girl's voices were previously silenced, in fact youth voice more generally had been marginalised with preference for adult interpretations of observational methods (France, 2007). This new approach also marked the beginning of an era of research that considered the workings of the private sphere of social life such as friendships, family relationships and sexual relationships (Griffin, 1993). Recent scholarly work in this area has been described as an emerging new field: 'girlhood studies' (Harris, 2004) and is typically qualitative in nature with an emphasis on research outcomes that include the empowerment of young women involved in the studies (Heath et al., 2009). This thesis builds upon previous feminist research and seeks to retain the goals as explained above.

Youth-Led Research

The idea of positioning young people as researchers on youth experience is relatively recent (Delago, 2006) and has sustained a degree of resistance from the academic and 'scientific' community (Smilowitz, 2000; Howard et al., 2002). Supporters of youth-led research argue that allocating decision making roles to young people makes for democratic and empowering research (Fetterman, 2003) that is rich in results and

experiences for both young people and adults involved (Alawy, 2002). Youth-led research takes numerous forms such as 'empowerment evaluation' (Fetterman, 2003), 'collaborative evaluation' (Cousins, Donohue and Bloom, 1996) 'participatory evaluation' and 'community mapping' (Harley, Stebnicki and Rollins, 2000) and '(youth) participatory action research' (Berg, Owens & Schensul, 2002; Morell, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Cahill, 2007), however Delago (2006) outlines five core beliefs upon which most youth-led research is premised:

> 1) Youth have abilities that can be tapped in developing and implementing a research project;
> 2) Youth bring to a research project a unique perspective or voice that cannot but help the process of answering questions about youth;
> 3) Youth are vital stakeholders in the process and outcome of research;
> 4) The knowledge and skills youth acquire through active participation in research can transfer over to other aspects of their lives;
> 5) Youth-led research can help broaden and revitalise an activity that has a reputation as being boring, inconsequential, and of interest to only a small select group of adults (Delago, 2006, p.19)

Critical Youth Studies is the most prevalent field of study cited throughout the literature relating to youth-led research. Critical youth studies purports to:

> go beyond the traditional pathological or patronizing view by asserting that young people have the capacity and agency to analyse their social context, to engage in critical research collectively, and to challenge and resist the forces impeding their possibilities for liberation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008: p.4).

As a tradition it 'acknowledges that resistance can be attained through formal processes in "real" settings, through multi-generational collectives, and sometimes among youth alone' (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008, p.2). Branches of this approach include 'critical youth engagement' (Fox et al., 2010), 'youthtopias' (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008) and 'youth participatory action research' (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Fox et al. (2010) conceptualize critical youth engagement as 'the intellectual, political, emotional and bodily space shared by three overlapping areas of social justice work with youth: youth leadership, youth organizing, and youth participatory action research' (p.5). They outline five core premises that underpin this kind of work. First, young people as sources of knowledge and power as a direct challenge to previous epistemologies which equated expertise with academia, particularly in recognition of their ability to identify and

explain their social conditions (p.17). Second, 'a critical analysis to facilitate critical consciousness of history, privilege and power…inviting youth to unpack the historic and current role of structural forces that perpetuate inequality' (p.18). Third, youth leadership in partnership with adults with a particular emphasis on young people leading on decision making and organising (p.19). Fourth, Intersectionality with a holistic approach to the analysis and exploration of young people's everyday life and interactions (p.19). And, finally, collective action for social change through acknowledgement of shared experiences of oppression coupled with development of strategies for change (p.20). Akom, Cammarota and Ginwright, (2008) suggest that in order to achieve the conditions of possibility for such work to take place young people require 'new kinds of spaces where resistance and resiliency can be developed through formal (and informal) processes, pedagogical structures, and youth cultural practices' (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008, p.2). They propose that 'Youthtopias' represent viable opportunities for this and define them thus:

> We define Youthtopias as traditional and non-traditional educational spaces where young people depend on one another's skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge, to generate original, multi-textual, youth-driven cultural products that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social justice, and ultimately lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008, p.3).

Such spaces provide a safe haven for young people living in disadvantaged communities to explore their experiences, react to self-identified neighbourhood problems and offer 'an alternative way to conceptualize the production and distribution of social and cultural capital among all youth' (2008, p.9). Further, they present feasible opportunities for research to address youth agency in the production and consumptions of social and cultural capital. In addition, Youthtopias can be utilised to broaden 'understanding of the innovative ways young people are forming social critiques and envisioning new democratic possibilities' (p.10), therefore making space for critical consciousness, collective responses to repressive conditions in their home environment and intergenerational community action. This differs from other approaches to youth studies that 'often fail to recognize both individual and collective agency, or how social networks ultimately foster critical consciousness' (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008, p.11). Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright,

(2008) identify some of the limits of a Youthtopian framework by cautioning that despite careful attempts to 'empower' or 'give voice' to young people, often important power differentials appear through the process of interpretation, representation and distribution of young people's views.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is another approach that strives for these types of research goals and is defined as

> a research methodology in which young people study their own social contexts to understand how to improve conditions… As a collaborative approach that breaks down the barriers between the researcher and the researched, and values community members as equitable partners in the research enterprise (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008, pp.4-5)

YPAR approaches are underpinned by three interrelated elements: 'participation, research, and action' (Minkler, 2004, p.685) and have been reported to empower young people in education (Morell, 2008) and community settings (Cahill, 2007). My study reflects a similar approach and draws heavily on the YPAR model, however, my work incorporates both a poststructuralist lens and a desire to acknowledge the gendered nature of my project, this has led me to define my approach as feminist participatory action research (FPAR), this will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. It is important to situate these approaches within theoretical critique . Youth-led approaches rely heavily upon the concepts of 'empowerment' and 'participation', therefore a poststructuralist critique of these terms, in relation to young people, will be explored now.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a term that emerged in the 1970s and is rooted in radical and revolutionary approaches to work delivered by social professionals and researchers, however it is increasingly utilised in consumerist, managerialist and liberal discourses (Quinn and Davies, 1999). Scholars argue that this is possible due to the illusive and imprecise nature of the concept, which makes it prone to redefinition, adaptation and abuse (Adams, 2003; Thompson, 2007). For this reason some researchers seek to avoid providing definitions altogether (Parsloe, 1996). However, it is essential to attempt to create a working framework for this study and therefore the following

definition is cautiously outlined for use:

> Empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterised as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1994, p.380)

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that 'empowerment is a subjectively experienced process of developing people's capacities to control their lives' (Dominelli, 2005, p.44). Critics of empowerment models claim that professionals seeking to confer empowerment upon their client groups may in fact, act as agents of social control and dominance (Gillman, 1996, p. 108). Gillman (1996) states that 'it is possible to view empowerment as a more subtle refinement of domination, cloaked in the respectability of liberatory discourse' (p. 113). A more damning critique comes from Gomm (1993) who states that 'those people who say they are in the business of empowering rarely seem to be giving up their own power; they are usually giving up someone else's and they may actually be increasing their own' (p.137). Lather (1991) emphasises the need to avoid regarding empowerment as something transmitted to oppressed individuals by powerful others by conceptualising empowerment as individual and collective approaches to analysis of the roots of powerlessness and taking actions to change this.

These critiques reveal that the concept of empowerment can be problematic when it is not critically applied. To align this element of the project with my post-structural approach it is necessary to apply poststructuralist analyses to the concept of empowerment. At first glance it would appear that the notion of 'empowerment' is incompatible with a post-structural paradigm, this is true in the sense that many conceptualisations of empowerment rely on modernist conceptions of power as something one either does or does not possess (Payne, 2005). For example, modernist scholars such as Paulo Freire (1970) argue that an appropriate education can empower people to grow to reach their full human potential and be free. This position has largely been regarded as a fit with the youth work profession, with workers seen to be empowering oppressed groups of young people. However, many theorists are now distrustful about the potential for human liberty and equality through such modernist

approaches (Parton, 2000; Leonard, 2001). To view youth workers as 'empowerers' ignores the manifold roles and obligations of youth workers which could often see them deconstructed as agents of social control (White 1990).

Many social researchers advocate the use of poststructuralist ideas as a positive approach to unpacking empowerment in research, and in particular through a Foucauldian envisioning of power (Wendt, & Saymour, 2010; Lennie, Hatcher & Morgan, 2003; Fitzsimons, Hope, Cooper & Russell, 2011). Social work scholars Wendt & Seymour (2010) argue that empowerment models can be usefully applied if researchers maintain a poststructuralist lens and are cautious to avoid assumptions of equality by examining potential relations of power (p.678). They frame their analyses by adopting a Foucaldian understanding of 'power'. In contrast to modernist understandings of power, Foucault regarded power as mobile and modifiable and therefore reversible and unstable (Foucault, 1994a). Therefore, Foucault challenges the dichotomy of people as 'powerful' or 'powerless', instead power is seen as many-sided and flowing and as such, there are many opportunities for selection and resistance. If power is not regarded as fixed, it is no longer possible to view young people or research participants as being entirely powerless and in need of 'empowerment' from youth workers, researchers or 'expert' others as holders of power. This however does not render inappropriate the intervention of knowledgeable others, but rather requires them to practice reflexivity and self-critique (Foucault, 1994a)

Wendt & Seymour (2010) explain that by applying Foucault's work we are urged to 'be cautious in our claims to 'help' or to 'empower' as without critical reflection our practices can also be associated with the 'will to power' over others, that is, domination can occur' (p.677). They identify poststructuralism as a tool which is helpful for researchers in maintaining this level of reflexivity and outline four ways in which this can be done: 'Firstly, this lens encourages us to see that power is neither good nor bad; rather it is dangerous if we do not think about our power and how we use it' (Wendt & Seymour, 2010, p.677). Secondly, reflexivity can enable workers to situate young people's failure to proceed from perceived acts of empowerment in prescribed ways, as deliberate forms of resistance (Forest, 2000) as opposed to apathy, and therefore avoid reverting to the individualist stance referred to in the

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sections above. Thirdly by taking Foucault's notion of power, it is essential to acknowledge that power is a fluid and fluctuating entity and therefore, if we perceive ourselves to have empowered an individual in a particular circumstance, the balance of power is inevitably altered by changes in space, time and discourse, and so perceived acts of empowerment may manifest in multiple and varying exercises of power. Therefore 'poststructuralist ideas urge us to examine exercises of power in our relationships even if it is the mundane and routine interactions or it is the explicit and formal exercise of authority and control' (Wendt & Seymour, 2010, p.678). Finally 'Foucault argues that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free (1994a, p. 34). Poststructuralist ideas therefore challenge the notion of empowerment or giving power when people have no or limited freedom. By using this lens you are asked to really think about how free the people that we work with are' (p.679). In summary, Wendt & Seymour argue that 'poststructuralist thinking complements ideas of power inherent in empowerment theory by encouraging reflexivity and deconstruction of discursive practices' (2010, p.671). Chapter six in this thesis covers an evaluation of the participatory projects carried out with the young women and includes attention to researcher reflexivity and the nuances of (dis)empowerment as they were experienced during this research.

Participation

The concept of participation is closely linked to the notion of empowerment and these terms are often discussed interchangeably in youth research. Participation may be defined as providing the right opportunities for young people to access power and use it in a democratic and responsible manner. Jeffs and Smith (1999) suggest that the purpose of youth work or informal education is to foster democracy through conversation and learning. Youth participation can be understood as set within a rights framework and as such, youth participation can be positioned as synonymous with ideas of citizenship, which in turn relates to perceptions of competence. While adults are generally not required to prove competence in order to exercise their rights to citizenship (for example voting in elections) young people must manage the burden of proof of possessing adequate competence in grasping and communicating citizenship responsibly in order to be taken seriously (Neale, 2004). This is primarily due to understandings of developmental processes associated with fixed age thresholds (as discussed previously), where age eighteen is constructed as an artificial

boundary to adulthood.

Current understandings of participation stem from Arnstein's (1969) typology of citizen participation which shows eight levels of participation, arranged in a ladder formation, outlining varying types of participation ranging from 'non-participation' to 'citizen control'. Roger Hart (1992) adapted this typology and re-envisioned it with a focus on young people's participation (See Figure 1). The bottom rungs of the ladder represent forms of 'non-participation' often developed by adults to display attempts at authentic involvement, but which in truth are veiled processes of manipulation and tokenism. The rungs higher up the ladder represent increasing degrees of empowerment and genuine influence.
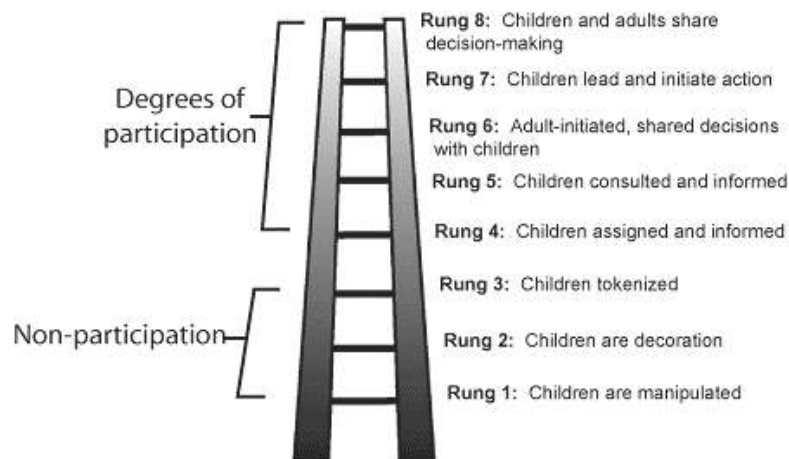
Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Figure 1: Ladder of participation (adapted from Hart, 1992)

Several limitations have been identified with Arnstein's typology which can be equally applied to Hart's ladder of participation, for example the way in which the model creates a relationship between seemingly homogenous groups of the 'powerful' and 'powerless' that are located in opposition to one another (Fitzsimmons et al., 2011). In addition, 'the typology fails to offer any analysis of barriers to community empowerment based on racism, sexism, homophobia and socio-economic disadvantage' (Fitzsimmons et al., 2011, p.49). A further criticism recognizes that lower rugs of the ladder may be unnecessarily categorised as negative and inappropriate since 'the lower rungs of the ladder may not necessarily imply a lack of control: they may offer opportunities to get involved at a level appropriate to needs

and wishes' (Cooper & Hawtin, 1997, p.85). A further model developed by Fletcher (2008) seeks to prescribe appropriate characteristics of work that wishes to incorporate and utilise 'youth voice'. The cycle of youth voice (see figure 2) recommends that workers must: listen in an active and engaged way; validate by providing young people with honest responses rather than humouring or placating; authorise young people's opinions and ideas by providing skills to facilitate powerful, purposeful and rewarding action; act by utilising a variety of approaches including research, planning and celebration; and finally reflect by encouraging young people to assess and analyse their learning (Fletcher, 2008).
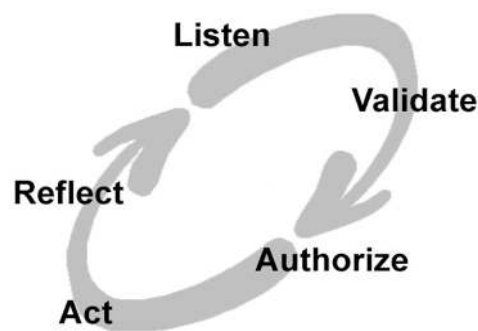
Figure 2: Cycle of Youth Voice by Fletcher, 2008

The terms 'youth participation' and 'youth voice' are represented throughout the youth studies literature as overwhelmingly positive approaches, however some critiques do exist. Bessant argues that youth participation is presented as a technology of citizenship that has the effect of increasing state sponsored regulation of young people. In other words it is a strategy for governing the very people whose problems the state seeks to address – youth at risk and related problem populations. Bessant argues that 'youth participation is part of a response which is invariably directed towards remedial or preventative action by encouraging young people to 're-connect' or become more 'integrated into society' (Bessant, 2003, p.88) and further elaborates:

> One reason for the successful 'discovery' of youth participation rests with the fact it emerged in a context receptive to communitarian inspired reformist language (community building, etc.) and the political desire to make individuals politically active and capable of self-government (Bessant, 2003, p.89).

Bessant uses Foucault's notion of 'governmentality' to suggest that the orthodoxy of youth participation is a way of regulating youth deemed to be at risk. In this way,

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youth participation is constructed as the act of managing young people rather than about democratic renewal. Mannion (2010) builds upon poststructuralist critiques to describe ways in which participation can be reconceptualised and analysed in new ways. He criticises claims by researchers that 'power-free spaces' can be created in order to facilitate youth engagement because power cannot 'easily be redistributed among participants through some technique... Participatory approaches are not innocent levellers; some perspectives are always privileged while others are silenced' (Mannion, 2010, p.336). Instead he advocates that researchers should 'work with a circulating view of power so that new social positionings are made possible for participants as a result of taking part' (Mannion, 2010, p.337). This is in line with earlier discussions on empowerment, which through an understanding of power as 'shared' rather than 'possessed' allows for a more relational approach to conceptualizing participation. Importantly he states that incorporating poststructural critiques means allowing flexibility in interpretation of experiences to allow for the different and diverse ways in which partners in participatory work encounter and value experiences (Mannion, 2010, p.341). In chapter five I further explore the ways in which 'feminist', 'participatory' and 'poststructuralist' approaches to research are not only compatible but in fact can be regarded as complimentary.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the historical progression of approaches to youth study and research with particular emphasis on feminist and poststructuralist critique. Key conceptualisations of youth have been scrutinized, with the result of situating my study within this vast literature. This thesis places particular emphasis on the lived experiences of young women, and mobilises a feminist participatory action research framework. The following chapter builds upon conceptualisations of 'youth' and 'gender' raised in the last two chapters and considers how these relate to youth sport.

Chapter Four: Young Women and Youth Sport

This chapter explores research relating to youth sport and in particular young women's experiences. I begin by exploring prevailing myths around youth sports and refutations that have been made to these by sport sociologists, following this I establish the policy context of youth sport in the UK. The rest of the chapter examines research that explores young women's experiences of sport, reasons for higher drop out rates among young women and possible solutions.

Youth Sport: Dispelling Some Myths

A number of myths exist in public discourse surrounding youth sport such as the notion that participation in sport is implicitly good, healthy and character building, and the fear that young people's participation rates in youth sport have decreased in comparison to previous generations. These myths are widely dismissed by sport sociologists, however they continue to form part of the common sense assumptions of many, including policy makers. In this section, I will examine these myths and the evidence that refutes them.

Sport Participation is Implicitly Healthy

The benefits of participation in youth sport have been investigated and promoted in depth, and as such, 'common sense' understandings surrounding the 'implicit good' of sports participation is a prevailing public discourse. Most often benefits of sports participation are associated with improved health and well being, such as reduction in the risk of chronic diseases (Elrichman, Kerbey & James, 2002; Chief Medical Officer, 2004); reduced risk of obesity and related health implications (Biddle, Gorely & Stensel, 2004; Aarnio et al., 2002; Tacon, 2008; Ekeland et al., 2005); improved mental health (Biddle & Mutrie, 2001; Fox, 1999; Tacon, 2008; Galloway et al., 2006); and increased self esteem (Fox, 2000). However, upon closer examination, within such arguments, sport is presented as a homogenous category and therefore potential benefits are often conflated with those benefits more associated with exercise and physical activity (Coakley, 2007). This view further fails to account for complex and nuanced differences in experiences of sport. Sport sociologists highlight the importance of recognising that not *all* benefits are accrued from *all* sports

participation, and caution that such common sense expectations for the potential outcomes of sport must be addressed more critically (Ewing, Gano-overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002; Coakley, 2002). For example, one common sense notion is that sports participation is implicitly 'healthy'. This is contested by sport sociologists, who note that participation in sport, particularly at elite level, often results in injury and even emotional and psychological anguish (Coakley, 2007). Young people involved in elite sports have been reported to suffer physical and sexual abuse (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002), emotional abuse (Gervis, 2004), financial burden (Kay, 2002) and young athletes are often unable to access normal social situations due to gruelling training regimes (Donnelly, 2000). Johnsgard (1999) further explains that engaging in sport or exercise is likely to have little positive effect on self-esteem if this is absent from other areas of the young persons life such as education or employment. In addition, an over-emphasis on competition and winning gives way to use of performance enhancing drugs, encourages young athletes to 'play through pain', triggers eating disorders and compulsive over exercising, as well as creating restrictions on development in other areas of life (Eitzen, 1999; Gatz et al., 2002). Research data supporting the intrinsic value of sport are therefore largely inconsistent with the real life experiences of young athletes (Coalter, 2001).

Participating in Sport Builds Character

A further common sense assumption is that sports participation 'builds character' in young people. A key response to this by sociologists states: 'Sport does not build character, it builds characters' (Ogliuvie & Tutko, 1971 cited in Gatz et al, 2002) which suggests that engagement in sport does not automatically create positive behaviour change in young people (Coakley, 2001). Instead sport sociologists now 'view sports as sites for socialisation experiences rather than as causes for specific socialisation outcomes' Coakley (2007, p.9). Assuming this stance, it is possible for undesirable behaviours to be learned and reproduced through sports, particularly where values of competition and 'winning at all costs' are promoted. This calls into question recent, popular initiatives that were designed with the aim of reducing criminal, violent and deviant behaviour in young people, through sports programmes (such as 'Splash' operated by the Youth Justice Board or 'Positive Futures' a partnership between Sport England, the Football Foundation, the Home Office Drugs Unit and the Youth Justice Board). Young people that experience anger and

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aggression will not necessarily benefit from sports centred interventions and those focussed on competition and winning may even reinforce existing attitudes to violence (Nichols, 2007). Beyond acting as a diversionary measure, there is little evidence to support the theory that engagement in sport by itself will affect positive behaviour change (Morris, Sallybanks, Willis & Makkai, 2003). It is suggested that such programmes can only be successful if they acknowledge the complexity of causes of criminal and anti-social behaviour, and as such, the need for leaders to possess interpersonal and professional skills beyond those of performance-oriented sports coaches (Coalter, 1996). Further, sociologists argue that using sport to tackle such issues is inappropriate because it ignores the root causes of youth crime, which are identified as social inequalities such as poverty, poor education, poor heath and unemployment.

Scholars in this field also argue that there are negative consequences to the potential separation of young people from society through sport. Coakley (2007) explains that sports programmes that separate young people from the rest of the community will have a negative impact. For instance, in some elite sports young people may develop a superiority complex over those less able or talented in their sport and 'deviance and violence may be directed at those 'outsiders' who are seen as undeserving of their respect' (Coakley, 2007, p.24). Coakley (2002) further suggests that this will always be the case where sports programmes focus on the individual rather than wider society. Studies have reinforced this assertion, and shown that young male sports cultures often embrace sexism, homophobia, and violence, and this goes largely unchallenged by the coaches (Benedict, 1997; Fine, 1987). The sport media too works to perpetuate undesirable behaviours, and often acts of violence and aggression shown on television during sport rarely show the consequences. This is significant when we consider that many young people often hold sports stars in high esteem and know more about the lives of sports personalities than people like politicians that make decisions about their lives (Coakley, 2007).

Hughes and Coakley (1991) developed a ground breaking theory to critique deviant behaviours they perceive to be endemic to sports cultures. Their notion of 'positive deviance' examines the ways in which groups and individuals within traditional sports cultures come to accept particular norms and values, which may otherwise be

regarded as undesirable, they call this a 'sports ethic'. The sports ethic comprises four qualities which correspond with legitimate athleticism: 'sacrifice for 'The Game'; seeking distinction; taking risks and challenging limits' (Hughes and Coakley, 1991, p. 363). Hughes and Coakley suggest that this underpinning sport ethic leads athletes to adopt a 'winning at all costs' attitude which in turn leads to deviant behaviours, as suggested above, such as drug use and violence. In summary, it is widely believed by sports scholars that positive outcomes do not automatically arise from sport. Consequently, many scholars argue that it is necessary to have responsible adults, with clear aims and methods for teaching positive outcomes alongside sports programmes (Coakley, 2007; Danish, 2002). As such, there is a need for research that incorporates these positive outcomes. However, the issue of adult control of youth sport is also a contested topic and this is addressed later in this chapter.

Youth Participation in Sport is Decreasing

There is a commonly held belief that soaring child and youth obesity rates can be understood as a direct consequence of dwindling participation in youth sport (Goran & Treuth, 2001). However, numerous studies disprove this, there is evidence to suggest that young people today participate in levels of aerobic fitness activity equal to that of previous generations (Cavill, Biddle & Sallis, 2001; Sallis et al., 1992) and that sport has in fact increased in popularity among young people in recent years (Sport England, 2000). Government funded surveys by Sport England found that 'there are now fewer young people spending less than one hour, or no time, in a week doing sports and exercise than was the case in 1994' (Sport England, 2003, p.58). In addition, there has been an increase in the number of sports and physical activities available to young people within school PE (SCW, 2003; Sport England, 2003; TNS, 2007), which correlates with an improvement in participation levels of young people aged 11-16 years (TNS, 2007).

While overall participation rates have remained level, it is more important to note that as such, participation rates of particular groups have remained low, and drop out rates for particular age groups have remained high. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that young people's participation in sport continues to be mediated by social divisions such as gender, social class, ethnicity and ability (Green et al., 2005). This will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter. In addition, age, in particular

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school leaving age, has a significant bearing on sports participation. Fifty years ago, the Wolfenden Commission identified the 'Wolfenden Gap' which highlighted the sharp drop off rate of sports participation among young people of school leaving age. Although many initiatives have sought to plug the gap in sports opportunities for young people outside of compulsory education, a recent conference highlighted that this drop off has remained stable over the last fifty years and this continues to be a concern raised by government: 'This "Wolfenden Gap" still has not been bridged: 70% of our young people cease participating when they leave school, compared with 30% in France' (SCCMS, 2005).

Despite this evidence, the perception of sport as a cure-all for health and character development coupled with the fear of a reduction in participation, means that youth sport has been highlighted as a policy priority since the inauguration of the 'New Labour' government in 1997 and continues to be a concern today.

Youth Sport Policy in the UK

The election of Blair's 'New Labour' government in 1997 saw the appointment of the new Department for Media, Culture and Sport, representing the first time that the word 'sport' appeared in the title of a governmental department (Bloyce & Smith, 2010). This was accompanied by a shift in focus from the previous Conservative governments focus on elite sport and performance in international competitions, to a more inclusive approach to sport, typified by the policy '*A Sporting Future for All*' (DCMS, 2000). Shaped by New Labour's 'Third Way' philosophy, this placed emphasis on accountability, modernizing, 'joined-up thinking' and reform (Green, 2004). In contrast to Conservative policies, '*A Sporting Future for All*' indicated that local authorities would play a central role in the delivery of sport development work that would promote social goals (DCMS, 2000) through 'inter-agency working and partnerships for the delivery of both sports development objectives and broader community regeneration benefits' (Houlihan & White, 2002, p.111). This document also introduced the principle of specialist sports colleges and pledged to improve local authority sport facilities. These policies were further developed in Labour's subsequent policy: '*Game Plan: A Strategy for Delivering Government's Sport and Physical Activity Objectives*' (DCMS, 2002) which highlighted the links between sport, health, social inclusion, and education. It promoted the dual focus on

community and health outcomes (at a local level) and elite sport, school sport and youth sport (at a national level through national governing bodies).   The policy further articulated the need for 'simplifying the fragmented funding arrangements' for sport (Green, 2004). This policy coincided with the initiation of the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) scheme, which aimed to effect a wholesale improvement in the school sport system and improved sport opportunities at school. The social inclusion agenda set out in Labour's two policies served as a catalyst for further work by Sport England, highlighting the potential of sport to achieve desired social outcomes for young people such as: community regeneration, improved educational attainment, reductions in offending behaviour and drug use, community cohesion and health promotion, as well as for developing interpersonal skills and employability (Sport England, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2008e, 2008f). However, despite the abundance of such reports and their purported outcomes, the complex nature of issues such as social inclusion mean that it is impossible to evaluate to a degree of certainty the effectiveness of sport to achieve such goals (Coalter, 2007).

After the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were awarded to London in December 2007, Sport England was appointed by the DCMS to carry out a review of community sport and this resulted in the publication of the '*Sport England Strategy 2008-2011*' (Sport England 2008a). This document emphasized a shift towards greater responsibilities and accountability for National Governing bodies as 'primary drivers to deliver the new strategy for community sport' and achieving outcomes (Sport England, 2008a, p.13). Alongside this, the DCMS released the publication '*Playing to Win*' (DCMS, 2008a), which was outlined as 'a plan to get more people taking up sport simply for the love of sport; to expand the pool of talented English sportsmen and women, and to break records, win medals and win tournaments for this country' (DCMS, 2008a, Preface). It set out a specific target to 'engage a million more people in regular sport participation' by 2013 (DCMS, 2008a, p.8). It is at this point that policy rhetoric began to reveal a consideration for the Olympic 'legacy' and this was reflected by regional and national strategies such as the *'London 2012 Olympic Legacy Action Plan'* (DCMS, 2008b).

The election of the Conservative- Liberal coalition government coincided with the build-up towards the London 2012 Olympic Games, and the policy focus for sport reflects this. While attention to many of the previous government's objectives remained, the issue of the Olympic 'legacy' became pivotal in the formation of policy. The period represented an explosion in interest in the development, promotion and provision of youth sport, particularly with a view to utilizing the Games as a springboard for maximising engagement in sport. The DCMS issued a new youth sport strategy '*Creating a Sporting Habit for Life*' (January, 2012) which seeks to capitalise on the legacy of London 2012 to inspire people to take part in sports, not just in the short term aftermath of the Games, but for the rest of their lives. It is specifically intended to: 'raise the proportion of 14-25 year olds who play sport and to establish a lasting network of links between schools and sports clubs in local communities so that we keep young people playing sport up to and beyond the age of 25' (DCMS, 2012, p.4). This goal is to be achieved, in partnership with Sport England, through a set of particular interventions such as 'building a lasting legacy of competitive sport in schools' which will be delivered by the adoption of 'The School Games', and continuing to specify PE as a compulsory subject, as well as the application of lottery, public and private funding to improve school sports opportunities. In addition, 'improving links between schools and community sports clubs', with the intention to strengthen school-club partnerships and guarantee every school at least one link to a local club. Another target is 'working with the sports governing bodies: focusing on youth' by directing such bodies to allocate 60% of their funding towards encouraging 'sport as a habit for life' and by withdrawing funding from underperforming bodies. There is an explicit commitment to 'investing in facilities' by committing a further £160m funding for upgrading of facilities. Finally, an expectation to engage 'communities and the voluntary sector' by providing extensive funding to community and voluntary groups to grow youth sport initiatives. It is of course too early to speculate as to the potential success of this policy. Finally, in a recent radio broadcast interview, Prime Minister David Cameron offered an indication of proposals to reform youth sport approaches, particularly in the school context when he said:

> If we want to have a great sporting legacy for our children - and I do - we have got to have an answer that brings the whole of society together to crack this, more competition, more competitiveness, more getting rid of the idea all-must-win prizes and you can't have competitive sports days…We need a big cultural change - a cultural change in favour of competitive sports. That's what I think really matters (David Cameron, LBC 97.3 FM, 08.08.2012).

It is imperative that more research is conducted that explores the lived experiences of young people, in particular young women in relation to sport to examine how this relates to plans for policy. There is especially a need to explore 'non-sporty' young people and the kinds of physical activity opportunities that might appeal to them.

Approaches to Youth Sport

One of the key concerns highlighted regarding youth sport is the way that agendas are set for physical education and organised sports (Jones & Armour, 2000). Penney & Evans, (1997) argue that the needs of the economy rather than interests of children and teachers, are represented in the shaping of the national curriculum and, in particular, aspects of citizenship that are promoted. One aspect of this citizenship training is the privileging of ability and winning over participation (Coakley, 2007). Cumming, (1998) believes that more young people would participate in sport if the focus were on recreation rather than competition and elitism. Further, Ewing & Danish (2002) consider excessive concern for winning as limiting to participation opportunities (Ewing & Seedfeldt 2002). Other academics believe that competition not only limits participation, but also teaches undesirable attitudes to young people. Fernandez-Balboa (2000) highlights the risks associated with ignoring this:

> Educators, parents and coaches must be aware of the fact that, by instilling notions of competition and team membership unproblematically, without balancing their lessons with words of caution and tolerance, they may be planting the seeds of human suffering, hatred, and prejudice in the minds of children (Fernandez-Balboa, 2000, p.138).

In an attempt to combat the potentially damaging effects of competitive sports, 'alternative' or 'extreme' sports developed (Anderson & Meyer, 1988, cited in Gatz et al, 2002). These sports, (such as skate boarding, climbing, surfing, and free running) tended to include activity that focused on skills improvement and a positive and sharing peer culture rather than competition, and were used as a site for expressing

resistance to adult controlled spaces. However, as these sports have become more popular they have become more competitive and have even developed consumer appeal (Rhinehart, 2000). Other reported problems associated with alternative or extreme sports are that they are often sexist and tend to have a high injury rate (Coakley, 2007). Therefore there is a need for research into new forms of alternative participation.

An important area of debate in youth sports is the involvement of adults. The ways in which children experience adult-led, organized sports vary from those experienced during informal games and sports that they create and lead themselves. Both experiences provide opportunities for significant learning, and neither approach is free from problems. However, there is a tendency to overrate the importance of formal sports and underrate the value of informal games (Schultz, 1999). In a classic study, Deveraux (1976a) argued that 'informal games represent an important environment in which children learn about social interaction and appropriate social behaviour- an environment that is corrupted when taken over by adults' (Deveraux, 1976a, cited in Jones & Armour, 2000, p.167). Penney (2000) describes how adult involvement in school sport can be both positive and negative since 'teachers play a central role in either reinforcing and legitimating, or alternatively, contesting and challenging, particular social and political agendas that are inherent in curricula' (Penney, 2000, p.63). In his chapter on '*Youth Sport in Canada'*, Donnelly (2000) states that often youth sports are run in the same way as adult sports, thus inheriting the problems of adult sports, which are then exacerbated by the children's involvement. Donnelly also cites research that discusses problems with adult organised youth sports. Smith (1975 cited in Donnelly, 2000, p.168) expressed concerns for children being used to entertain adults; he argues that this results in an emphasis on winning, which creates a division between winners and losers (leading to a need for young people to be in the 'right group'). In addition, this approach means a necessity for adult control and adult determined and regulated rules for the activity to be perceived as of 'real value'. Howell & Howell (1969 cited in Donnelly, 2000, p.169) describe concerns related to adult controlled sport such as stress on the child, limitations on social and emotional development, violence in contact sport, overemphasis on winning and limited playing time or exclusion from teams for lack of size or skill. They argue that these types of concerns result in many young people dropping out. Donnelly (2000, p.172) offers

two criticisms of adult organised youth sports, firstly he criticises the 'ultra-conservative/fascistic nature of organised sport', which leaves no joy of participation even for children, and secondly, he argues that 'if there are positive benefits from sport they should be available to all children' and the competitive element, described above, works in contrast to this.

Coakley (2002, 2007) has written extensively on the differences between adult organised or formal sports, which encourage playing positions, rules and rule enforcement; and informal sports, which tend to provide personal involvement, close scores, action and opportunities to reaffirm friendships.   He concludes that 'each experience makes different contributions to the lives of children, and neither is without problems. However, people have traditionally overrated the contributions of participation in formal sports' (Coakley, 2007). Many experts in child development have reiterated the benefits of play and informal games in the lives of children and young people, particularly for developing creativity decision making skills and conflict resolution (Lauman, 2006; Sternheimer, 2006; Elkind, 2008;). In addition to this, research demonstrates a correlation between experience of informal games and drop out rates, with young people regularly participating in informal games and sports demonstrating lower dropout rates than those young people that specialize from an early age (Weirsma, 2000; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Kirk, 2005). Despite this, formal sports tend to be viewed by many as more worthwhile because they are 'culturally valued', 'highly visible', and structured in such a way that it is possible to quantify achievement in a way that it is understandable to others (Coakley, 2006).

Coakley (2002) describes how young people's experiences in adult organised sport can differ in relation to social class by splitting these ideas into two 'dreams'. The first, the 'social control and deficit-reduction' dream, is used primarily for young people (predominantly young men) of a lower socioeconomic class, and focuses on controlling perceived deviant behaviour, reducing undesirable attitudes and promoting conformity and respect for authority. In contrast, the 'social opportunity and privilege-promotion' dream, more often used with young people of a higher socioeconomic class, unlike the former, focuses on building strengths such as leadership and initiative rather than reducing deficits. Coakley criticises both stances because they do not

focus on the need for social justice or on rebuilding strong community-based social institutions, or on re-establishing the resource base of the communities where these young people live, or on politicizing and empowering these young people to be effective change agents working on behalf of their communities.' (Coakley, 2002, p.16)

Donnelly (2000) echoes this idea by stating that sport is used for social control purposes and is based on the concept of 'youth as a problem'. He also reminds us that there is often an element of gender exclusivity with regard to such types of character building in sport (Donnelly, 2000). It is the intention of this thesis to develop understandings of young people's engagement in sport in opposition to these types of assumptions. Coakley (2007) advocates 'hybrid sports', organised sports in which young people are encouraged to take control, as a more balanced and positive alternative. Through participation in hybrid sports young people can develop the skills available through engagement with informal sports, with additional help and assistance where necessary from appropriately trained adults. In this role, adults would focus less on rules and position playing and more on safety and promotion of positive values (Coakley, 2002). He describes the process of such an approach in later work, outlining requirements for adults to employ tact and patience, which will be rewarded by 'the creativity and compassion shown by many children as they play these games' (Coakley, 2011, p.10).

Several further suggestions have been made regarding the improvement of youth sports. Coakley's (2002) ideas of 'alternative dreams' are

informed by a quest for community development rather than by a quest for individual achievement, and dreams based on concerns for justice rather than on concerns only about individual freedom and choice, dreams that visualize young people growing into political and cultural change agents, not just young people who are aspiring stockbrokers and bank presidents. They would be dreams in which progress is defined in terms of maximising the public good, not maximising only individual and corporate bottom lines (Coakley, 2002, p.17-18).

There is evidence that scholars and sports practitioners have attempted to adopt this kind of approach to youth sport. Lawson (2005) for example, developed a 'social

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work model' approach to sport, exercise and physical education, which focuses on identifying and meeting the needs of specific communities, to ensure maximum social benefit and sustainability. He suggests that sports programmes seeking to empower participants should not strive to achieve individual goals but rather regard such work as a social and collective activity. Lawson (2005) further states that achieving empowerment through physical activity is not a given and must be carefully reflected upon in the planning stage, 'if you want SEPE [Sport, Exercise and Physical Education] professionals and their programs and practices to empower people and contribute to community development, you'll have to design them accordingly' (p.158). Lawson argues that such design can facilitate practices, which empower young people through collaboration, power sharing and civic engagement. In addition, it is therefore important for sports programmes to be carefully planned to enable young people to develop life skills that can be transferred to other aspects of life (Danish, 2002), and to ensure that programmes produce outcomes that are appropriate to the social context in which they are operating (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). This is not always straightforward, Clarke (2003) documents an unsuccessful sports project that, through lack of local consultation, failed to account for and overcome barriers experienced by intended participants. However successful examples also exist, Wilson and White (2003) examine the ways that young people who were provided with greater levels of freedom and responsibility in a 'drop in' recreation centre 'colonised the social space', negotiated with adult leaders, and developed their own 'unofficial' peer culture that maintained 'order and relative 'peace'' (p. 171). There is a need for more research that adopts a collaborative approach to youth sports interventions and builds upon these previous examples to position young people as decision makers and leaders of good practice.

Weller (2006) mobilises the concept of social capital to examine ways in which adults can work creatively with young people to facilitate their ability to create and develop sporting opportunities that are relevant to them. She highlights the potential of such projects to place young people's sense of ownership and community involvement at the forefront. She draws upon a case study of young people that raised money to renovate their local skate park. To achieve this the young people drew on stocks of social and cultural capital. The conclusions of this research underline the possibilities for adults working alongside young people to encourage, support, and assist the

capitalisation of social capital. Weller further highlights the significance of developing projects designed to engage young people in ways that emphasise the sharing of knowledge, resources and networks. It seems therefore, that youth work offers a useful framework from which to approach youth sport programmes. Youth work values such as voluntarism and choice (Jeffs & Smith, 2010) offer fertile ground for developing youth led sports initiatives. Therefore, it is possible that combining youth work and sport would offer an environment conducive to both informal learning and positive experiences in sport. However, as yet, little research exists that explores this possibility. It is hoped, that this thesis will go some way towards plugging this gap in research.

Barriers to Sport for Young Women

Holt (1989) suggested that 'the history of sport in modern Britain is a history of men' (cited in Jones & Armour, 2000: p.125). Given that facilities provided for young women in schools and other settings are often poor, there exists an underlying assumption that 'girls are not expected to take sports seriously' (Coakley & White, 1992: p.27). It is, therefore, unsurprising that clear gender differences have been identified in relation to regular involvement in physical activity. Young women are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in physical activity in and out of school, and are more likely to be critical of physical education (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000; Kimm, Glynn, Kriska, Barton, Kronsberg, Daniels, 2002; Sallis, 1993; Sherar et al., 2007; Trost & Pate, 1999; Olds et al., 2004; USDHHS, 1996). Experiences of school sport have been shown to have a negative effect on the attitudes of children and young people towards sport and exercise (Coakley and White, 1992) and this is echoed by research finding that only 27% of girls believe that it is important for girls to be good at sport (Sportscotland, 2006). There is a tendency for secondary age girls to view sports participation in a restrictive manner, and as an activity for school rather than for their own recreational purposes (Coakley and White, 1992).

Inequality and Female Participation

It should be acknowledged that many girls and women face 'double barriers' to sports participation for example, gender and race, social class or disability and in these cases a layering of inequalities further impacts access to physical activity (WSFF, July,

2008 Anderson, 2007). Donnelly (1996: p.68) reminds us that 'poverty represents a real class barrier to participation in sport'. Girls from families with lower family income and parental education usually have lower levels of participation in physical activity (Sportscotland, 2006). Girls cited the support of parents in encouraging sport and physical activity (e.g. providing transport, paying for activities or acting as role-models) as important in maintaining participation (Sportscotland, 2006). The cost of public transport has been identified as a problem and, for many girls, the lack of late buses. Young women have identified difficulties in getting to facilities, particularly if they live in a rural or unsafe areas (Sportscotland, 2006). Some respondents reported that activities themselves were too expensive and this hindered participation. It was not simply the cost of the activity itself, but additional related expenses such as travel, kit or equipment (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). Sport sociologists state, time and again, that 'poverty represents a real class barrier to participation in sport' (Jones & Armour, 2002, p.68). Lack of financial assistance can impede young people's participation in sport at all levels. High sports related costs coupled with the necessity for personal introduction to certain sports, creates a class hierarchy within the sporting world (Armour, 2000). Research shows that class is the issue reported to have the most impact on access to and experiences of sport and is most often identified in addition to other forms of inequality such as race or gender (Laker, 2000; Gatz, Messner, & Ball-Rokeach. 2002).

Grimes & French, (1987), stress the 'double barrier' to disabled women's participation in sports and champion the role of school and community programs in providing equal opportunities for disabled females. They argue that it is important for initiatives to address potential emotional and psychological problems experienced by many disabled women and girls, and meet the need for visible role models as a valuable source of encouragement. They argue that educational institutions should include training strategies for coaches in the area of disabled sport and stress that professionals in physical education, recreation, and dance can take a leading role in removing barriers to participation. WSFF (2008) have reported widely on barriers to women and girls' participation in sport and found that young women with disabilities are less likely than disabled young men to participate in sport out of school hours or in organised sports activities. They also reveal that 16% less women with disabilities take part in activity than men with disabilities. Attitudes and assumptions about

people with disabilities can make sport seem even more inaccessible for example, the assumption that removing physical barriers will automatically increase participation is damaging, more significant barriers are those of discriminatory attitudes, and a lack of training and awareness (WSFF, 2007).

Rowe & Champion (2000) outline that although many people mistakenly believe that different ethnic groups share similar experiences, differences between Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) groups are significant. Rates of participation in sport amongst different ethnic minorities vary, on average, Black Caribbean (39%), Indian (39%), Pakistani (31%) and Bangladeshi (30%) populations have rates of participation in sport below the national average (46%). Only the 'Black Other' group (60%) has participation rates higher than that found in the population as a whole, and the gap between men and women's participation in sport is greater amongst some minority ethnic groups than it is in the population as a whole. A consultancy report for the BME Sports Network East (2005) supports these findings and identifies a range of factors that appear to act as barriers to wider BME participation. These include: poverty and deprivation, a lack of role models, a lack of celebration of BME achievement in sport, the existence of a largely White sporting establishment, incidences of racism that were not adequately addressed and the advertised commitment versus lack of action perceived on the part of national and local sports organisations.

WSFF (2007) point out that attitudes to women and girls' bodies differ in different cultures and religions. For example, some Muslim girls and women practice Islamic law which prevents them appearing dressed in inappropriate attire in front of men. This is just one of the factors which results in lower than average participation rates for BME girls and women. For example, swimming pools which don't allow women to wear T-shirts over their swimming costumes, and clubs that insist members wear tight-fitting and/or revealing uniforms can exclude those who follow the Muslim faith as well as those who are self-conscious of their bodies. Sporting Equals, (2009) collated a '*Systematic Review of the Literature on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Sport and Physical Recreation*' and concluded that there must be more research to explore the sport experiences of BME girls and young women. One such research project, conducted by Lowrey and Kay (2005) explored how best to

negotiate inclusive practice with Bangladeshi girls. The project sought to link sports participation with educational goals and was driven by strategies for ensuring sensitivity to community interests and beliefs. This approach utilised 'community insiders' in the recruitment and delivery of activities alongside ongoing consultation with the families of the participants to bolster support for the programme.

In terms of sexual orientation, Sport England (2008g) recognize that 'the process of implementing effective policies to ensure LGBT people are not subject to discrimination and harassment in a sports context has been hampered by two factors: social attitudes and lack of information' (p.2). Social attitudes include heteronormativity, discrimination, homophobia and a failure to recognize problems experienced by LGBT sports participants. Information gaps concern a paucity of academic literature surrounding this issue, for example patterns of homophobic incidents in sport or reports on levels of sports participation by LGBT people (Sport England, 2008g). As a result of these findings, Sport England commissioned a literature review on sexual orientation and sport which argued that sport may represent an opportunity to introduce a culture of empathy and understanding among young people on this issue:

> 'Young people are seen as key to effecting change because they often express more enlightened attitudes to diversity than older generations. Sport can be a powerful influence both on young people's own personal development and on their attitudes to others, so young people's openness to diversity is likely to continue even after their personal involvement in sport ceases' (Sport England, 2008g).

Sport is often identified as a site of reproduction for hegemonic values such as discourses of masculinity and femininity, in which men are defined as natural athletes while opposing images are asserted for women (Birrell, 2000). This is problematic for those young women that dare to step outside the norm in relation to femininity, image, the body and sporting ability. Often homophobic bullying is used to discourage such young women, by disparaging their appearance and describing them as 'unnatural' women (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). This kind of carefully nuanced homophobia is detrimental to the sporting participation and experiences of both heterosexual young women and young lesbians.

Since one of my own research groups was a young mothers group, I attempted to seek out literature relevant to young mothers and sport. While there have been a number of studies that explore the experiences of mothers with young children (Brown, Lee, Mishra, & Bauman, 2000; Brown, 2001; Miller & Brown, 2005) unfortunately there appears to be a significant gap in such literature excepting a small study commissioned by the Women's Sport & Fitness Foundation (2005) into socially excluded young mothers in Tower Hamlets. The study sought to enhance understanding of the barriers that these women face in participating in physical activity, and to identify possible solutions. Researchers conducted discussions with socially disadvantaged mothers of young children from various backgrounds. The research found that this group had limited aspirations in relation to physical activity and for them, becoming a mum signaled considerable changes to lifestyle, in identity and status. They identified that motherhood includes physical changes and induces poorer self-image. In addition, the young mums in the study understood what 'healthy' meant in theory but not necessarily in practice. In relation to their own approach to physical activity they generally tended to focus on short-term, cosmetic benefits of exercise rather than long term health implications (WSFF, 2005).

The young mums in the study identified a number of barriers to exercise and sport. They felt that exercise was 'just not on their radar' and that regular exercise represented an insurmountable challenge. They felt there was a lack of positive role models that they were able to identify with and that cultural and religious barriers further impinged on accessibility of activities. Finally, they articulated that they suffered poor body image and received negative messages about exercise (WSFF, 2005). The young mums suggested a number of solutions for increasing participation, these included reversing the conviction that either 'you're fit or you're not', providing realistic role models and developing programmes with social support that cater for cultural needs. They further suggested emphasising corollary benefits for children and developing activities specifically designed to suit young, socially disadvantaged mum's needs (WSFF, 2005). Despite this study, there has been no research into programmes that seek to address the needs of young mothers or that position young mothers as leaders of physical activity projects.

Lack of Role Models

The issue of role models is a reoccurring theme in literature exploring young women's low participation in sport (Kirkby, 2009; Vescio & Crosswhite, 2002; Vescio et al., 2005). In particular, research highlights the representation of women in sports media as negative and identifies a lack of relatable sporting role models available to young women (WSF, 2004; Lines, 2001).

Sport sociology literature has described the effect of the media on the presentation of sports and the subsequent values that are reproduced. The media contributes to the 'dehumanisation of athletes' and to creating 'the equivalent of war' in (male) sporting arenas such as football or rugby, with the intention of creating drama that can be used for capital gain (Anderson & Meyer, 1988, cited in Gatz et al. 2002). Kennedy (2000) argues such media approaches constitute male athletes through 'hero narratives' specifically embodied by elite male athletes and masculine subjectivity. Hargreaves describes this as 'gendered heroism', and reinforces that the media presentation of female athletes means that they are unable to achieve hero status and they therefore symbolize less powerful role models (Hargreaves, 2000). Hero narratives are typified by muscular bodies disciplined to endure sacrifice, and rely upon a valorisation of aggression and denigration of physical or emotional weakness (Sabo and Jansen, 1998). As a result, 'real sport' (Creedon, 1994) comes to be characterised by a rejection of norms and values traditionally associated with femininity (Wright & Clarke, 1999). Feminist researchers have highlighted the ways in which the sports media, through its construction of images and narratives is actively involved in the process of 'gendering' (Horne et al., 1999). Such processes serve patriarchy by reproducing gender norms:

> The continued under representation of women in sport and the denigration and trivialisation of their sport experience provides strong support for the myth of female passivity and frailty. This myth is manifested in barriers to women's participation in traditionally male activities, perhaps most crucially, in traditionally male occupations (Therberge & Cronk, 1994, p.290)

Numerous research studies have highlighted the under representation of women's sports in the media and the ways in which a lack of coverage renders women's sports invisible in comparison to men (Harris & Clayton, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1998;

Von Der Lippe, 2002). The invisibility of female athletes is examined by Lont (1995) who explains that the paucity of women's sports in the media means that one is more liable to come across a story of a sporting male who lost than a sporting female who won. However, it is not merely the lack of coverage of women's sports that is significant, but rather the contents of such coverage (Bernstein, 2002). Wensig and Bruce (2003) argue that media coverage of women's sport is mediated by 'rules' which include gender marking, infantilization, trivialization, compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity. Gender marking is signified through language by prefacing the name of each sport with the word 'women's', for example 'women's football'. In this way, sport is implicitly coded as male and men's sport is constructed as the norm, while women are inevitably 'othered' (Sabo & Jansen, 1998). Consequently, gender is constructed as central to the understanding of what constitutes legitimate sport, as Kennedy (2000) explains: 'gender appears then not as a discrete element in televisualisation of sport, but as central to the disparate ideological themes around which sports narrative is constructed' (p.61).

The most frequently observed practice of sports media to diminish women's role is the concentration on appropriate femininity and compulsory heterosexuality. While the female sporting body might be viewed as a potential site of resistance to hegemonic masculinity and the gender order, the sports media redresses the patriarchal balance by presenting female athletes in an overly sexualised way (Harris and Clayton, 2002).   Women in sport media are frequently displayed as sex objects, or positioned as wives and mothers (Choi, 2000). Women that are most likely to receive sports coverage are those that are most easily viewed as heterosexually desirable, rather than those with the greatest sporting achievements (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Those women that do not adequately maintain a balance between sporting prowess and heterosexual attractiveness are often subject to ridicule and denigration.

Research considering young women's perceptions of physical activity, found that girls who were most active felt it would be helpful to identify positive female role models in the media. The young women felt this approach may encourage less active girls to question their existing ideas on sport as incompatible with femininity, thereby appreciating the possibility of physically active lifestyles for themselves (Whitehead

& Biddle, 2008). In addition, viewing sports women as role models offers opportunities for aspirations to different types of femininity:

> Famous female athletes who appear in the media may act as important role models for girls in relation to embodiment, as an alternative to models and beauty queens, who are famous only for their appearance (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p.160)

The potential influence of media images is important. Therefore, there is a need for research that involves young women more directly in assessing the impact of media representations of sports women on their perceptions of physical activity.

Young Women and Sport

The professed, uneasy relationship, between adult femininity and physical activity has been highlighted as a significant influence on girls' understandings of their own suitability for sports participation (Cokburn & Clarke, 2002). Traditionally, physical prowess within the context of sport has been strongly associated with masculinity (Hall, 1996, Hargreaves, 1994). Through such a perspective, hegemonic masculinity has become synonymous with sporting success and the ideal sporting body (Messner, 1988) and therefore, sport is perceived as instrumental in the perpetuation of gendered power relations (Connell, 1987, Hall, 1996). Scholars have suggested that girls may struggle to reconcile sports engagement with emphasised femininity or 'to balance active embodiment with a more traditional understanding of femininity, and ultimately they may be pressured into choosing one of these, as there seem to be few possibilities for combining the two' (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p.160).   In a related argument, Cockburn and Clarke (2002) identified the difficulty girls experienced in combining an enthusiasm for sports with the burden of displaying heterosexual femininity. However, despite such struggles, increasing numbers of young women are engaging in physical activity and sports. Bryson argues that 'sport is a powerful institution through which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed and it is through understanding and confronting these processes that we can hope to break this domination' (1994, p.47). As such, scholars have sought to research young women's involvement with sport and their relationships between femininity, embodiment and sport (Hills, 2007) and there is scope for this research to be extended.

Research by Hills (2006) discovered that some girls found it necessary to engage in 'secret consumption' (p.547) of sports, meaning that they hid their sporting interests from their peers. In some cases girls ceased to take part all together because they feared that their friends would criticize their behaviour, or that they would fail to maintain their display of appropriate femininity. While the girls' secret consumption may be viewed positively as a form of subversive practice, Hills identifies that through such practices, the young women 'colluded in the silencing of sports participation that serves to maintain a discourse that masks girls' involvement and interest' (2006, p.548). She mobilizes Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence in her analysis of such practices. 'Symbolic violence' is a social device that 'maintains field disadvantages among low capital social groups' (Guilianotti, 2005, p.160) and according to Bourdieu (2001):

> Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator (Bourdieu, 2001, p.170)

The effectiveness of symbolic violence for Bourdieu is rooted in misrecognition, in the way that those individuals subjected to symbolic violence may not recognize themselves as such and may in fact assume such practices to be inevitable or 'natural' (1998, p.168). In relation to sport symbolic violence operates through gendered understandings of performativity forming ideas in the 'natural order of things' (Beltran-Cerrillo et al., 2012, p.87).

In relation to the girls' 'secret consumption' of sports activities, Hills states:

> Within Bourdieu's (2001) terms, girls' self-repression in relation to physical activity participation constitutes a form of symbolic violence. Constructing a potentially positive corporeal experience as outside the field of feminine peer relations implicates the body in its own subjugation by removing the potential for benefiting from an activity that might prove enjoyable, healthy, and even empowering (Hills, 2006, p.548).

Hunter (2004) also asserts the prevalence of symbolic violence within physical culture and specifically physical education. She discusses symbolic violence as key to the

identification of 'good students' and 'bad students' typified by ability to conform to valued abilities and skills within the field and performances of sporting competence. Jeanes (2005) reports that some girls reach a stage in their sporting competence where these kinds of fears become less significant. In her study, examining girls' involvement in football, she explores the intricate negotiations that young women may undertake in their attempts to reconcile their sporting interests with social and cultural expectations of adult femininity. The study found that girls that played football acknowledged the prevalence of stereotypes associated with features of femininity but, nevertheless, were comfortable identifying as female footballers.

An Australian study of rural young women and their participation in sport and physical activity found that the young women were positively influenced when sports and physical activities were fun, when they involved being with friends, and when they were supported by families and teachers through role modelling and positive feedback (Casey et al., 2009). Therefore, we can see that opportunities do exist for young women to engage in positive experiences of sport. In fact, Flintoff and Scraton (2001) found that the negative responses some girls displayed towards school physical education are not predicated on a reluctance to take part in physical activity, but on their conviction that out of school provision is often more enjoyable, challenging, and gratifying. Despite this, relatively few examples exist in the literature examining young women's experiences of sport in informal settings, in youth-led activities or in community settings. As such, it is hoped that research in this thesis will supplement this body of knowledge.

Young Women and Physical Education

The Programme of study for Key Stage 4 physical education states that:

> Physical education develops pupils' competence and confidence to take part in a range of physical activities that become a central part of their lives, both in and out of school. A high-quality physical education curriculum enables all pupils to enjoy and succeed in many kinds of physical activity (QCA, 2007, p.199)

However, in practice physical education is primarily focussed on physical skills and prizes speed, strength, aggression and power, reinforced by biological and

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physiological facts on physical performance (Armour, 1999). Physical education in the UK has, for some time, suffered heavy criticism from feminist scholars who assert that current structures and pedagogical approaches fail to account for the needs of young women (Hargreaves, 1994; Scraton, 1992). There are a number of concerns identified as problematic within physical education, particularly in terms of the negative effect on young women's experiences. In two studies, carried out with the aim of generating implications for the training and development of teachers, specifically in relation to increasing and improving young women's involvement, young women were asked to comment on experiences of teachers as role models. In the first study, (Nicholson, 2008) the young women underlined the importance of teachers as role models and largely preferred young, female, 'sporty looking' PE teachers, who were willing to participate in sporting activities alongside their pupils. The young women stated that they struggled to build up an equal rapport with male teachers. In particular, the young women felt that male teachers gave them a raw deal in mixed-gender classes. In the second study, this view was reinforced and girls criticized male PE teachers as overly competitive and insensitive, with a tendency to favor boys during co-educational classes (Casey et al., 2009). In addition, young women raised issues such as clothing, curriculum design, fears about perceived competence, embarrassment and shame, as well as issues relating to body image, appearance, and discourses surrounding acceptable femininity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Benn, 2002; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Garrett, 2004) as features of their discontent. As a result: 'these girls are not only missing out on a vital part of their education and experience, but that they also lose out in terms of their rights to access the beneficial aspects of participation in sport' (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, p.651). As with sport experiences explored above, young women identify the maintenance of feminine identities and sports engagement as incompatible, Cockburn and Clarke further iterate that:

> A girl can identify herself as a masculinized 'doer' of PE (a 'tomboy'), or a feminized ('girlie') 'non-doer' of sport and physical activity. It is highly unlikely that girls can achieve being both physically active and (heterosexually) desirable, so they are often obliged to choose between these images (2002, p. 661)

However, other scholars advise that if young women can avoid the pitfalls of the underlying values of hegemonic masculinity, there are possibilities for experimentation with 'progressive physicalities' (Cole, 1993). For some time, feminist scholars have promoted the prospect of physical education to enable young women to enjoy physical skill, bodily competence and enjoyment (Wright & Dewar, 1997).

Laura Hills, (2007) conducted ethnographic research within a physical education class in the north east of England, and discovered that 'girls' social relationships and networks played an important role in shaping their involvement in and enjoyment of lessons' (Hills, 2007, p.318). Her study explored the interplay of girls' friendships and physical competence and, correspondingly, the relationship between generation and conversion of social and physical capital in PE lessons. Hills found that young women valued social rewards that accompanied the display of sporting skill and prowess, however they also feared the repercussions of failing to meet expectations, particularly within team games. She also uncovered the existence of a 'social order', created through the 'scaling of bodies', which saw some bodies as privileged over others, and reflected a 'hierarchy of competence' (p.327). Girls were able to bypass the significance of competence by drawing on reserves of social capital to ensure greater inclusion within team games. Hills concludes by identifying that:

> The construction of physical capital within the context of this physical education context related closely to the capacity for successful displays of competence…While femininity may be strongly associated with appropriate bodily displays, it is clearly interlaced with other desirable social locations represented in the capacity to appear competent (Hills, 2007, p.331)

As a result she recommends that in order to be inclusive, physical education must be differentiated to account for the differing competencies of girls by for example 'deemphasizing competitive outcomes, introducing individualized as well as group approaches to learning, integrating multi-dimensional learning environments, and modifying or adapting physical activities' (Hills, 2007, p.333). It follows therefore that successful interventions are likely to emerge within programmes where young womens friendship groups are acknowledged and where the issues important to these groups of young women are taken into account.

Ennis' (1999) work describes an innovative American study focused on a 'Sport for Peace' curriculum. In response to negative experiences of girls in mixed multi sport physical education classes, the project aimed to enhance girls' engagement with and enjoyment of team sports. The Sport for Peace curriculum incorporated an additional focus on 'conflict negotiation, self and social responsibility, and care and concern for others' in short, students were given responsibility 'for creating an emotionally safe environment for team-mates and opponents' (Ennis, 1999, p.36). She describes the project as successful in establishing more authentic co-operative environments, providing opportunities for learning and changing boys attitudes to girls within physical education classes. This research seeks to emulate the approach by striving to enable the young women to create similarly secure and positive environments.

In a further study, Enright & O'Sullivan, (2010) engaged a group of 15-19 year old young women that were disengaged from physical education. This study employed a participatory Action Research approach as a vehicle for enabling the young women to negotiate their own physical education curriculum and engage in decision processes. They found that the young women were energized by this process and took ownership of their learning, developed deep insights and enjoyed participation. This thesis builds upon this participatory model and employs similar strategies within informal youth and community work settings.

Why do Young Women Drop Out of Sport? What Can be Done About it?

Despite some significant barriers to sport participation, many young women continue to participate in sport at some point in their lives. However, despite often positive beginnings in sport in primary and sometimes secondary school, evidence indicates that drop out rates in sports participation post secondary school education are significantly higher for girls than for boys (Sherar, Esliger, Baxter-Jones, & Tremblay, 2007; Pate, Ward, O'Neil & Dowda, 2007; Ziviani, Macdonald, Ward, Jenkins, & Rodger 2008; Evans, 2008; Kimm, Glynn, & Kriska, 2000); and girls drop out at a faster rate than boys (WSFF, 2009). For example aged 2-11years 61% of girls and 70% of boys engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity each day. However, while for boys these levels are maintained through to age 15, girls participation levels fall to around 50% from age 12 (The Energy Project, WSFF, 2008). It is therefore important to investigate why teenage girls drop out of sport and to understand that their reasons for dropping out 'can be very different from the

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reasons why girls don't play sport in the first place' (WSFF, 2009).

For many girls the decline in sports participation starts from around age 12 and continues throughout adolescence. Many have reported that the increased competitiveness of sport in later years influenced them to drop out (Sportscotland, 2006). 'Life transitions', for example, from school to college or from education to employment had a negative effect on girls' participation in sport due to decreased levels of spare time and energy (Sport England 2006, Sportscotland, 2006). Respondents also reported that they were aware that their participation in physical activity had changed with maturity. Young women believed that their involvement in physical activity had decreased and they now did less compared to when they attended primary school. The main reasons given were that they felt more self-conscious and were increasingly more aware of their image among their peers (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). There is a need for research that provides reflective spaces for young women to consider these aspects of their disengagement as an integral part of a physical activity project.

Social aspects and benefits of sport, for example, whether friends were available or willing to attend sports sessions, are key to girls choosing whether or not to participate and to their enjoyment of sport (Cox et al., 2006; Sportscotland, 2006). Friendships and peer groups play an important role in encouraging participation in sports and exercise. It has been observed that sport is often just one feature of belonging to a group (Mason, 1995) and being with friends is often considered more important than the sport itself (Harris, 1995). Given the powerful influence of social groups, potential interventions could include a 'peer' or 'mentoring' approach to driving up participation (Cox et al., 2006). The social aspects of physical activity are important to young people, and in one study respondents stated that they would rather take part in physical activity with friends (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). The approach taken in this research values the peer relationships of young women and therefore sought to work with, rather than in spite of, peer groupings within youth work settings.

Psychosocial factors such as self-confidence, perception of ability, and influence of friends and family are significant in determining girls' levels of sports and physical

activity participation (Cox et al., 2006; Tucker Center, 2007; Dwyer et al. 2006; Lee, 2004; Pate et al. 2007). Many young women reported that they resist sport due to feelings of embarrassment or because they feel self-conscious about their body (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000, Penney, 2000; Vu et al., 2006; Xiang et al., 2006). Young women often felt further intimidated and embarrassed doing physical activity alongside young men and it has been suggested that sports clubs could run single sex sessions to ease this discomfort (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). In line with this, the projects delivered through this research were deliberately targeted at women-only youth club groups.

Cumming, (1998) believes that more young people would participate in sport if the focus were on recreation rather than competition and elitism. This is reinforced by research by Coakley & White (1992) who found that concerns with personal competence mean that many young people, particularly young women, felt that they should not join a sports club unless they already displayed high levels of competence at the sport; and Sportscotland (2006) who found that 'general anxiety and self-consciousness was associated with lower perceived competence at sport. Girls who feel self-conscious are more likely to feel they aren't good at sport and do not want to participate' (p.22). Ewing & Danish (2002) consider excessive concern for winning as limiting to participation opportunities and they explain that 'being successful in sport is not the same as winning' (Ewing & Danish, 2002: p.54-5). Therefore, there is a need for physical activity programmes that remove the emphasis on competition and instead focus on collective enjoyment.

Sportscotland (2006) found that girls do not perceive activities as being promoted well, if at all, and they often feel there is a lack of activities that they find interesting, or that are targeted specifically at them. Ensuring that girls are a part of the recruitment and planning of activities could help to ensure that projects meet the desires and needs of the communities in which they are delivered. Interventions should include experiences that focus on increasing self-esteem, positive body image, valuation of physical activity, motivation to be physically active, and develop a sense of commitment to be physically active by providing social environments that involve a range of fun activities that girls enjoy (PCPFS, 1997; Debate et al., 2009).

My own research project attempted to build upon these recommendations by using a participatory process to explore young women's (and young mother's) identified barriers to sport and to use their suggestions for improvement in the planning and delivery of participatory sports projects.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on theories raised in the previous two chapters and literature surrounding youth sport to investigate varying approaches to youth sport. The barriers to young women participating in sport were examined and the ways that young women experience sport and physical education were considered. The chapter finished by considering the reasons that high numbers of young women and young mothers drop out of sport altogether and what might be done to mitigate this. The next chapter explores methodological and theoretical foundations of this study and explains how the data was generated and analysed.

Chapter 5: Methods and Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodological approach adopted in the study. The approach chosen has been shaped by the aims of the research project and the epistemological and philosophical positions considered most suitable for examining them. Specific reflections on the process of carrying out a feminist participatory action research project are explained in more depth in the following chapter. Chapter six offers more in-depth explorations of ethical and political implications, and the ways in which power operated throughout the FPAR process.

The approach of this study is guided by the overall aims and the research questions. The overall aims of this research project are:

- o To carry out a collective investigation of young women's experiences of physical activity.
- o To use this to form the basis of young women-led physical activity projects.

The key research questions associated with these aims are:

- o How do young women come to define themselves as 'non-sporty'?
- o How do young women negotiate, conform to or resist dominant expectations of femininity and physical activity?
- o What issues would young women consider important in the construction of a physical activity project?
- o How do young women experience participatory physical activity projects?

The research questions shape the choice of methodological approach. Crotty (1998) suggests that four key components must be addressed within this decision process: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. Each will inform the other and therefore must be linked coherently together.

In this study, these choices will be influenced by the significant elements of the research: the gendered focus of the research area and the concentration on young

people as research partners. These factors have consequences for the epistemological stance adopted, as well as the theoretical perspectives and the methods employed. The philosophical and practical considerations of examining femininity in young women and physical activity, will be integrated in the methodological framework. Feminism, poststructuralism and feminist participatory action research (FPAR) influence this procedure. The research questions are compatible with a qualitative methodology and approach to data collection. A qualitative approach provides opportunities for the research to reveal rich in-depth data on the subject area and, importantly to establish a rapport with the young women. This study utilizes a variety of methods within a participatory framework to enable young women to explore, experiment with and reinvent sporting experiences. Underpinned by poststructural feminism, which acknowledges the fluctuating nature of subjectivity, this approach was chosen for its potential to redress power imbalances within the research relationship and to offer a flexibility that would negotiate the young women's changing attitudes within the project. The methods were designed to create an environment of mutual informal learning with an emphasis on possibilities for reciprocity between researcher and participants. The research was carried out collaboratively by myself and the young women in three phases: interactive reflective activities used to build up a body of knowledge relating to the young women's past and present sporting experiences; the utilization of this body of knowledge in planning unique, personalized, sports projects; and the participation in and evaluation of these projects.

Ontological and Epistemological Stance

A number of competing paradigms exist, each of which offers a discrete account of what constitutes knowledge and reality. The main positions and paradigms are considered to be Positivism, Interpretivism, Critical Theory and Constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Positivist approaches regard knowledge as existing in an immediate reality that can be measured using scientific techniques and processes. Positivists believe that knowledge is produced through rigorous and objective experiments within which researchers adopt a neutral, unbiased position. Interpretivists perceive the social world to be constituted of historic and cultural influences, which it is possible to interpret in multiple ways. In challenge to positivist research, interpretivists state that unbiased

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research processes are impossible. Critical theorists root understandings of knowledge within understandings of power relations. Within this paradigm researchers set out to be deliberately political, and set objectives to improve social conditions. Constructivism shares the belief of interpretivism that experience must be understood in relation to the lived experiences of individuals. They differ in seeing knowledge and truth as constructed through human interaction. Constructionists view knowledge from a subjectivist perspective, where knowledge and understanding is co-created by researchers and research participants through research proceses (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The overall approach of this research can be conceptualized as corresponding to a constructivist paradigm. This has particular implications for the ontological and epistemological stance of the research.

Ontology describes the worldview of the researcher that influences the claims or assumptions they make on the nature of reality. This research applies a relativist ontological perspective, which conceptualizes 'reality' as created through multiple, fluctuating and fragmented constructions of social life constructed, often experientially, by individuals and groups (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Relativist positions recognise that different observers may have different viewpoints and that 'what counts for the truth can vary from place to place and from time to time' (Collins, 1983, p. 88) however, this does not diminish the legitimacy of such constructions. A relativist philosophy rejects the existence of absolute truth and instead regards meaning as created through local constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1983).

Since different worldviews exist regarding what constitutes reality, it follows that ideas will differ in terms of what constitutes knowledge of that reality. This leads to the necessity of considering epistemology, which is concerned with the most suitable ways of investigating reality, what knowledge is considered to be and the sources and limitations of such knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008). The epistemological stance selected impacts all aspects of the research process. Constructivist researchers are interested in the deconstruction and reconstruction of the ways in which the social world is understood. They value transactional knowledge which may be considered compatible with feminist and participatory action approaches because of a shared concern for action, praxis, antifoundational

arguments and multivoiced texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.158). Feminist, poststructuralist and participatory action research approaches underpin this study and will therefore be explored further now.

Feminism

This study focuses on young women, femininity and physical activity. Therefore it is essential that the research methodology incorporates a feminist analysis which is considered most appropriate to explore the ways in which knowledge is gendered. This methodology was also chosen for its continuity with feminist theory employed throughout the literature review and which has served as a guide to the general research process.

Feminist research presents a challenge to mainstream research in a number of ways. The most apparent is the concern of feminist researchers to highlight concerns for the unequal and unjust experiences of women in patriarchal societies (Beasley, 1999). This is coupled with a commitment to attempt to struggle against these injustices by developing research that shines a light on them and arguing that they are unacceptable. This has been partly achieved by feminists interrogating the androcentric bias of mainstream research and the ways in which such forms of knowledge benefit the patriarchal order (Beasley, 1999) and partly by giving voice to the previously silenced or unheard narratives of women . Feminist theory seeks to explore male-female power relations and promote social justice (Stromquist, 2000). Although these broad aims can be applied to most branches of feminism, it is important to recognize the diversity of feminist theory. Feminist epistemology acknowledges women as a heterogeneous group and as such no one feminist approach is expected to encompass all women. A variety of theories and methodologies are adopted, and used to ask and answer different questions regarding women and their experiences. Feminism can be categorized in numerous ways, for example liberal feminists, radical feminists, Marxist/socialist feminists, critical feminists, postmodernist and poststructuralist feminists and black and lesbian feminists. Each branch of feminism adopts different approaches to research and feminism as a whole represents a range of diverse political interests (Beasley, 1999). As such feminists value praxis, and feminists are mindful of the relationship between theory and practice and the ways in which gendered knowledge is helpful in describing and

explaining the oppression of women. The particular branch of feminist epistemology I shall be using is poststructural feminism. Poststructuralism largely emerged from the work of the founding scholars: Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault and offers a counter approach to liberal humanist conceptualizations of the social world particularly in relation to examination of subjectivity (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). While all feminist traditions have, to some extent, sought to challenge the dualistic nature of prior social research, it is argued that the most persuasive critiques have emerged from poststructural theorizing. In fact, challenges to binary thinking and dichotomies are central to poststructuralism.

Poststructuralists reject the notion of essentialism and claims that we come to know ourselves through systems of language and systems of meaning. The deconstruction of language and discourse offers possibilities to highlight, question and trouble binary oppositions for example, self/other. Poststructuralism offers a different way of approaching gender and subjectivity because the subject may be understood as 'a product, an embodiment of a set of discourses or codes of signification that construct her actions, beliefs and her notion of self, within a social nexus of structures of knowledge, meaning and power' (McLaughlin, 2003, p.93). Scott (1988) identifies four concepts that are mutually beneficial for enhancing feminist and poststructuralist analyses, these are *language, discourse, difference* and *deconstruction.* These concepts are regarded as fundamental to extending understandings of the ways in which power is mediated by temporal, historic, local and special shifts.

Feminist and poststructuralist approaches have been widely addressed throughout the review of literature and will later be considered in relation to the participatory action research approach adopted for this study.

What is Participatory Action Research (PAR)?

The roots of PAR can be traced to the work of Kurt Lewin and his work on group dynamics in the 1940s, while other scholars had previously adopted an action research approach, Lewin was 'the first to develop a theory of action research that made it a respectable form of research in the social sciences' (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.11). PAR attempts to build on the model of action research with the addition of a more explicit collaborative approach.

Participatory action research is a term that encapsulates a method, a process and a goal in social research (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993). It is a contemporary form of research that focuses on the effects of the researcher's direct actions of practice within a participatory community, with the goal of resolving identified problems and affecting positive social change (Dick, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Hult & Lennung, 1980; McNiff, 2003). PAR is an approach to improving social practice by changing it and learning from the consequences of change, it is defined by the need for action and creates knowledge but not for the sake of knowledge alone (Merrifield, 1997). A key feature of PAR is collaboration between members of communities to be researched and professional researchers. Within the PAR paradigm the value of local knowledge is paramount and as such, research participants or partners can expect to be engaged in as many aspects of the research process as possible and for the research process to be responsive to community needs. In essence PAR sees 'ordinary people address common needs arising in their daily lives and in the process, generate knowledge' (Park, 2001, p.81). This group is widened as far as possible to include people who will be directly affected by the research. As an approach PAR is 'purposefully multidisciplinary and eclectic. It mobilizes theories, methods and information from whatever sources the participants jointly believe to be relevant' (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993, p.178). Therefore, research methods are diverse, for example poetry, creative writing, interviews, memory work, photographs, and selected to suit individual cases as will be seen in the instance of my study.

Essentially Participatory Action Research (PAR) is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. They do this by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts and try to make sense of it. Participatory action research is not just research, that it is hoped that will be followed by action. It is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants.

The participatory aspect of PAR arose in direct opposition to 'positivist research methodologies characterized by an expert-researcher-driven process and detached

researcher roles' (Frisby et al. 2005, p.368) and 'turning the relationship between researchers and subjects inside out by promoting the approach of co-researchers in an effort to share or flatten power is at the heart of action research' (Maguire, 2001, p.63). Benefits to involving participants in knowledge production are: enhanced relevance and trustworthiness of data (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000), demystifying the research process (Park, 2001), providing opportunities for reciprocity and mutual learning (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; Lather, 1988) and affirming participants' right to a voice in decisions that are made often on their behalf (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

A significant attribute of PAR is its continuing spiral of hypothesizing, planning, acting, observing, reflecting and then re-planning and so beginning the spiral again this process is outlined below in Figure 1: The Participatory Action Research Cycle. This flexible and fluid approach is essential if the project is to continue to be responsive to community need. However, the seeming formulaic nature of the cycle belies the complex process that often occurs in practice. Linked to this is an organized learning process in which participants remain open to surprise and respond to opportunities as they arise.
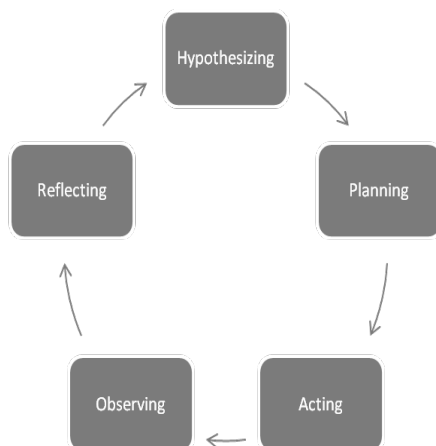
Figure 1: The Participatory Action Research Cycle (from Coghlan & Brannick, 2001)

PAR as a Political Act

Despite a growing affection for various forms of action research within academia, very little has been written about what constitutes legitimate 'action'. The use of 'action' within research processes is a controversial approach and is an area for debate

that has created paradigmatic divisions. Lincoln and Guba (2000) explain that while positivist researchers regard action as characteristic of a contamination of results, whereas interpretivists regard action as a significant and meaningful research outcome. Reid et al. (2006, p.316-7) point out the difficulty with current literature that uses the terms 'action' and 'social change' interchangeably, as this precedes a tendency to overstate what actually constitutes action, favoring overly idealized conceptions of grand scale social change that undervalues smaller or individual local actions. They advocate a fresh approach to understanding action in all of its complexities, and acknowledging individual and collective action. Their preferred definition of action is 'a multi-faceted and dynamic process that can range from speaking to validate oneself and one's experiences in the world to 'the process of doing something', such as taking a deliberate step towards changing one's circumstances' (Reid et al., 2006, p. 317). Including objectives relating to action in research design can be regarded as a political act.

PAR is deliberately political, 'deciding to take action is itself political, because what one person does invariably has consequences for someone else' (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003: 15) and therefore one can expect to meet resistance. PAR involves taking a critical analysis of systems, processes and power within institutions and communities and usually centres on promoting social justice and affecting positive social change. In this way PAR differs noticeably from other forms of research that 'usually stop at the level of describing a situation. They sometimes go on to suggest ways in which the situation might be changed. Action researchers take action, and begin by asking, "What can I do? How do I do it?" (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003, p. 15)

Kakabadse & Parker (1984) argue that even what constitutes valid information is intensely political. Coghlan & Brannick, (2001, p.63) warn that 'while action research is a collaborative activity, raising certain questions and applying judgements to particular issues may have severe political implications.' It is essential therefore to understand organizational macropolitics that may arise through action research projects and I shall explore these within the context of my own youth work organization in the next chapter.

Critiques of PAR

There are very few vehement criticisms of PAR. However, its intrinsically political nature can be contested and it can be argued that despite the participatory nature of the work, it is still a 'stronger outsider' seeking to make changes, for a community perceived as weaker. PAR may be manipulated by various actors to deliberately affect power dynamics, often with a more centralizing than democratizing effect (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Frisby et al. (2005) champion the benefits of PAR but also warn that participatory action research projects are extremely time and energy consuming and, despite using strategies to foster active involvement in their project, participation at various stages was often partial. They also note that it is naïve to believe that it is possible to remove all power imbalances and they stress the importance of being aware of these. A key question to emerge from their study was: 'How much should researchers expect from research participants, and at what point does participation become too onerous?' (Frisby et al., 2005, p.384). They advise being aware of competing interests and activities and ensuring flexibility and variety in ways of involving participants. Frisby et al. (2005) further warn that although power imbalances may be alleviated through close researcher-participant relations, this may also result in increasing vulnerability of participants, for example offering more disclosure than they may normally have felt comfortable with and possible feelings of abandonment at the close of research projects (Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoeber, 2005; Reid, Frisby, & Ponic, 2002). An exploration of the workings of power in this study is provided in the next chapter.

Khanlou & Peter (2005) also note that often, due to the longitudinal nature of many PAR projects, some participants who engage early on may not benefit directly at the end of the project in terms of knowledge and resources. I was fortunate in the case of my study that all but one of the young women in both projects were able to engage with the project to it's conclusion. They also stress that on occasion individuals who do not wish to participate may feel group/community pressure to do so. On balance Cahill (2007) notes that despite such critiques, PAR projects 'represent viable, vital alternatives to the exclusionary domains of academic research' (p.5).

Herr & Anderson (2005) describe attempts to delegitimize action research within the academy, where academics claim that this kind of research generates practice based, local knowledge but does not provide a sound basis for epistemic claims and therefore wider academic knowledge. They summarize that debates on legitimacy of action research centre around agreement with (Richardson, 1994; Huberman, 1996; Hammack, 1997) and opposition to (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1998) a 'formal' (or university based, 'pure', 'real') versus 'practical' (practice/setting based, 'local') knowledge dualism, they critique this debate thus:

> Such a dualistic approach to the insider-outsider conundrum is partly solved by participatory action researchers, who suggest that when research is done collaboratively, it brings both the insider and outsider perspectives into the research. (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.53)

Many scholars go further to praise the practice and particularly action based approach taken in PAR projects, for going beyond 'objective' reporting. For example, Cameron & Gibson (2005) who argue that 'much social science research goes little beyond simply describing the world, producing few tangible benefits for those that are the subjects of research' (p.316). According to Coghlan & Brannick (2001, p.8) 'action research rejects the separation between thought and action that underlies the pure applied distinction that has traditionally characterized management and social research'. Greenwood & Levin (2000) distill their motivations to promote action research down to its potential to reconstruct two relationships: the relationship between theory and praxis; and the relationship between the university and society, both in reference to conventional academic social sciences. They argue that the dichotomy constructed between 'applied' and 'pure' research is not only false, misleading and unhelpful, but is also detrimental to the social sciences. Therefore, they adopt a pragmatist approach that links rather than rejects the separation of theory and praxis, stating 'either social research is applied or it is not research' (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p.94).

PAR and Feminism

This study is influenced by, and seeks to follow feminist research, by placing young women's experiences at the centre of the research, whilst simultaneously seeking to acknowledge the diversity of such experiences, and by conceptualizing gender as

subject to power relations. As with many other research approaches, early examples of PAR presented a heavily androcentric bias. Women's experiences were effectively invisible and often unexplored and yet assumed to be accounted for under umbrella terms such as *people* or *community* (Hall, 2001). Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) was developed in opposition to this and works by centralising the diversity of women's experiences in the analysis: 'FPAR specifically considers how gender embeds itself in power structures, institutions and interpersonal relations in ways that oppress women' (Frisby et al. 2005, p370). Although it is recognized that feminism is a broad church with many opposing and conflicting dimensions there are a number of common concerns that can be seen to be shared by many feminist and participatory action researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Frisby, 2009). Table 1 provides examples of these commonalities:

Feminist Researchers:	Participatory Action Researchers:
seek to redress the power balance between researchers and participants	aim to work collaboratively and enable research 'participants' to become research 'partners'
value praxis	Seek to use participation and action to link practice and theory
Challenge and trouble taken for granted structural power relations	Endeavor to create positive social change that reduces inequalities
Value reflexivity	Reject claims of neutrality/objectivity

Table 1: Shared goals of feminist and FPAR researchers

Feminist scholars have highlighted the lack of female voices in dialogue around action research (Maguire, 1987) and critique attempts to insitutionalise action research emphasizing that creating 'unauthentic' projects and planned interventions results in a social engineering approach that de-prioritises emancipation and risks reinforcing structural power imbalances (Chisholm, 1990; Weiner, 1989; Whyte, 1987: all cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005).

FPAR & Poststructuralism

As previously outlined, this thesis is underpinned by a feminist and poststructuralist theoretical framework. Poststructuralist feminists are particularly concerned with

exploring alternatives to liberal humanist understandings of the self (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004).   An emphasis is placed on the role of language in the structuring of social worlds and the ways in which discourses produce subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Critics argue that the tenets of poststructuralism are incompatible with PAR:

> PAR is characterized by some as an archetypal modernist political project concerned with liberating marginalized and exploited subjects; while poststructuralism is lampooned by its critics for abandoning politics and embracing the deconstruction of texts and images with little relevance to the "real world" (Cameron & Gibson, 2005, p.317)

Despite these polarized critiques it is also possible to draw comparisons between PAR and poststructuralist approaches. Reason & Bradbury (2001) & Cameron & Gibson (2005) identify several themes that can be seen to be related to both approaches, (collated in Table 2) such as the rejection of grand narratives in preference for local knowledge, mindfulness of the political nature of research and the individual construction of knowledge and subjectivity.

Participatory Action Research	Poststructuralism
Value for local and indigenous knowledges.	Suspicion of overarching theories and paradigms, recognition of multiple knowledges.
Understands that politics pervades all phases of 'expert' and 'objective' knowledge.	Understands the political nature of all knowledge-generating processes.
Seeks to ensure that everyday knowledges are utilized in shaping the lives of 'ordinary people'.	Recognises that language constructs the world.

Table 2: Shared characteristics of PAR & Poststructuralism

Cameron & Gibson (2005) further suggest new ways that PAR may be approached, by learning from poststructuralist underpinnings (collated in Table 3). This includes the potential for exploring complex and contradictory experiences and therefore the possibilities for 'authentic' knowledge to further reproduce inequality. In addition, poststructuralism contributes to PAR approaches the potential for mobilizing

emotions and discontent for developing new ways of understanding and existing in the social world.

Poststructuralism	Traditional PAR perspective	Poststructuralist + PAR perspective
Subject as empty, acts of identification produce momentary fixities confused with fixed subjectivity.	Subject understood as having pre-existing identity, social and power relationships that limit subjugated groups. PAR as a liberating/ emancipatory process.	PAR as a process for generating knowledge around '*multiple and often competing narratives, practices and actions that produce certain kinds of subjects*' (p.318).
'*A poststructuralist approach involves carefully interrogating the potential effects of different languages and representations because of their potential political effects*' (p.318).	Believes improvements are best made using local knowledge of oppressed peoples.	Exploring the possibility that local knowledge may *reproduce* social inequalities. Caution in accepting *all* 'authentic' knowledge as transformative. Recognising multiple and conflicting local knowledges.
Poststructuralism acknowledges micropolitics of self-transformation a key to larger issues of social action and change.	Utilisation of emotions such as resentment, anger and discontent within consciousness raising activities as stimulus for political action.	'*...harnessing the creativity of everyday events that might inspire previously unknown possibilities and increase a willingness to explore different ways of being in the world*' (p.320)

Table 3: PAR using a poststructuralist framework

I observe a further similarity between poststructuralist and PAR approaches, which is the deliberate challenge both pose to positivist approaches in academia. While poststructuralism challenges modernist thinking by rethinking core social concepts such as knowledge, truth, language, politics and identity, PAR approaches challenge positivist academic ideals by valuing praxis, action and change in the research process. Poststructuralist feminists view subjectivity as unstable, fluctuating, multiple and contradictory (McLaughlin, 2003) which would, at first glance, appear to be at odds with FPAR's approaches that value 'authentic' local identities and aim to

emancipate oppressed people, however Cahill (2007) addresses the problem by explaining:

> I consider how participatory technologies and social relations actually create new forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. In other words, I engage with the potential of a PAR process for producing new subjectivities…My analysis considers how young women are transforming themselves as they engage in a PAR process (Cahill, 2007, p.270)

Throughout my research I certainly observed this to be the case and feel that I would struggle to find another approach that so deftly allows the flexibility to acknowledge agency and shifting subjectivity naturally within the research process. Since the goal of this kind of research is to make changes, it implicitly entails a necessity to negotiate such changes within the observation and analysis of the research. I would further propose that in addition to producing new subjectivities, the memory work that formed a key part of my FPAR approach, also allowed the young women to recapture and reflect upon 'old' subjectivities. For example Stephanie adamantly considered herself to be non-sporty and argued that she had never enjoyed physical activity, however, on reflection during the memory work activity, she remembered and described a love for cycling at a young age, she recalled learning to ride without her stabilizers and challenging herself to ride further and further without stopping. She described the elation of, for the first time, managing to ride from one end of her street to the other without stopping and how she ran inside to tell her mother of her achievement.

Implementing FPAR Within This Project

My research has sought to implement FPAR practices by: placing the young women as leaders in as many stages of the research as possible; by providing them with research skills; by working in partnership with the agencies in which the youth work sessions are delivered; by attracting resources from local agencies; and by highlighting the issues relating to young women and physical activity.

According to Park (2001, p.81) 'dialogue occupies a central position in inquiry by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings, and forge concerted actions

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together'. Creating spaces for reflection and sharing were key to my approach, the success of the entire project rested on the young women feeling able to openly share and discuss their experiences and opinions and utilize these in the planning process. As such it was important to create safe spaces for dialogue.

The limitations of this study as a doctoral thesis (required to satisfy guidelines for proposing the research and undergoing ethical consideration) meant that there were some areas of the research that were not initiated as a collaboration between myself as the researcher and the young women. This included the generating of the core research questions, these were developed by myself in advance through consultation with my supervisors and derived from reading relevant literature. I also devised the first two (phase one) group work activities in advance of speaking to the young women about the project. Further group work activities were also devised by myself, but followed interactions with the groups and were designed to be user friendly for the young women. Methods of data collection varied between the two sample groups and were omitted or adjusted according to the reactions and wishes of the participants. The young women inputted into how they would use the tools I had designed and were free to opt in and out as they felt comfortable to do so. The phase two and three activities were led primarily by the young women, with minimal guidance from myself and other youth workers. Little input was received from other stakeholders within the local authority youth services in which the research took place, this was in part due to time constraints of many of these stakeholders, however if I was to repeat this kind of study I would strive to increase stakeholder involvement. In the writing up process I struggled to involve the young women as fully as I would have liked. In the case of the young mothers group we simply ran out of time before the summer break, and for the young women's group, their lack of interest in theorizing led them to disengage with this part of the process. However, for both participant groups I was able to provide the young women with bullet point accounts of findings which they offered feedback on.

Research Methods

The methods used in this study were designed to not only generate data on the young women's opinions of sport, but also to provide opportunities to share previous experiences that would help shape a project within which each person felt

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comfortable to participate. Much emphasis was placed on the importance of participation in the whole research process, rather than simply the final product of the young women's planned sports projects. A timetable showing the sequence and timing of the research activities is provided in appendix 1.

Choosing the Research Settings

As a youth work practitioner I felt that women-only youth work settings would provide a good foundation for creating women-only sports projects. I hoped to use my own skills and contacts as a youth worker as the foundation for setting up the research project. This way, I could be sure that the groups would already know each other well and probably be pre-formed peer groups with a certain amount of group safety. I also hoped that pre-existing relationships with youth workers would mean that the young women had been exposed to previous experiences of informal education activities and that they would have developed trusting relationships with youth workers. I planned on working with three already established, women-only, youth work groups within the local authority. However, it soon became apparent that the only women-only youth work group within the local authority was the group I was running. This prompted me to look more widely and fortunately, through my contacts, I was signposted to a young mothers group in a neighbouring area.

Participants

The participants were selected as whole intact groups. I selected two groups of young women already attending women-only youth work provisions, already in established groupings, and peer groups. As a youth worker I have observed the positive outcomes of collective female-only youth projects before and felt that this project would have a greater chance of success within these settings. In addition, I hoped that my own young women's group might benefit from participation in this project. I deliberately approached young women that did not already participate in sport outside of school P.E. Groups were selected according to their availability and willingness to engage in and commit to a long-term youth work project. A breakdown of the young women participants is provided in appendix 2. Young women were not required to pay to engage in any of the activities set out in the sports programme including activity costs, transport, and equipment. The young women applied for funding for these from the Youth Opportunity Fund, and Positive Activities Fund as part of the

planning process. The young women were helped to understand financial limitations within their budget as part of their ownership of the project, and they were asked to incorporate this into their overall planning. Therefore, activities were adjusted according to available funds to ensure that there was not a short fall that would be paid for by the young women.

The Participant Groups

Young Women's Group

The young women's group was established six years ago for young women only, aged 13-19 years and has been regularly attended since that time. The group of young women that participated in the study had been meeting together for over a year – they are a small group of nine young women from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds (see breakdown in appendix 2), not all of whom attended every week. Many of the young women had already engaged in previously organized projects within youth work settings (such as a drama project around identity and expression). The group meets every Wednesday evening from 6-9pm. The session has always been staffed by myself (as leader-in-charge) and another female member of staff (different individuals over time). In a typical session the young women would take part in discussion activities, share news, worries and problems and take part in planned activities (e.g. art). A strong professional relationship existed between the young women and youth work staff, myself included.

Young Mother's Group- Little Ones and Luncheon's

This group is open to young mothers aged 13-25 (although the population attending are aged 15-25: see appendix 2 for breakdown). The sessions are run by two female part-time, part-qualified youth workers who themselves had also been young mothers. Sessions run on a Monday lunchtime 11am-2.30pm during term time only (the group is not active during school holidays apart from organized trips). In a typical session the young mothers and their children arrive and, while children play with the toys that are made available, the young mothers seize the opportunity to socialize with one another. A free lunch is provided at the session for all mothers and children and this is paid for through the group's core project funding. Each week two young mothers help out in the kitchen to make lunch for the whole group and then everyone sits down to eat together. Following lunch, an activity is usually made available such as

music or art sessions for the mothers to take part in with their children. After this, some time remains for the children to play with the toys and for the mothers to spend some more time socializing.

Throughout the session the young women often take it in turns to look after each other's children and enable each other to visit the shop, go for a cigarette break or make a phone call. Visitors, such as health visitors and midwives also attend the group to speak to the young mothers and to offer services such as weighing babies and baby massage. The young mums use this opportunity to ask questions they may have relating to the health and development of their children.

Access

Young Women's Group

As a professionally qualified youth worker I already possessed substantial credibility within the local authority in which I worked and this undoubtedly assisted the prioritizing of my project. This kind of access is crucial to the success of FPAR projects because close and trusting relationships form the basis of dialogue and research. As leader-in-charge I already had a good degree of freedom to consult with the young women and plan projects of their choosing. I met no resistance from my line managers or higher managers in the youth service to the project or the intended research and was given permission to develop the research as I saw fit, provided that appropriate consent was attained by the young women involved. I feel that the PAR approach I implemented aided this process a great deal as it correlated strongly with a youth worker stance. The participatory research project mirrored standards expected for good practice in youth work because it was for the most part youth-led and encouraged young women to be active decision makers. As such, the aims of the project were easily understood and appreciated by youth work practitioners.

Young Mother's Group- Little Ones and Luncheon's

My youth worker status also ensured credibility and the building of trust with youth workers in the young mothers group. My credentials had already been relayed to the workers by a mutual colleague before our first meeting, and therefore an assumption existed that we held some similar values and agendas in relation to working with young people. My practitioner researcher stance enabled them to see me as a 'youth

worker doing research' rather than a 'researcher of youth work'. My ability to vocalize a clear understanding of youth work processes, such as need for considerable time to be taken to build relationships of trust, helped the youth workers to feel comfortable that I would not be too huge an imposition in their group. It was also helpful, that as a professionally qualified, CRB checked, youth worker I was able to slot into the group as an additional member of staff and on many occasions this meant that I was able to provide cover for their sessions if one of the youth workers was off sick- this was an asset to the group because under previous circumstances if a member of staff was off sick the group would have to be cancelled.

Building Research Relationships

Young Women's Group:

I had already established an effective and trusting youth work relationship with my young women's group, we often spoke at length about the young women's lives and shared experiences and concerns. We had planned, taken part in and evaluated previous projects. This provided an excellent foundation for the research project which would draw upon similar techniques, however, it was important to set apart a complimentary 'research relationship'. I wanted the young women to be able to identify when I was their youth worker and when I was researching them. This was difficult to negotiate, because I wanted them to feel free to continue speaking to me about their personal issues without fear that they may be used in my research without their permission. We decided that as far as spoken conversations were concerned I would always ask 'is it okay to include that in my research?'. They agreed that any observations I made during the sports project could be used. The young women fully understood that their details would be kept confidential and that they would not be identifiable in the research.

Young Mothers Group:

In the young mothers group I was aware that there was an element of caution towards me at the beginning, this is probably because I was the only person attending the group, including the other youth workers, that had not been a 'teen mum'. The group were initially suspicious as to why I would take an interest in them in this case and were perhaps wary that I was there, as many other professionals in their lives are, to pass judgment on them. They expressed that they were accustomed to feeling this

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way towards professionals they meet such as health visitors and social workers and it was important for them to know that I didn't see them as either inferior or 'exotic':

> **Carrie:** Are you just here because we are teenage mums? Is that why you wanted to research us?
> **Karen:** I don't know why everyone is so fascinated with us, just because we chose to have babies when we were a bit younger

I explained to the group that the reason I had chosen them was because I was interested in working with 'women only' groups rather than specifically young mothers, and this seemed to alleviate some of their fears. A challenge to me as a youth worker was the intense interest in my own private life. While other youth groups I had previously worked with had occasionally shown a small interest in my relationship status, I am not accustomed to being asked openly to declare personal information so early on in the youth work relationship. In this case it appeared to be a prerequisite of forming a trusting relationship with the women. Early on with the young mothers group I was required to answer questions about my own background for example Did I have children? Why not? Would I like to have children? When? Did I have a boyfriend/husband? How long had we been together? I am unsure what would have happened or how I would have tackled this if I had been single, lesbian, not interested in children and so on.

So much of the young women's sense of self was identified by their children and mothering, the majority of conversations at the group revolved around their children, and their experiences as mothers and the majority of activities planned for the group incorporated activities designed to provide learning opportunities for the children. As such, it would have been impossible to work with the women as separate entities from their children in the research. Therefore, not only was I required to build a relationship with the young women, but I also had to become familiar with their children. Part of this relationship building involved demonstrating that I like, and am comfortable and confident with children for example, being asked to look after the child while the mother left the room or for a cigarette, playing with the children, and singing along to children's rhymes during music sessions. I felt that I was almost required to prove that I could be a mum too or wanted to be a mum in the future. My background in nursery nursing and primary school teaching was an advantage and

helped the young mothers to connect with me further, however I was constantly reminded of my own childlessness and lack of mothering experience. The young mothers would sometimes ask me questions, such as 'How much milk should I be feeding him at this age?' and I had no idea of the answers. I was always honest about my lack of knowledge in this area but often felt embarrassed about it, these occasions marked obvious differences between us and I sometimes worried that this may result in a reduction of credibility in their eyes. However, my lack of knowledge in relation to their own specialist area of expertise- mothering, may also have alleviated some of the potential power imbalances experienced within collaborative research.

Ethics in FPAR

All research projects are required to make considerations for ethical implications, however, scholars argue that additional measures should be contemplated in the planning of PAR projects since FPAR relies on relationships between researcher and research community extending trust and dialogue. Ethical issues that must be considered and resolved include careful negotiation of access, the ways in which confidentiality is promised and delivered, ensuring that participants are enabled to withdraw from the research process as they wish, and importantly, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are kept appraised of the progress of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). A core ethical principle of PAR involves 'keeping good faith by showing that you are somebody who can be trusted and always checking with others for any misunderstanding' (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001, p.73).

Ethics in this Study

Before carrying out the research I applied for, and was granted, ethical approval by Brunel University Social Research Ethics Committee, the specifics of the application are summarized below.

Informed Consent

The young women were informed in advance about the nature of the study and informed consent was obtained from them (and in the case of under 18's their parents). The young women were advised that they were free to opt out of the study, interviews, video diaries, the physical activity projects or any other aspect of the project at any point and assured that any data collected would be disregarded.

Information packs were provided to participants, parents and other youth workers, written in easy to understand and transparent language, a copy can be found in appendix 3. The young women had the chance to take away the information packs, read over them and return with any questions before they committed to the project. During the process of collecting the data only one young woman withdrew from the research since she was moving out of the area.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was assured for all participants, no real names were included and no information or details that may have significantly described the participant or group as a whole were used. Audio tapes and video tapes were viewed only by the researcher and the young women within each group, and these items were securely stored at all times. All participants remain anonymous in data presentation. Pseudonyms were created and used to protect identities. The young women chose their own alternative name, in the case of some of the African young women taking part in the study they selected to use their African names. Data will be retained confidentially in a locked/secure/password protected space for up to 5 years and may be used in planning further research, the young women consented to this.

Health and Safety and Child Protection

As a youth work practitioner I was already familiar with and adhered to guidelines laid out by the specific organisations in which I was working with regards to health and safety, risk assessment and child protection. I planned responses to possible issues that might arise for example, in the event of a disclosure I would have followed the child protection flow chart and informed the appropriate line managers and/or child protection officers immediately. Fortunately this did not happen during the research. All activities engaged in by the groups were risk assessed by both the young women and myself using pre-existing organisational templates. I understood that there was always a possibility that participation in their chosen sports may have associated risks or result in injury, in order to mitigate this I took sensible, common sense precautions to ensure safety in the day-to-day running of the activities, and liaised with coaches and other youth workers when necessary. All activities undertaken and instructors hired were covered by public liability insurance in addition to that held by the organisation within which the groups operated. As the researcher I

gained an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Check which was presented to the organisations for their records. No issues relating to child protection were raised during the projects and there were no health and safety incidents reported.

Emotional Well-being

The young women were encouraged to reflect on their previous experiences in youth work and sporting contexts including thoughts, emotions and feelings. I prepared for the eventuality that for some young women this may prompt unpleasant memories which may be distressing (such as previous experiences of bullying, inadequacy, shame or exclusion). The young women did share such experiences with the group and I feel that, due to the supportive nature of the groups, this experience was more cathartic than distressing. At no point did any young women express that they felt unable or unwilling to discuss these issues. In fact, the opposite was usually the case:

> **Mafunda:** Are we going to have another discussion today? I liked it last time and I've been thinking about some of the stuff Yolie said
>
> **Karen:** Shall we have another chat today?

I prepared for the possibility that examining issues of gender inequalities may be painful, emotive or uncomfortable for some participants, had the young women needed to further discuss any issues that arose I was willing to make myself available to them. However I am not a qualified counselor so had they required this kind of service I would have referred them a local young people's counseling service with whom I already had contact. I am pleased to report that all matters arising from group discussion were dealt with during group discussion.

Group Dynamics

As a qualified youth worker I was prepared for dealing with issues relating to group work, interaction between participants, conflict resolution and possible bullying and had prepared strategies for dealing with any of these issues should they arise. There were some minor issues within the young mothers group where returning members to the group that had not been involved in the whole research process, were critical and disparaging of those taking part in the cheerleading course. This issue was dealt with

by myself and the other youth workers through open discussion and relocating of these young women during the times the activity was taking place.

Research Methods

In this section I offer a concise description of the research methods employed throughout the three phases of this research, the theoretical frameworks that underpin them, and reflections on how they were delivered in practice.

Phase 1 activities:

It was important not to assume that previous research regarding young women and physical activity could be generalized seamlessly to the groups with whom I chose to work. In order for the young women to gain as much as possible from the project and to ensure that the physical activities chosen best met their needs, it was first essential to use interactive group activities to explore the young women's relationship with physical activity. Davies & Banks, (1992, p 4.) stress that 'it is to the detailed examination of subjectivity that we turn to try to understand how old patterns are held in place and how they might be let go.' In the case of this study I wanted the 'non-sporty' young women to examine their opinions, experiences and memories to understand how they had constructed their 'non-sporty' identities and consider how this related to the potential success of the project ahead. Phase 1 activities consisted of: photo elicitation group interviews; sports alphabets; memory work; a research methods session; media analysis and a self-reflection exercise, I will explain these further below.

Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI's)

PEI's are a relatively new form of visual research method but growing in popularity. Previously used primarily with adults (Harper, 1997, 2002; Collier, 1987), but more recently in research involving children and young people (Epstein et al. 2006; Weinger, 1998; Smith & Barker, 2004; Rasmussen, 2004), PEI's have been purported to add value to interview data. Harper (2002) explored the case for using photo elicitation in interviews and surmises that 'photo elicitation evokes information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation' (p.14). He argued that participants respond differently to the symbolic representation of photographs in comparison to words alone. This is not

unprecedented, in Collier's study 'the pictures elicited longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time helped subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews' (Collier, 1987, p.858) while Epstein et al. advocate that 'PEI [photo elicitation interviews] in it's various forms can challenge participants, trigger memory, lead to new perspectives, and assist with building trust and rapport' (Epstein et al. 2006, p.1). Harper (1997) suggested that photo elicitation be considered a postmodern dialogue because it is based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher. Harper further declares that:

> Photographs can jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence. As someone considers this new framing of taken-for-granted experiences they are able to deconstruct their own phenemological assumptions (Harper, 2002, p.21)

In the case of our projects the PEIs enabled the young women to express and analyze their assumptions about female sports participation and how this relates to their own participation patterns.

The photo elicitation group interviews were planned and delivered as an 'ice breaker' activity to introduce the research project in a fun, interactive and low pressure way. The objective was to discover the young women's current opinions about women and sport. In this activity the young women were provided with 48 photographs of women and girls participating in a variety of physical activities. The photographs were chosen by the researcher and taken from Google Images, it was intended to provide as wide a spectrum of images and sports as possible in order that discussion would not be limited, but rather could be widened beyond the young women's own field of experience. The images were selected on the basis that they were of good quality, that they featured women only, and that it was obvious from the photograph what sport was being represented. Only images that were already in the public domain such as images from Google or newspapers were used for this activity. The images were printed and laminated to make photo cards. The photo card activity and prompt questions were piloted with a group of my own friends to ascertain whether the sports represented were obvious and whether they elicited a significant amount of discussion. Following this, some interview questions were adjusted and further questions were developed.

When the activity was carried out in the youth groups, the young women sat in a circle and the collection of photographs was spread out on the floor so that each photograph was visible to all group members. Firstly, the young women were asked to ensure that they could identify each picture and which sport it represented. They were encouraged to sort through the photographs naming the sports and if necessary asking questions to clarify their understanding. The majority of the photographs were deciphered without help. When all of the photographs had been identified questions and prompts were provided. The young women were asked to look at the photographs and take turns to answer questions such as: which photograph do you most/least identify with your own experiences of sport? (See appendix 4 for full list of questions and appendix 5 for a transcript of this focus group session). The young women discussed their opinions and experiences of the different sports with each other, and with me, freely and without further prompting. The use of photographs in this process encouraged the young women to think more deeply about their answers, triggered memories, provided a focus for the discussion, and therefore broke down the formal interview structure. At the same time this approach allowed the young women to consider wider sporting choices which they may not have come up with on their own such as circus skills, or skateboarding. This activity lasted for over an hour with both groups of young women and there were no long pauses in the dialogue.

Sporting Alphabet

The 'sporting alphabet' was devised by me with two objectives. Firstly, to encourage the young women to think outside of their personal experiences of physical activity, and secondly to encourage discussion on what activities they felt constitute sport, exercise and physical activity. This exercise served as creative inspiration and a starting point for planning their own physical activity project. The young women were given an alphabet grid (see appendix 6 of an example of a completed grid) consisting of 26 boxes each containing a letter of the alphabet. They were asked to list as many different kinds of sport, exercise or physical activity as they could think of for each letter (for example B: basketball, bowls, boxing, baseball and so on).

An unexpected outcome of this activity was that it revealed a competitive spirit within both groups of young women. During previous conversations about sport (when

having initial discussions about the possibility of a physical activity project) both groups of the young women had denied possessing any competitive drive:

> **Livvy:** I don't have a competitive bone in my body!
> **Sara:** I don't do competition

So when I carried out this activity, (first of all with the group of young mothers) and they decided to work as individuals, keeping their answers from each other to see who could list the most examples, I was surprised and immediately dashed out to the shop to buy a small prize for the winner. I repeated this format with the other group of young women and found them to be just as competitive. When I reminded them of their previous comments, the young women answered:

> **Ellie:** Well it's not worth me being competitive at sport because I never win
> **Carrie:** Well I've actually got half a chance of winning this one.

Through this it is possible to view the young women's desire to present themselves as non-competitive as a technique to avoid potential feelings of failure experienced in relation to sport.

Memory Work

Memory work is a feminist and social constructionist research method developed in Germany primarily by Frigga Haug (1987). Onyx & Small (2001) describe memory work as an attempt to develop a method capable of bridging the gap between theory and experience; explore the processes individual women employ to become socialized into existing social and power relations; and work with groups of women to collectively analyse individual written memories. They describe the aim of memory work thus: 'It is feminist in being explicitly liberationist in its intent.' (Onyx & Small, 2001, p.773). Valerie Walkerdine (1990, p.112) further advocates the power of memory for feminist investigations: 'Memory … is unlocking the past; freeing the spirit. Memory is filling the gaps, breaking the silence, telling what could previously not be spoken, which was buried in the frozen silences of the history of women.' A memory work activity fits neatly with my FPAR framework as because of the potential to reduce the hierarchy between researcher and researched. As with FPAR, memory work represents a challenge to traditional approaches within the academy 'to create research practices that

relate to women as subjects and not as objects, and where closeness and experience is juxtaposed against the classic scientific ideals of distance, control, and objectivity' (Jansson, Wendt & Ase, 2008, p.231). Critiques of memory work surround the reliability of memories and the ability of research participants to accurately recall details of past events and experiences, post-structuralist supporters of this method however view this as immaterial since

> remembering something more or less truthfully is not, in this view, an achievement which is located solely within the individual. It has two sources: one in an individual's biography; the other in the intersubjective dynamics surrounding the telling. Memory works biographically in the sense that earlier events are reworked in the light of later meanings (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000, p.151)

In the case of my study therefore, it is not necessarily important that the young women's stories provided a detailed and accurate account of events, rather that they provided an opportunity to reflect on how shifting meanings of these events have worked towards the production of 'self', specifically a 'non-sporty' self.

Critiques of this method also problematise the potentially individualizing effect of re-telling personal stories at the expense of exploring social structures of power, therefore naturalizing or stabilizing women's experiences, rather than challenging and deconstructing gendered power relations (Taguchi, 2005). Haug (1987) stresses that it is the collective *theorizing* rather than *sharing* of these experiences that provides opportunities for new understandings of construction of the self. Jansson et al (2008) reinforce this by explaining the way that memory work might be used to explore new ways of understanding experiences and therefore challenge established power orders.

In the case of my study the collective sharing of memories highlighted a plurality of experiences that queried the naturalization of women's disengagement with sport, brought to light common experiences of inequality and discrimination and provided opportunities to re-visit 'old subjectivities' which existed before the young women had become 'non-sporty'. In this session the young women were provided with worksheets (see appendix 7 for an example of a completed worksheet) that were divided down the middle, on one half of the sheet they were asked to list positive memories of sport and on the other their negative memories. The young women made their lists, decorated

their papers and then presented them to the rest of the group. This exercise allowed them to share and compare and contrast experiences, it also provided a way of exploring how some of the young women made a shift from feeling sporty when they were younger to now identifying as non-sporty. The activity served as a vehicle to engage the young women in telling stories and building up a picture of their sporting journeys. Transcripts of these sessions can be found in the appendices (8 & 9). The young women's experiences of physical activity recorded in these memory work sessions form a large part of the discussion in chapter seven.

Media analysis

A session on research methods was incorporated to enable the young women to carry out their own research into women and sport. It was intended that looking outside of their own experience would bring to light issues relating to gender and sport that either they had not previously considered, or that they may have felt unable to raise. The methods session was delivered to the young women's group only, the young mothers did not feel that they wanted to participate. During the session the young women discussed different research methods (questionnaires, interviews, observations and media analysis). They discussed what they considered to be the benefits and drawbacks of each of these methods (see appendix 10 for transcription of discussion) and as a group they decided to use media analysis. Their rationale for this choice is explained in the following dialogue:

> **Livvy:** I think media analysis because then we don't have to talk to any strangers or spy on people and I hate questionnaires I think they're rubbish and really boring.
> **Laura:** what do the rest of you think?
> **Yetunde:** yes I think media analysis too because I don't like talking to strangers
> **Mafunda:** I thought interviews but you're right you know I would be a bit scared talking to people I don't know!
> **Laura:** okay so lets take a vote, how many people want to do media analysis? (All put up their hands)
> **Laura:** well that was nice and easy then wasn't it!

In the following youth work session, the young women were provided with several copies of the monthly sport supplement from the 'The Observer' and the only direction they were given was to find out about women in sport. They worked in pairs and as

individuals and created posters by cutting out images, articles and sections of text (see appendices 11-13). When they had completed their posters they presented what they had found to the rest of the group. For a transcript of this session please see appendix 14.

I was surprised by the effort and thought that the young women put into their media analysis. They worked in pairs and spent over an hour looking through the magazines and creating their posters. During this task, I felt that much of the dialogue was reminiscent of feminist consciousness raising groups. The young women examined how sports women in the media were represented, and for the first time I saw them question discourses of emphasized femininity, they became angry about how women were portrayed in the media and began to relate this to the positioning of women in wider society. Examination of their findings form a significant part of the discussion in chapter seven.

Phase 2- Planning the projects
Following all of these activities the groups were asked to devise their ideal project. They needed to decide what sports/physical activities they wanted to do, where, how and when. This process varied for the two groups and so I will describe them separately below.

Planning- Young Womens Group
The group began by discussing what their aims for the project were, they decided that the main goal would be to 'try activities they had never done before'. Before the projects began I had imagined that each group would choose 1 activity and do this every week for 12 weeks, however the young women's group decided that they would rather try out a variety of different activities. The young women devised a list of sports that they *did not* want to do, followed by a list of sports they were interested in (see appendix 15). They voted on the list of activities until they had come up with their top four choices (personal trainer, martial arts, zorbing, outdoor adventure sports). After this they each made a list of what they would need to happen for the project to be successful such as: a friendly environment, fun activities, and co-operation; and what potential risks would hinder the project such as: tension,

arguments, and people not getting involved (see appendix 16 for lists). Analysis of this process is central to the discussions in chapter eight.

The group was not allocated funding for their project from the general youth work account and was therefore required to seek and apply for outside funding for their project. The group applied to the Youth Opportunity Fund and they were awarded part of what they had applied for, £1200. However, the funders stipulated how the money was to be spent and they suggested that to spend £300 on zorbing for one day was not best use of the money and advised that it should instead be used to fund activities that would make the project last longer. This was hugely disappointing to the group as it had been the activity they were most looking forward to. They were also denied funding required to enter them for a sports accreditation, this would have cost £60 per person and the funder suggested that the young women ought to pay for this themselves. As a result, youth workers suggested other forms of accreditation to the group and the young women decided to use Berkshire Awards and Youth Achievement Awards instead. The activities that the young women decided upon were non-contact boxing, Pilates, personal trainer sessions and a day at an outdoor adventure centre. Further discussion of this and other organizational constraints are provided in the following chapter.

At the young women's request, only female coaches were selected as instructors, the young women interviewed prospective coaches and had the final say on who they would work with. They also completed risk assessments for all of the activities.
In phase two, I used a dictaphone to record planning meetings. I also kept copies and photographs of all written documents such as brainstorms, funding applications, risk assessments and planning sheets.

Planning- Young Mothers' Group
When we began to plan activities for the young mothers group there was silence around the table, they were not sure where to start or what activity to choose. So we returned to the sheets completed in the sports alphabet activity and made a list of all of the activities they had come up with on one piece of paper. This was then photocopied so they each had a copy, and they individually crossed out sports they did not want to do and circled those they liked (see appendix 17). They then pooled

their responses and by a process of elimination, we narrowed it down to their top choices, next they discussed the pros and cons of those that were left until they had mutually decided to go with either cheerleading or pole dancing.   The ethical dilemmas encountered during this stage of the process are discussed in the next chapter. The final choice for the project was cheerleading.

The young women used the internet to find cheerleading instructors in the area and contacted two instructors to arrange interviews. They interviewed both instructors and selected the person they liked best. It was interesting to be a part of this process because I was able to observe how their choice was linked to their ability to relate to the instructor. The first instructor arrived in a cheerleader uniform, perfectly made up with blonde pigtails, after she left the young women were adamant that she was not the sort of person that they could work with. The second candidate wore a tracksuit and no makeup, was very chatty, informal and easy going and after she left the group unanimously agreed that she should be selected.

The cheerleading course was funded using the project's general funds. The young mothers carried out a risk assessment for the activity.

Hopes and Fears

Before beginning the sports projects the groups created hopes and fears posters (see appendix 18). An A3 sheet was divided into two and the columns were labeled 'hopes' and 'fears'. The young women were encouraged to take post-it notes, and list their hopes and fears for the project and stick them in the appropriate column. The hopes and fears were discussed within the group allowing the young women to problem solve how they felt fears could be alleviated and hopes fulfilled. These posters were also shared with instructors/coaches prior to beginning the activities.

Self Reflection Exercise

Prior to beginning their sports projects both groups of young women completed a self refection exercise (see appendix 19), which encouraged them to think about how they perceived their bodies, confidence and competence levels in relation to sports and physical activity. The young women's group used these as a basis for discussion, while the young mothers group preferred to just complete the worksheet and hand it

to me. It was intended that this exercise would be repeated after the young women had completed their sports projects, however this did not occur with the young mothers group as we ran out of time before the sessions closed for the summer holidays.

Phase 3- Participation in and Evaluation of the Sports Projects
Participant Observations
Throughout the research process, I carried out participant observations. These observations as well as my own feelings, struggles and reflections were recorded in a project journal and later typed up. During the physical activity projects, I took part in all of the activities alongside the young women. After each youth work session, I typed up field notes. In total 56 pages of typed notes were created based on these observations.

Gratton and Jones highlight a number of benefits associated with the use of participant observations. They particularly favor this method for it's potential: to collect direct and immediate data; to collect data within a natural setting rather than artificially conceived environments such as interviews; and to observe behaviours that are either unknown to or denied by the research participant (Gratton & Jones, 2004, p.163). However, they also identify a number of disadvantages to the use of participant observation such as, the possibility that the observer may misunderstand or misinterpret what they observe, the difficulty of recording data, and the potential effect of the observer on research participants. In my study I attempted to overcome these pitfalls by using participant observation in triangulation with the other methods described in this chapter, member checks on bullet points of findings and establishing rapport with the research participants. Field notes were written up immediately after each youth work session, however I can of course, never expect to capture every element of my observations in this way.

Video diaries
Video diaries are a relatively new method of data collection and, as such, little literature exists to fully interrogate the effectiveness of the approach (Buchwald, 2009). However, a small number of studies have highlighted some possible strengths and limitations of the use of video diaries in research with young people. Noyes

(2004) argues that while previous generations may have felt video diaries an awkward and inappropriate method, contemporary children and young people, who have been exposed to and surrounded by reality television shows such as 'Big Brother', approach videos with confidence and familiarity and often find this method inspiring. Scholars regard video diaries as a convenient method for obtaining biographical material (Moinian, 2006) and report that for some participants the camera has the possibility to become a sympathetic and attentive ear and a useful outlet for discussing their thoughts and feelings (Moinian, 2006). In addition, this method is particularly helpful for gathering views from participants that have difficulty expressing themselves in writing (Punch, 2002). As such, use of video offers a way to vitalize qualitative research and provides a lively alternative to traditional methods (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). In terms of research data, videos provide researchers with sources of both verbal and nonverbal data for analysis (Joseph, Griffin, & Sullivan, 2000).

However, as with other methods, use of video diaries is not without limitations. The staged nature of video entries means that participants may take time to prepare their feedback before creating their diary entry, for example by choosing to say what they perceive the researcher is looking for, or to 'put up an act' in front of the camera (Camic et al., 2003). Similarly, participants may avoid appearing on camera at times when they feel they are not able to project a particular persona, as such they may avoid filming when they are concerned about how they may portray their emotions (Morse et al., 2003).

During phase one, all of the group activities and subsequent discussions were captured on video camera. At the beginning of the projects, some young women were nervous about appearing on camera, but after a short while the camera became part of the furniture in the room and the young women felt comfortable to engage freely. In setting up this process, it was important to establish ground rules for the viewing of the footage. I promised the young women that other than myself, and possibly my supervisors, no-one would be permitted to view the videos. I allowed the young women to play with the camera and experiment with interviewing each other before we began data collection. I also allowed the young women to watch back sections of footage that included them if they wanted to. I feel that all of these ground rules

prepared the young women for appearing on camera however, as I shall explore later, these ground rules changed when we moved into phase three. Videotaped footage of the phase one activities was transcribed as evidenced in appendices 5,8,9,10, and 14. I would note here that this is extremely laborious, however this it was also extremely useful as it was possible to view which photographs or worksheets the young women were referring to during discussions.

During the physical activity projects the young women planned to keep video diaries. It was intended that these would serve as a mode of data collection as well as being viewed at the end of the projects as part of the evaluation process. However, it soon became apparent that not all of the young women were comfortable being on film and while others were confident most of the time, if they were feeling particularly unhappy on a particular day they were less inclined to be filmed. Body image issues were often identified as reasons for not wishing to be on film. As a result, we decided that video diaries were not the most effective way to gather data. From this point I selected to use participant observations, field notes and written recordings of some of the young women's comments in my notebook and on evaluation sheets.

Power and Reflexivity

Feminist researchers have outlined the necessity of reflexivity throughout research design, process and especially in respect to relationships between researchers and research participants and the representation of participant voices (Skeggs, 1994; Hertz, 1997; Birch, 1998; Standing, 1998). A reflexive approach rejects the scientific positioning of the neutral observer and according to Fox et al:

> Reflexivity is about being aware of one's reasons for constructing knowledge in particular ways. It is about being aware of one's own values and motivations, and the social, cultural and political context in which one makes decisions about what is valid about the research and the way the research was carried out (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007, p.189)

A key element of reflexive practice is the recognition of the relevance of identity characteristics of the researcher. In short, 'reflexivity is about understanding how research is affected in terms of outcomes and process, by one's own position as a researcher' (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007, p.186). Reflexivity is a particularly important practice for practitioner researchers because research takes place within

environments and with participants with whom the research relationship must be regarded as secondary to the professional role:

> Power cannot automatically be transferred from the role of the practitioner to the practitioner researcher. Being an expert practitioner and an expert researcher are not synonymous. Practitioner researchers, therefore need to be adept at maximizing the transferability of power and developing power within their new role (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007, p.89)

Feminist action researchers are expected to advocate high standards in reflexivity, which is manifested through transparency and openness in the examination of choices made throughout research processes (Coleman & Rippin, 2000; Rose, 1997; Reid, 2006). Reid (2006) emphasizes research reflexivity as a particular strength of FPAR since 'it is essential for feminist action researchers to be clear about the promises, parameters, and guiding principles of the research. Through critically examining the dimensions of FAR and the researcher's own ongoing reflexivity, accurate portrayals of the possibilities and limitations of FAR may arise.' (Reid, 2006, p.1). Throughout my research it was necessary to carefully evaluate how my position as a white, childless, educated woman with feminist beliefs may have impacted the process of research. Throughout my fieldnotes I reflected on how my personal politics influenced the collection of data, the planning of the projects and importantly the interpretations of the data. The following chapter attempts to offer an account of the interplay of power relations within this FPAR project and of the ways in which I struggled to remain reflexive throughout.

Academic Rigor in Action Research

FPAR, like many other forms of qualitative research does not strive to adhere to positivist measures of academic rigor such as objectivity, validity, reliability and generalisability. Greenwood and Levin (2000) explain that these measures are largely unsuitable for social research generally. The nature of PAR implicitly renders such measures inappropriate because they fail to adequately account for 'issues surrounding voice, empowerment and praxis' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p.158).

The credibility of PAR is better measured by the willingness of stakeholders to participate in the process of action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). In the case

of this study, the young women were retained until the end of the projects and other youth work staff remained enthusiastic and motivated. While change and improvement is a clear goal in PAR, projects are not measured according to the level and success of such change, 'but rather that the exploration of the data, i.e. how a particular change was managed, provides useful and interesting theory which contribute to learning on the subject of change management' (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001, pp. 23-4). This research provided opportunities for the young women to reflect on their relationship with sport, and as shown in the next chapter had positive outcomes in relation to participation in physical activity. The collaborative approach to knowledge creation built upon in PAR projects, coupled with the value for the local context means that it is 'a challenge to compare results across cases and to create generalizations' (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p.97). Greenwood & Levin (1998b; 2000) reframe generalizability in relation to action research findings as a 'process of reflection rather than seeing them as a structure of rule based interpretations' (2000, p.98). Lincoln and Guba (1985) sought to create an alternative framework for evaluating the rigor of qualitative research and they identify four elements of 'trustworthy' research, that is, research whose findings are 'worth paying attention to' (p.290). The four elements include: 'credibility', confidence in the truth of the findings; 'transferability', showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts; 'dependability', assessment of the processes of data collection and analysis; and 'confirmability', a measure of how well the findings of research are supported by the data (Shenton, 2004). In relation to my study, it is possible to assess the trustworthiness of the research. The research can be evaluated as credible due to the use of triangulation of research methods, which strengthen the credibility of findings, my familiarity with the research settings and my use of youth worker skills. The data itself is credible because findings were discussed and generated in collaboration with the young women and therefore represent the lived experiences of the groups. The reflective commentary provided in chapter six and the use of extensive samples of the young women's own voices ensure the credibility and confirmability of the research presented.

Under Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, the responsibility for transferability lies with the reader rather than the researcher and whether they believe their situation to be similar to that described in the study. The responsibility of the researcher is to

provide 'thick description' of the research processes so that readers may relate the findings to their own positions. Likewise, dependability requires that the researcher should provide enough detail on research processes that readers are able to repeat their work (although not necessarily with the same results). Such detail should include research design and implementation, operation details of data gathering and reflective appraisal of the project. The extensive information provided in this and the following chapter, represent 'thick description' and therefore meet the standards expected for transferable and dependable research.

Coghlan & Brannick view action research projects as rigorous if they contain three key elements: 'a good story; rigorous reflection on that story; and an extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection on the story' (2001, p. 24). As such, this thesis adopts a narrative approach to enquiry, makes space for critical reflection on this story in chapter six, and theorizes these experiences in chapters seven and eight.

Data Analysis

There was a large amount of raw data for this project. This data included over 30 hours of video footage, from this, key sessions such as discussion activity sessions, were transcribed. Other conversations with the young women were audio recorded and transcribed. Overall, there are 183 pages of transcribed data. The data transcribed is single spaced, typed and includes pauses, laughter and utterances. In cases where videotape was transcribed, I also describe gestures that help to enhance the young women's dialogue and indicate worksheets or photographs that the young women were referring to. In addition to this, there are a number of photographs of worksheets (such as memory work sheets, evaluations sheets and self reflection questionnaires) and posters (such as media analysis posters and the hopes and fears sheet) completed by the young women.

It had been my intention to conduct data analysis, by a process of coding and recoding and in this way build up findings grounded in the data as it emerged. Therefore, following transcription I read through the data numerous times and coded each paragraph into themes and sub-themes. I made particular note of 'quotable quotations' as I was particularly keen to make use of the young women's voices in my

discussions in line with my feminist stance. After a while, I began to feel that the process of coding sections of text created a fragmented and 'out of context' picture of the project and failed to capture the temporal and continuous nature of the activities. In addition, this approach required me to attempt to set aside my subjective experience as a researcher and my own politics, as well as reflexive recognition of my own impact on the research, in favor of this heavy reliance on coded data. This did not fit with my reflexive stance and, as Cresswell points out, does not appear to embrace the philosophical understandings of qualitative research more generally, in which 'the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment. One cannot escape the personal interpretations brought to qualitative data analysis' (Creswell, 2003, p.182).

I found it impossible to separate the process of analysis with the process of writing up. After some time, I began to regard the two elements as woven together and I found that I was constantly returning to and interrogating the data. I struggled to piece together the most appropriate way to present themes arising in the data, moving quotations forwards and backwards within the text of my discussion chapters. It was during such a process that I remembered the words of previous action research scholars, who urged action researchers to 'tell the story' of the project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001). With this in mind, I adopted a narrative approach to the analysis and presentation of my findings. I followed the discussions of the young women in chronological order. This temporal approach to analysis enabled me to better represent the voices of the young women. Alongside this, I recorded my own impressions of what appeared to unfold for the participants as individuals, as a group, and for myself as researcher as the dialogue progressed. I am not alone in my disillusionment with coding, which has been criticized by postmodern and poststructuralist scholars for its narrow analytic focus and its over reliance on computer software (Coffey, et al., 1996). As I worked with poststructuralist approaches that focused more on discourse and narrative (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Reissman, 1993) I found that I seemed to better articulate the 'feel' of the project.

Narrative analysis meshes well with poststructuralist principles because of the value placed on language. Neimeyer (2000) extols the potential of narrative as a metaphor for the reconstruction of the self, he argues that the self is situated in language

because it is 'deeply penetrated by the vocabularies of our place and time, expressing dominant modes of discourse as much as any unique personality' (Neimeyer, 2000, p.209). Narrative analysis allows data texts to be considered from a range of historical, social and cultural perspectives. Through analysis, narratives are deconstructed to uncover 'powerful discourses, hierarchies, presuppositions, deliberate omissions and polar opposites' (Grbich, 1999, p.52). In this way, narrative analysis can be viewed as complimentary to Foucauldian notions of discourse and subjectivity. Byrne-Armstrong (2001) adopts an approach she describes as 'narrative analysis with a Foucauldian twist' (p.111). She mobilizes Foucault's style of analysis with the direct aim of acknowledging multiple voices, in particular, identifying those voices that are powerful and those that are silenced. This had specific implications for conception of truth, she states that 'the interpretation we call truth is the one that is attached to power' (Byrne- Armstrong, 2001, p.113). I approached my analysis in a similar way, I paid close attention to emerging discourses and attempted to make links between language and the formation of social processes and power relations. My own approach to analysis can be described as narrative analysis informed by Foucault's notion of discourse.

Approaches to discourse analysis can be categorized in two broad ways, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and poststructuralist approaches to discourse (based upon the work of Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida and others). Taylor defines the difference by stating that CDA pays 'close attention to the linguistic features of texts' while discourse analysis based around Foucauldian interpretations 'does not' (Taylor, 2004, p.435). However, this is an overly simplistic explanation and other scholars identify that a key element of poststructuralist discourse analysis 'the search for clarity and simplicity of meaning which is seen as illusory because there will always be other perspectives from which to interpret the material under review. To seek a definitive account is, thus, a misguided undertaking' (Humes and Bryce, 2003, p. 180). As such, Foucault inspired discourse analysis rejects the prospect of 'universal truths' and refutes the possibility of an objective and scientific approach to the derivation of meaning from texts.

Such an approach is criticized for it's overly 'playful' and nihilistic nature (Wetherell, et al., 2001), however, scholars utilize this method of discourse analysis for

understanding taken for granted, familiar forms of oppression that occur through language. Foucault (1980, p.237) describes, 'the discourses of true and false… the correlative formation of domains and objects… the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them, and … the effects in the real to which they are linked'. The value of such practices is described by Stephen Ball, who underlines the importance of research 'to engage in struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices' (Ball, 1995, p.267). In my own analysis, I explore the potential of discourses for contributing to and constructing fluctuating subjectivities. I identify the ways in which discourses have impacted upon young women's conceptions of self in the past, but also draw upon how reflection on such discourses opens up spaces for the development of new and emerging subjectivities.

In chapter seven, discourses associated with understandings of femininity, physicality and physical activity are examined with particular emphasis on the ways in which discourses construct appropriate femininity, memories of sports involvement and 'non-sporty' subjectivities. Chapter seven also considers how, through collective media analysis, active involvement in the deconstruction of discourses offers possibilities for transformative thinking. In chapter eight, the embodied effects of discourses are considered. This chapter considers how creation of safe spaces within the projects provided opportunities to generate emotional and symbolic capital.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the research conducted for this thesis. It has provided an account of the complimentary elements of the project including, feminism, poststructuralism, PAR, and narrative. The next chapter offers a reflective account of the FPAR projects drawing out highlights, challenges and difficulties experienced in the process of managing the FPAR projects. The chapter evaluates the 'success' of the project and outlines the positive outcomes in providing physical activity projects that are delivered in young women only, youth work settings. In addition, challenges, difficulties, ethics and power relations are examined.

Chapter Six: A Reflexive Account of the FPAR Project

This chapter seeks to attempt to reflexively evaluate the young women's youth work and sport projects in terms of both the impact on and potential learning for the young women and the usefulness of this FPAR model. I shall explore the highlights of this project, including potential outcomes for participants; some challenges that I felt though tricky to negotiate, overall added to the success of the projects; and the difficulties that we faced and which I felt posed a threat to the success of the projects. I will end by making a case for creating girls only, youth work based, sports projects and by drawing out implications for future projects.

Highlights

Young Women's Participation

At the beginning of the sports projects the young women identified as non-sporty and were, in many cases, anti sports participation. A quotation from my fieldnotes during an early session with the young mothers group summarizes this:

> Today I began to tell the young mums about the kind of project I hoped to run with them… what a disaster! One of them spoke for the group and told me 'er, good luck, we don't do sport'. The mere mention of the word 'sport' conjured up unpleasant looks, eye rolling, sighs and some sarcastic feeling laughter. They told me that it's just not something they are interested in and within five minutes of mentioning sport half of the group had left the room to go outside and have a cigarette. As a youth worker it's hard to take this as anything less than extreme attrition and a very bad sign for the project ahead. What's going to happen if they refuse to do it? I'll have to find another group. (Fieldwork notes, Young Mums group, Week 1)

It is no surprise, then, that by far the greatest highlight of the project was watching these 'non- sporty' young women taking part in and enjoying physical activity. All of the young women that were involved at this early stage, went on to take part in physical activities. If the impact of the projects were measured in terms of 'engaging young women in sport', the following quantitative facts would indicate positive results.

Young Womens Group:

- Nine young women took part in the 'young womens group' project, attended regularly, and were retained from beginning to end.
- The young womens group engaged in a minimum of 2 hours of physical activity each week for 16 weeks.
- The young womens group took part in taster courses for four different types of physical activity (pilates, personal trainer fitness sessions, non-contact boxing, outdoor/adventure activities)
- All nine young women achieved a Berkshire Award accreditation for their involvement in the project.
- After completion of the project the group planned and took part in a follow up course of street dance classes within their youth work setting.
- As a result of the project girls only gym sessions were established at the youth centre gym and these were attended by the young women from the project and other young women.
- Four of the young women subsequently joined a Sports Leaders Award course run by the Youth Engagement Service and gained an accreditation in sports leadership.
- Following this, one young woman began volunteering as an assistant netball coach with young girls aged 10-12 years.
- Informal discussions that took place 6 months following project completion, revealed that seven of the young women continued to take part in regular (more than 2 hours per week) physical activity.

Young Mothers' Group:

- 14 young women took part in the 'young mothers' group' project, 13 were retained from beginning to end (One young woman left the project and also the youth work group because she moved to live in another area).
- The group engaged in a minimum of 2 hours physical activity per week for the duration of the 10 week cheerleading course.
- After completion of the project the group planned and engaged in a follow up course of yoga classes.

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- The young mothers and their children took part in the 'Race for Life' the following year.

- Informal discussions that took place 6 months following project completion revealed that eleven of the young women continued to take part in regular (more than 2 hours per week) physical activity. During these discussions all of the young mothers further reported that they more proactively encouraged their children (particularly daughters) to engage in physical activity.

It is interesting to note that significantly more achievements were recorded with the group with whom I had a previously established relationship. This could indicate the value of long term youth work relationships in delivering FPAR projects.

Young Women's Views

Beyond these outcomes, it is possible to identify further successes for the projects, not least the young women's change of attitude. While the beginning of the project saw the young women displaying extremely negative opinions towards sport, the end of the projects saw them evaluating their experiences as enjoyable and exciting. One young woman even commented in the evaluation stage:

> **Yolie:** I've loved all of the different activities we've done in this project, the pilates, the boxing, everything and I don't think I really expected that.

Beyond this, however, was the young women's newly realized skills of critique in their own lives:

> **Laura:** Do you think about things in the same way now… after our project?
> **Karen:** It seems mad to me now how many things I took for granted. Why did I think it was normal that I would have loved sport ten years ago but hate it now? There's lots of things we've done that have made me think differently.
> **Laura:** differently about sport?
> **Karen:** yes sport. But other stuff too like all the things we talked about you know about being a woman and that, about why I sometimes hate the way I look, about what women are supposed to do. Do you know what I mean?

As will be shown in the following chapters, the young women's participation in the interactive activities prompted a number of shifts, recognized as fragile and changeable but nevertheless present, in subject positions in relation to gender and sport. These shifts were visible in the ways in which sport and physical activity were viewed, and in the ways the young women understood their relationship with discourses of sport. These shifts were felt tangibly by the researcher throughout the project, and were reflected in the fieldwork notebook. A further significant highlight was the young women's support for one another throughout the projects, the ways in which they took control of activities and made strong assertions as to the kinds of projects they needed, these are all explored further in chapter eight.

During the project evaluations, the young women made the following recommendations for what they believe young women need in the delivery of future sport projects:

- We want fun and variety and not routine
- We need time to deal with our issues!
- We want to choose our own projects
- We want to be with our friends
- We don't want to look stupid
- We want flexibility in commitment levels
- We need help to make our projects work

Improved Youth Work Practice

From a practitioner perspective, reflections throughout this process have enabled myself (and colleagues) to significantly improve youth work practice. The experience of taking part in an FPAR project generated a renewed desire to position the young women as decision makers, this resulted in youth workers being mindful of taking on supporting rather than organizing roles in the projects. We felt motivated to allow time for the young women to progress through the projects at their own pace rather than completing tasks ourselves, or pushing the young women to complete them quickly in order to move the projects along more swiftly. The young women gained meaningful experiences in project management such as applying for funding and managing budgets, interviewing and hiring instructors, carrying out risk assessments

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and planning projects. The project was also helpful in providing both the young women and my youth work colleagues with an understanding of research processes and research methods.

Research Outcomes

From a research perspective, the FPAR project generated an enormous amount of rich in-depth data, which has been utilized in describing and explaining the young women's experiences. The high quantity and quality of the data can be directly attributed to the ownership the young women felt for the project and the relationships developed between the researcher and the young women as research partners. Using an FPAR project allowed for data to be collected in a range of ways and thus provided different perspectives on experience. The 'action' part of the FPAR process allowed the research to be used as a vehicle for positive change and as such generated interesting data.

Challenges

Managing the 'P' in FPAR

It is worth discussing the challenges that arose through the participatory element of the projects. Attendance at youth work sessions (unlike school settings) is purely voluntary, and therefore it was essential that the activities arranged suited the young women's needs; had they not liked the activities on offer they would have simply 'voted with their feet' and not attended the sessions. While my own approach as a youth worker and FPAR researcher considered it an advantage that the young women were afforded a large degree of power in decision making, there were occasions when this created ethical dilemmas. The pole dancing debate, raised in chapter five, with the young mothers group was one example of this and future facilitators of FPAR projects may wish to consider, in advance, how they are prepared to balance participation with personal values and the search for useful data. My own experience of this process reveals the nuances and 'leaky' boundaries of a 'truly' participatory project. It is clear that my own agendas affected how I felt the projects should be shaped and certainly which activities were acceptable.

The group's selection of pole dancing posed a problem to myself and the other youth workers as we did not feel it was an appropriate activity. The young women voiced

the opinion that, in their opinion, pole dancing classes were a fun way to exercise and they did not believe it to be degrading to women or sexist. Youth workers took the opposite view and this was the cause of some debate. This particular situation highlighted to me the tensions that I experienced in my combined roles as a practitioner, researcher and as a feminist. As a youth worker I rejected the idea of young women taking part in pole dancing as an inappropriate message for the youth service to send, myself and the other youth workers felt it would be inappropriate to deliver this activity within the youth work setting. As a researcher, I strove to protect an authentic approach to participatory research. However, as a feminist I was appalled at the prospect of young women taking part in an activity so deeply rooted in female exploitation. At this stage in the process I was forced to carefully consider how far I should allow autonomy and full participation on the part of the young women within the research and whether, by imprinting my own views in this way, I was stifling their creativity. After much discussion, we researched the idea and discovered that the cost of having a pole dance class at the session every week would have been too expensive and so thankfully cheerleading was selected instead. While this was eventually resolved to the satisfaction of all, it demonstrates a clear ethical dilemma for participatory projects.

Following the resolution of this debate I was, initially, disappointed by the young mother's choice of cheerleading as their main activity. I had silently hoped that they would select an activity that was less stereotypically feminine, perhaps rugby or skateboarding. However, my disappointment quickly evaporated when I observed how nervous and even frightened the young women appeared at the beginning of the first session. This highlighted one of the strengths of adopting a PAR approach, if this process had been less participant driven and I had instead selected the activity in advance I feel that the project would have been doomed to failure! I observed their anxiety and thought to myself '*imagine if I'd just come in and suggested rugby!*' I also reflected that the choice of activity was not the significant factor in my research, but rather the young women's ownership of and continued engagement with the projects. Bourdieu (1999) warns sociologists to adopt 'reflex reflexivity' throughout the fieldwork process ensuring that links are made between 'on the spot' occurrences and wider social structures. In this study I overestimated the impact that the project could realistically have provided for the young mothers in relation to overcoming

barriers to sport participation. Researchers must also balance their own social and intellectual position and background against lived realities of research participants (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992, p.39). In this case my own disappointment with the young women's choice of activities reflects my own feminist epistemology, which drove a desire for the young women to select non-stereotypical sporting activities and select perhaps a more 'enlightened feminist choice'. This was coupled with my own desire to present research outcomes that reflected the 'action' element of my research and a desire to demonstrate 'movement' in the young women's thought processes in relation to sport. I wanted a tangible change to happen and I thought getting the young women to participate in a male dominant sport was the way that I could prove this had occurred.

A more critical and reflexive stance revealed to me that such disappointment and unrealistic expectations caused me to overlook where real action had taken place. In fact, the actions of being involved in physical activity projects, engaging in the process of discussion and planning and the subsequent challenges to dominant power relations in the field of physical activity, were vast achievements and in themselves demonstrated a more nuanced form of change.

While the debate over pole dancing might be regarded as a placing of boundaries on the autonomy of the research participants, and may appear to completely counter FPAR claims for emancipatory processes, I feel that this issue is far more complex. The voluntary nature of the youth work settings meant that, had the participants felt unhappy with the shape of their projects, they would have chosen to simply cease attending the group. Further, I feel that compromise on choices does not always represent a failure in participatory processes. While the young women did not get to do pole dancing, I didn't get the rugby project that I had envisaged either and the subsequent reasoning, compromising and debating process allowed for mutual learning to take place. This is consistent with Roger Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation', which identifies the highest rung of the ladder: 'Youth initiated shared decisions with adults: Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between youth and adults working as equal partners'. This is placed higher, in terms of level of participation, than activities in which young people assume complete control of the project, because this approach empowers young people while at the

same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

A further challenge that arose as a result of the participatory approach, was managing the balance between good research and good youth work. During the early stages of planning my research my supervisor made the following comment: *"this is certainly a great bit of youth work Laura, but where's the research?"* As a practitioner I hoped to ensure that the projects were well planned and the young women had a positive experience, as such this took first priority, it took time to understand how I could turn my everyday work into research. This is a common dilemma within research more generally and relates to perceptions of truth, knowledge and power, 'a significant dilemma for research that attempts to be empowering is that the wider, often hierarchical institutional structures, beset with power/knowledge questions of what counts as research' (Lennie et al. 2003, p.53). The balance between good practice and good research required constant attention throughout the projects, for example, balancing a participatory structure in which the young women led the projects, against risks of over burdening the groups or creating a feeling of obligation. This meant accepting that there were some parts of the research process in which the young women were not inclined to participate, for example data analysis. I was keen to involve the young women as much as possible in data analysis since it is widely reported that such involvement is necessary to fully understand and address power imbalances in knowledge construction (Clark et al., 2001; Doucet and Mauthner, 2002).

It was intended that the young women would engage in data analysis sessions, however both groups declined to be involved in this section of the project. I was disappointed by this, but acknowledged that the young women had already contributed a great deal to the project. The young women found my attempts at introducing data analysis procedures tedious and boring. Kirby (1999) emphasizes that this is often the case in research with young people. However, this is also likely to be due, in large part, to my own lack of experience with data analysis, if I had possessed a wider understanding of analysis techniques I may have been able to employ greater creativity in explaining and developing this within the projects. It was, therefore, essential to find ways to ease this burden. Bircher (1999) proposes that in

such cases adults should undertake analysis and seek verification from young people. My own tactic to overcome this issue was to conduct data analysis myself and provide the young women's groups with bullet points and summaries upon which they could comment. In future projects I would seek to strengthen this part of the project. Kellett et al. (2004) and West (1995) argue that in order to afford young people real opportunities to provide interpretations, researchers should strive to deliver appropriate training and support. If I could repeat this research I would consider holding a residential weekend, which would be used for conducting carefully planned, interactive, data analysis activities combined with a celebration of the end of the project.

A final challenge regarding the participatory nature of the projects was that often the research process became disjointed. For example, some sessions in which we had planned to carry out reflective group work or sports activities were interrupted by more pressing matters in the young women's lives. If the young women were having problems at home, with social workers or at school, the sports projects would be put on hold in order to provide proper support in these situations. Similarly, some young women chose to participate less in particular sessions, for example if feeling tired a young woman may opt out of parts of the physical activity being delivered. However, while these instances slowed down project progression, in many cases, they bolstered working relationships and group cohesion, which contributed to a closer knit and more reflexive project group. The other advantage of this flexible approach was that in contrast to other physical activity situations, where the young women may have missed out on an essential session and felt less inclined or unable to return, in their project groups they remained part of the group process and therefore their continued engagement in the project was secured. In addition, as will be explored in chapter eight, setting a precedent for emotional disclosure actually served to generate emotional capital and was utilized in challenges to symbolic violence.

While it must be recognized that the agendas of the researcher will always be present (FPAR researchers rarely make claims to value-free research), projects such as these still offer research processes that seek to flatten power relations between participants and researchers.   FPAR processes engage with the needs and desires of particular groups and strive to place reflexivity prominently in the analysis of research data.

Therefore, while participatory work is complex and difficult to negotiate, FPAR may still be recognized as a significantly different alternative to traditional researcher led projects.

Managing Adult Interventions

Throughout the physical activity projects I participated in all of the activities alongside the young women, often acting as the class clown to generate laughter and alleviate anxiety and fears of looking silly. Whilst I internally experienced some discomfort at engaging in displays of physicality, I adopted a 'fake it til you make it' attitude, hoping that I might serve as a role model to the young women and enable them to feel more at ease. At the beginning of the projects, I assumed that other youth workers would adopt a similar approach, however on a number of occasions I found that colleagues either resisted joining in, by finding alternative work to do, or displayed visible discomfort with the activity. I experienced a sense of frustration with this kind of behavior. I was similarly irritated when a colleague attempted to dissuade the young women from choosing less stereotypically feminine sports activities. What I had failed to account for was a lack of preparation of my colleagues for this project. On reflection, it was an obvious possibility that the ways in which the young women had constructed 'non-sporty' identities might be mirrored in the older female youth workers. Due to my intense focus on the experiences of the young women, I had failed to account for the feelings of colleagues. Following these initial incidences I scheduled several meetings in which I encouraged colleagues to share concerns about the project. I discussed further some of the feelings raised by the young women during sessions and used these as a basis for us exploring our own feelings. This enabled some colleagues to engage more comfortably in the process but I regretted having overlooked this in the preparation stages. I also regret that I had recorded few fieldnotes on this experience, as I have since found no literature that offers advice on caring for colleagues during practitioner research projects. In future projects, I would certainly include more in-depth colleague briefings and planning sessions in preparatory work.

Throughout the planning and delivery of the physical activity sessions it was important to consider how other adults would contribute to the sessions. In particular, it was necessary to ensure that sports instructors and coaches were selected carefully.

The young women took the lead on this and in advance of recruiting coaches informed me that they would not wish to work with male coaches and coaches that would be 'strict' with them. It was particularly interesting to observe the selection process the young mothers used when selecting a cheerleading coach.

They used the internet to find cheerleading instructors in the area and then contacted two instructors to arrange to meet with them. They interviewed both instructors and selected the person they wished to lead the sessions. During this process I was able to observe how their choice was linked to their ability to relate to the instructor. The first instructor arrived in a cheerleader uniform, perfectly made up with her blonde hair in pigtails, she spoke to the young women about how cheerleading can increase fitness and described some of the routines. After she left the young women were adamant that she was not the sort of person that they could work with, their comments included:

> **Carrie:** She doesn't seem much fun.
> **Carrie:** She thinks a lot of herself doesn't she
> **Clare:** What was with the outfit and the hair, she's not at an American football game, talk about over the top!
> **Karen:** I don't think she is the sort of person we would get on with
> **Chelsea:** She didn't even ask us about how the kids can join in

The second candidate wore a tracksuit and little make up, was very chatty, informal and easy going, she spoke to the young women about the group and asked them how they would like her to fit in to what they were already doing. She made suggestions on how the children could be involved and spent a good deal of time chatting informally to the young women and even playing with the children. After she left, the young women unanimously agreed that she should be selected. Their comments included:

> **Caroline:** I liked her, she's just very chilled out.
> **Chelsea:** She could tell we wanted the kids involved, she knows that's what we're all about.
> **Carrie:** She's just normal, she's like us.

This exchange highlights the ways in which the young women sought to employ an instructor to whom they could relate. Their comments reflect concerns that sports instructors might not understand them. It was also important to act as an advocate for the young women with coaches. In the case of this project, I ensured this by providing feedback to the coaches from the young women about delivered sessions when they did

not feel comfortable to do so themselves. I supported the young women to inform coaches of the needs and desires of the group. Most importantly I ensured that I took seriously and promoted to coaches the young womens expectations for the projects. In some cases coaches attempted to bypass the young women as leaders of the project by speaking to myself or other youth workers. This was immediately challenged and an example of how this operated in practice is examined in chapter eight.

Difficulties

Research Within my Own Organisation

By far the greatest difficulty throughout the FPAR process was reconciling local authority organisational structures and expectations with a participatory framework. One of the most difficult aspects of the research process was managing the relationship between myself as researcher *and* practitioner within my own organization. I have deliberately selected to describe separately the experience of conducting the research within my own organization because, unexpectedly, I met far more institutional obstacles there compared to the young mothers' group. This is mostly because the young mother's group intrinsically ticked organizational boxes relating to what constitutes 'good quality youth work'. Young mothers are considered a vulnerable group and work with this group is therefore considered very valuable. In addition, the young mothers' group is completely funded (including youth worker salaries) by outside funders and therefore possesses more autonomy in terms of spending and activity choice than local authority funded groups.

Power Relations

The first tension, that I felt keenly, related to the hierarchical structure within the youth service Whilst youth work organizations often strive to place young people at the forefront of decision making, in real terms, the power structure I experienced throughout this project depicted a different balance (see Figure 4).
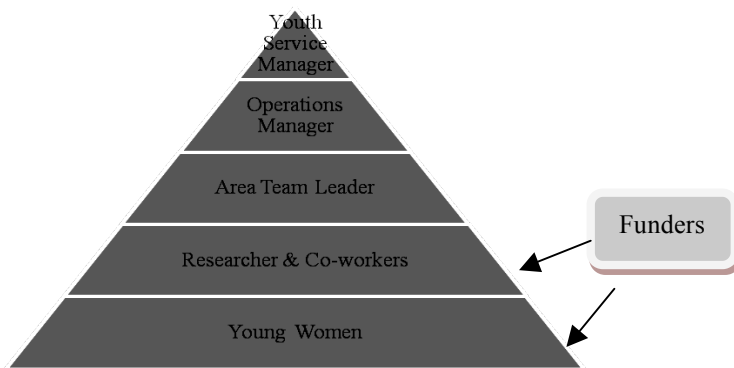
Figure 4: Organisational Hierarchy in the Youth Engagement Service

I struggled to come to terms with the need to appease this organizational hierarchy throughout the research, a process during which I felt the young women should have be afforded a greater degree of power. Below I explore how I negotiated these power relations in order to protect the progression of the project and to some extent the young women's autonomy within it. My challenge was to balance the expectations of all of the project stakeholders (young women, funders, university supervisors, university ethics committee, local authority managers) while at the same time ensuring that useful data were collected. This was no easy task, it was often the case that priorities of other stakeholders conflicted with the priorities of the young women and my research goals, for example, funders contributed financial backing but subsequently specified activities on which they could be spent, which in turn limited the young women's autonomy in the project. In addition, it was necessary for myself as 'project leader' to demonstrate a 'value for money' approach to youth service managers. To ensure the survival of the project for over a year it was necessary to balance all of the expectations and justifications of the stakeholders. Attempting to maintain this balance meant managing a number of power relationships within my organization (myself and the young women; myself and other youth workers/peers; my line manager and higher managers; myself and my line manager; managers and the young women; funders, myself and the young women). On reflection, I could have improved this process by attempting to engage stakeholders, such as service managers, within my organization more deeply and relinquishing some control in order to foster greater engagement from them. I think I took on a lot of solo work to try to protect the academic credibility of the project but in doing so gave myself an enormous task to complete. As a result, in some instances I possibly failed to communicate the true ethos of the project to service managers. Attempting to balance

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all of the stakeholder expectations meant that I faced a number of power relationships to manage within my organisation:

Myself and the young women

As discussed in chapter five, it was key that I establish appropriate research relationships with the young women, but it was also important for me to act as a buffer between the young women and the other stakeholders (within the organization and the funding body). Part of this role entailed enabling the young women to deal with negative responses for example, withdrawal of the promise of funding for the project from general youth service funds or the restricting of activities deemed appropriate for the project by the alternative funding body. These kinds of responses caused immense frustration and disappointment among the young women and as their youth worker I spent time facilitating sessions addressing these feelings and exploring alternative options.

Myself and other youth workers/ colleagues

To facilitate the project I was heavily reliant upon the support of fellow youth workers. Youth work sessions require at least two youth workers to be present and for youth work sessions to run effectively it is important for workers to share a common vision. For most of the project I was fortunate that the other youth worker on the team was enthusiastic about the idea of a girls' sports project. However, problems did arise within the planning stage. I was keen not to influence the young women's choices of activity, and had gone to great trouble to provide stimulus that encouraged the young women to think outside of their ordinary experience. The other youth worker, in her attempt to be helpful, was very vocal during this stage and to my horror constantly suggested and asserted that the young women should choose activities such as yoga, Pilates, and dance. I felt that as fast as I was creating a safe environment for the young women to widen their choices, she was limiting them to stereotypically feminine selections. We had several discussions as a staff team about this where I tried to explain that it was important for the young women to lead on the selections, however, this continued to be a problem until the final selections were made.

My line manager and higher youth work managers

As part of a local authority youth service, youth work sessions are assessed and evaluated on the basis of meeting organizational targets. Such targets include: reaching appropriate numbers of young people; ensuring participation levels are high; the number of young people receiving recorded outcomes (records of learning outcomes achieved by young people); and the number of young people receiving accreditations (recognized informal qualifications). These statistics identify whether youth work sessions are deemed 'good value for money'. In the case of my project, it was questioned whether nine young women attending a project constituted 'value for money'. My supervisor was expected to justify the project to the senior management team, and on occasion had to defend the project against criticism. It would have been feasible for the senior managers to close the project and therefore end my research, and so it was important for me to maintain support from my line manager in relation to the project.

My line manager and myself

Pressure from senior managers in the youth service detailed above, led to many fraught conversations between my line manager and myself. I felt that I was constantly fighting the fire in relation to the justification of my project and had to constantly provide evidence of its value ('quality over quantity'), to arm my line manager for battle with the higher powers. While she was supportive and understood the value of the project, she could not ignore the constant questioning from her managers. At one point I feared that the research would be called to halt altogether, my line manager even suggested that I could be moved into another project that already had a sport element, she suggested 'you'll just have to write your PhD on that instead'. This comment was followed by a frenzied explanation by myself (along with a few tears of frustration) that the whole point of the research was that it would be continuous with the same group of young women and that this certainly would not be acceptable. In the end, it was decided that if I was able to raise external funding for the activities of the project I would be permitted to continue. Fortunately, we did receive outside funding.

Managers and the young women

As far as possible I sheltered the young women from these threats to their project,

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however I did ask them to write a short report outlining why the project was important to them, which I provided to my line manager. I relayed to them that we would have to seek external funding but chose not to reveal the urgency of this course of action as I did not feel it was fair to place such pressure on their shoulders. On reflection, I feel that I should have been more open with the group, I was underestimating their ability to manage the situation, and in fact reduced their power within the process by not sharing all of this information with them.

Funders, the young women and myself

One of the highlights of the young women's project was the way that they were able to articulate their desire for the physical activity project within the funding application. I was pleased with how they described what the thought they would gain from taking part. The young women were delighted to be offered a substantial portion of the funding that they requested, however, the funding came with some stipulations. The young women were informed that they would not be allowed to spend the funding on a day zorbing as this was expensive (£300) and funders decided that it was more appropriate to spend the money on activities that would take place at the youth centre over a longer period of time. The young women were devastated by this news, zorbing was the activity at the top of their list, the activity they were most looking forward to. They were also denied funding to pay for a formal sports qualification that would cost £60 per person to register. It was suggested that the young women pay for this themselves, discussions with the young women found that this was certainly not possible due to their disadvantaged backgrounds and so I helped them to identify alternative (though sub standard) means of accrediting their project. My challenge was to balance the expectations of all of the project stakeholders while at the same time ensuring that useful data were collected. In their feminist action research study (which focused on enabling rural women to discuss and use communication technologies) Lennie, Hatcher & Morgan (2003) identified their taking on of a variety of discourses and corresponding subjectivities as the research process unfolded, they note that:

> 'feminists working on PAR projects would benefit from a greater awareness of their often conflicting subjectivities, the potentially disempowering effects of some of these subjectivities, and the complex power relations enacted in these projects.' (p.76).

Throughout this project I alternated subjectivities including feminist researcher, youth work practitioner, project campaigner and sports advocate. In some instances, I had to fight hard to ensure that the project secured sufficient support within the organization to continue to operate. Research in any organisation is political (Punch, 1994) and therefore researching within my own organization called for great political diplomacy. Cooklin (1999) considers insider researchers the 'irreverent inmate' that may be operating as a supporter or saboteur of the organisation and its beliefs. With its emphasis on listening, questioning, courage, action, reflection and democratic participation, action research may pose a threat to organisational norms and be viewed wearily as subversive by host organisations (Weinstein, 1999). Coghlan & Brannick (2001) advise that 'throughout the project you will have to maintain your credibility as an effective driver of change and astute political player. The key to this is assessing the power and interests of relevant stakeholders in relation to aspects of the project' (p.64). Buchanan & Boddy (1992, p.64) argue that to manage an action research process within organizations, researchers must be proficient in *performing* (building the action research project) and *backstaging* (creating alliances, maintaining supportive relationships and fighting off resistance to the project). I attempted this process as best I could, however, for me this was the single biggest and most exhausting challenge of the entire project. On reflection, in future projects I feel that these kind of issues could be minimized by increasing information sharing and quality of relationships between managers and project participants in the following ways:

- o Drawing up Service Level Agreements with the organizations involved
- o Inviting senior managers to speak to the young women's groups at each stage of the research
- o Producing regular reports to provide to senior managers and funders
- o Providing a short training session for the young women's groups on common difficulties in project management and dealing with disappointment.

Why youth work settings?

I would suggest that youth work settings are ideal sites for carrying out FPAR and physical activity projects with young women. The core values of youth work such as

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voluntarism and choice, are mirrored in FPAR. Youth work practitioner researchers are ideally placed to deliver these kinds of projects by drawing on their professional skills and credibility both within organizations and with young people. Non-practitioner researchers may enjoy similar success, however they will find it necessary to invest a significant amount of time in the process of gaining access to and building research relationships with youth work groups. They may find it useful to enlist the help of professionally qualified youth workers as co-researchers to ease these processes and in return provide youth workers with key FPAR skills and techniques that may further benefit the organization beyond the scope of the project.

Conclusion

This chapter asserts that the FPAR approach demonstrated real potential to redress power imbalances within the research relationship and to offer the flexibility necessary to negotiate the young women's changing attitudes to the project. The approach created an environment of mutual, informal learning with an emphasis on possibilities for reciprocity between researcher and participants. However, this was not always a smooth process and FPAR facilitators must plan carefully for ethical issues that may arise in the research. Collaborative approaches such as FPAR create space for young people to become valuable resources within research projects, for young people to be creative, reflective and innovative, and for young people to develop projects that meet their own diverse needs and desires. The following chapter examines findings from the phase one discussion based activities and in particular how engagement in these discussions prompted a shift in the young women's understandings of physical activity and femininity.

Chapter Seven: Discussing Discourses, Shifting Subjectivities

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the young women's group throughout their FPAR physical activity project. This group consisted of young women that had been attending regular 'girls only' sessions at the youth centre for over two years; the group were friends and had engaged in a number of projects together. The young women in this group ranged in age from 16-18, with varying ethnic identities (Black Caribbean, Black African, White British and Pakistani) and all considered themselves to be working class. This chapter argues that through participating in the activities of the research the young women engaged in a process of deconstructing the discourses surrounding women and sport. They reflected on how wider social discourses impacted their own experiences of, and relationship with sport, shared experiences of inequality and considered moments of resistance. The initial discussion activities allowed the young women to identify and experiment with new subjectivities and, in turn, try out and take on new subject positions. These experiences formed the basis of the young women's planning of their own physical activity projects. This chapter examines the ways in which the young women's group examined previous experiences and current perceptions of sport; engaged in analysis of representations of women in sport; and planned and participated in their own sports project.

Negotiating Un/sporty Identities

During the initial discussions of the project, the young women discussed their journeys in and out of sports participation. They recaptured old subjectivities of sporting enjoyment and achievement; deconstructed the taken-for-granted process of transitioning out of sport; uncovered shared experiences of inequality and celebrated moments of brave resistance.

Remembering Sporting Enjoyment

Despite considering themselves non-sporty, all of the young women were able to provide examples of positive experiences of sport and physical activity. In addition, despite previous claims that they were not competitive the young women recalled many moments of success and achievement in competitive sport, for example Livvy explained:

> **Livvy:** sports day, the last sports day in my school. I won the 100 meters sprint for girls relay, we won and I did the last leg, that's bad! Long jump aced it completely. Then rounders, and netball my school versus another school we won both matches every time we played them, they just got obliterated.

The young women were surprised by the number of positive memories they had once they began to think about it:

> **Mafuda:** and then relay, love it because I'm always allowed to sprint the last race and it's like having you know, winning for your team it just feels so great cos you're winning for your team and making your team happy. And then dodgeball, oh wow my list is long, because like back in Africa we used to play our own dodgeball thing and in Africa dodgeball is fierce!

> **Emma:** My positives is gymnastics, I remember doing it when I was a little girl and I can see my little niece going and doing it and it brings back good memories like tap dancing and things like that I loved all that. Um hockey, I absolutely loved my hockey when I was younger, and trampolining like Mafunda was saying I felt so free when I was, when you jump and the more you jump.

Such recollections reinforce findings that outline the often positive, enjoyable and pleasurable physical activity experiences that young women do have (Hills, 2007, 2009; Hills & Croston, 2012; Wellard, 2012; Bloodworth et al., 2012; Friesen, 2010), which are largely overlooked by research with non-sporty girls. As can be seen from these examples, the recollections of the young women in this study directly challenge their preconceived notions of themselves as intrinsically non-sporty.

Becoming 'Non-sporty'
Recollections of negative experiences in physical activity further helped to build up a picture of the young women's journeys in and out of sporty subjectivities. Their reasons for disengagement with sport were complex and diverse and demonstrate the heterogeneity of experiences. Exploration of these experiences challenged conceptions of exclusion from sports as a universal female occurrence.

Recollections from the young women outlined their perceived lack of physical competence in relation to sport. Yolie, Mafunda and Sara's exchange below provides

comments that relate to perceptions of the potential performance of their bodies, during sports activities and in particular during physical education at school:

> **Yolie:** I'm no good at rock climbing because I don't have an upper body!
> **Sara:** you don't have an upper body?
> **Yolie:** no
> **Sara:** you mean you don't have upper body strength?
> **Yolie:** yeah you need to use your upper body to get up there and I couldn't
> **Sara:** you need to work on that stuff though to strengthen it, you need to do exercise to make your upper body stronger
> **Yolie:** that's no good to me when I'm hanging off the side of a climbing wall though!

> **Yolie:** I've got two left feet

> **Mafunda:** I never used to get the ball in the lacrosse thing. I didn't feel co-ordinated

Perceptions of ability are closely related to perceptions of the body as they rely on judgments of bodily performance. Achievement in physical education is chiefly rewarded in relation to physical skills, speed, strength, aggression and power (Armour, 1999). It is important to consider this unhelpful effect of sport and physical education since 'negative experiences in PE and sport actively promote inactivity' (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012, p.22). However, perceptions of physical competence were also closely related to changes in body shape:

> **Laura:** tell me about your bad memory first then
> **Sara:** food food food food equals unhealthy me that's basically it
> **Laura**: say some more about that
> **Sara:** I used to be sports mad and I used to be like, everything I used to do used to be sports and then for some reason I fell in love with food, and I fell in love with the wrong food and so I became very very unhealthy and then the sports I did kind of got less and less and less until now I don't really do that much.

Corporeal transitions appeared to exacerbate their relationship to physical activity. The young women tended to view their more developed bodies as inappropriate or incompetent. Scholars describe the onset of puberty as a pivotal moment in young women's conceptions of their bodies as weak and inactive which in turn impacts on their understandings of their physically active selves (Wellard, 2006; Bedward & Williams, 2000; Segal, 1997). At this time, girls begin to appraise their bodies in

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reference to ideal forms of femininity and physicality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Frost, 2001). Concerns for failure to measure up and related feelings of embarrassment and self-consciousness affect decisions to participate (or not) in physical activity (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Garrett, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Hills, 2007; Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000, Penney, 2000; Vu et al., 2006; Xiang et al., 2006). Although no member of the group would be described as overweight, they associated their changed body shapes with a failure to maintain their diets:

> **Laura:** why have you got food written on the bad memories?
> **Yetunde:** because food is what's making me not want to play football
> **Laura:** tell me why, explain that
> **Yetunde:** I get tired after like 30 minutes of the game
> **Laura:** why do you think it's food though that makes you tired?
> **Yetunde:** because it's food! I keep eating!

> **Yolie:** All I want, is to look like the girls in magazines

Evans (2006) relates the onset of puberty and physical changes, such as the development of breasts, as significant to girls' concern for the 'visibility' of their bodies, which has been shown to affect some girls relationship with physical activity. As a result, young women may begin to underrate their bodily potential, become less confident engaging in sport, and this in turn hinders their development of physical skills 'thus fulfilling the prophecy that they are weak' (Evans, 2006, p.554). According to Hunter (2004) visual markers of 'fatness' are misinterpreted as markers of physical incompetence, therefore students regarding themselves as fat, tend to disengage with physical activity. Negative bodily perceptions of any kind therefore, may have a negative effect on participation. This is particularly the case where such imperfections are perceived to be on display to others (Clarke & Cockburn, 2002; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garrett, 2004).

In other examples, gendered inequalities impacted on the young women's choice to withdraw from participation in physical activity. Lucy recalled that she played football in a mixed team until she was nine years old, at which time it was changed into a boys only team and she was forced to leave:

> **Lucy:** I used to play football for a team but then they made it into an all boys team
> **Laura:** they changed it to an all boys team? How old were you then?

Lucy: er about 9 and the only girls team they had was under 11's or something so I just missed it, so that was it never mind! And then I stopped doing it because it annoyed me the fact that they changed to a boy's team

Lucy was no longer allowed to play for the team she loved because of her gender, and also prevented from continuing because there were no equivalent girls teams for her to feed into. Exclusion from the boys' team marked the end of Lucy's participation in football and therefore formed a key part of her transition to a non-sporty subject position. In this way it is shown that singular acts of gender exclusion can have far reaching consequences for young women's continued involvement in sport.

In another example, attempts to provide broader experiences in physical education produced negative and unequal experiences for young women:

Katie: I hated the fact that girls had to do rugby but the boys didn't have to do netball or anything like that, rugby and hockey we had to do in the winter but I never saw any of the boys trying out any of the girls' sports. I don't think we ever got to play football either.

Once again, 'girls' sports' are positioned as inferior and of little relevance. Mafunda explained that in general she felt uninspired by her PE lessons:

Mafunda: Mostly I just found PE really boring and we got no good choices

Such experiences are significant because, as outlined by a wealth of research, poor early experiences in physical activity have an unhelpful effect on young people's continued interest in physical activity and often result in young people's construction of non-sporty selves and consequent non-participation in later life (Allender et al., 2006; Brooks & Magnusson, 2006; Carlson, 1995; Ennis, 1996; Garrett, 2004; Thompson, Humbert, & Mirwald, 2003; Van Daalen, 2005).

During one taster session Katie's interest was peaked:

Katie: I loved dance, street dance
Laura: why did you like that?
Katie: I dunno, I only did it once but you know I had a thing for street dance, I've never done it apart from once because it was a taster at our school in PE but you had to pay for more lessons outside of school but I couldn't afford to pay for lessons after that so that was it

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This example emphasizes both the positive and negative potential of 'taster' sessions. While the street dance session appealed to Katie in ways that other PE sessions had not, its lack of sustainability rendered such inspiration useless. Even though Katie was able to visualize herself as potentially successful at street dance, she had no way of following up her interests, and was effectively excluded by her disadvantaged economic position.   In contrast to previous examples of gendered inequality, this example demonstrates the impact of social disadvantage on participation in physical activity which reinforces assertions that economic disadvantage still presents a clear barrier to continued sports engagement (Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000; Donnelly,1996; Jones & Armour, 2002; Laker, 2000; Gatz, Messner, & Ball-Rokeach. 2002).

Sharing moments of resistance

A further feature of the discussions revealed previous moments in the young women's journeys through physically active identity constructions in which they had attempted to resist the normalizing discourses of gender and had tried to disrupt the unequal power relations they found themselves within.

> Today Yolie told a story of her secondary school experience of football. She attended a girls' school and managed to set up a football team. She demanded that games be arranged with teams from other school with some limited success. No other schools had girls' teams, and so she insisted on the arrangement of a fixture with a young men's team at a neighbouring school. Unfortunately on the day of the match some of the young women on the team, feeling uncomfortable about playing against a male team, failed to perform well, adopted giggly and submissive behaviour and (according to Yolie) threw the game. After this, teachers deemed it inappropriate for the team to play against male teams and so Yolie was never able to experience another school-to-school competitive match (Fieldnotes, Young Women's Group, Week 7)

While this narrative presents an unsuccessful attempt to transgress gender norms, it nonetheless demonstrates Yolie's reluctance to succumb to gendered expectations of female physicality and exclusion. Such forms of resistance demonstrate that the conditions of possibility exist for contesting male dominance of sporting spaces (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis 1997; Satina, et al., 1998; Hills, 2007). The process of recalling this memory allowed Yolie to revel in a previously defiant subject position.

In another account Emma refused to be consigned to girls' PE lessons at school, because she felt activities provided were sub-standard, and joined the boys' classes instead:

> **Emma:** I refused to do girls PE because do you know what was on offer? Trampolining or table tennis so I went and played basketball with the boys lesson. I said I'm coming in and they couldn't stop me so me and a few of the girls went out to play basketball. I didn't want to do table tennis what a waste of my life!
>
> **Emma:** I didn't mind doing PE it used to be quite fun but it was fun when I got to do what I wanted to do we actually invaded the boys PE lesson because ours was so boring and we went every week
> **Laura:** what did the boys get to do then that you wanted to do?
> **Emma:** they were playing basketball and the girls' choice was trampolining and table tennis and I was like forget this and I just joined the boys class and they couldn't say no because that would be discriminating
> **Laura:** wow
> **Emma:** it was great

Lorber (2000) suggests that by concentrating on such non-stereotypical experiences in relation to gender, there arises a possibility to blur the boundaries of gender and allow transformative learning to take place through the 'instability of gendered performance' (Hills & Croston, 2012, p.594). Likewise, Deutsch (2007) argues for an increased research focus on the ways in which practices that seek to contravene traditional constructions of gender and may be mobilized in 'undoing gender' (p.122), Hills and Croston (2012) suggest focusing on acts of resistance as one technique to achieve this.

The collective sharing of memories served to highlight a plurality of experiences that queried the naturalization of women's disengagement with sport. It brought to light common experiences of inequality and discrimination and gave opportunities to re-visit 'old subjectivities' which existed before the young women had settled in their 'non-sporty' identities. The process of memory work enabled the young women to produce new understandings of their lived experiences and highlighted the political within everyday practices. Engagement in the memory work activity provided reflections and ways of knowing that avoided the reproduction of previous discourses. The young women's recollections posed a challenge to 'naturalized' understandings

of their world and the ways in which they understood themselves and their sports participation as situated within existing social power relations.

Discussing Discourses: Redefining Terms of Engagement

Other group discussions deconstructed the young women's relationship with sporting embodiment, by unpicking their understanding of 'sport'. During the sports alphabet activity the young women analyzed the terms 'sport', 'exercise' and 'physical activity' and in turn the connotations of the terms. This provided further insights on their choice to withdraw from participation.

Early discussions of the difference between 'sport', 'exercise' and 'physical activity' examined the qualities and activities associated with each term:

> **Mafunda:** yeah but a game could also be a sport
> **Yetunde:** a game's anything, you can turn anything into a game
> **Yolie:** a game is something you do physically
> **Mafunda**: but you do all of them physically
> **Livvy:** no a game's like…
> **Mafunda:** a competition?
> **Livvy:** like the Olympics yeah but then the Olympics is kind of sports in a game
> **Yolie:** is it like an activity that involves finding a winner?
> **Laura:** okay so what makes a sport a sport?
> (Long pause)
> **Mafunda:** because it's in the dictionary
> (Laughing)

The young women had different views on how one can define the difference between sport, exercise and physical activity or on which activities could legitimately be categorized as sport. The following week's activity built on these discussions but was re-focused onto young women's experiences and beliefs about different forms of sport, exercise and physical activity. The 'sporting alphabet' exercise was guided by questions such as '*what ideas come into your mind when you think about sport/exercise/physical activity?*' and '*who is sport/exercise/physical activity for?*' Understanding the connotations of terms commonly used to identify physical activities can help to clarify how young women position themselves in relation to different sporting environments.

The young women consistently identified sport as formal, signified by 'rules of the game', uniforms, and official sports clubs with trained athletes and coaches. They shared a belief that typical sports participants were for:

Livvy: young people

Mafunda: men

Yolie: fit people

Sport was also seen as hyper-competitive with committed sports persons:

Mafunda: doing anything for a win

In the early part of this discussion Katie commented:

Katie: sport's really for men isn't it, I mean there are women's teams and that but everyone knows that like, things like football, they're really for men.

This was challenged by Sara who said:

Sara: no that's not totally true, men and women do play some of the same sports it's just that they never play together. I think women can be committed to sport I just don't think that people are necessarily bothered about watching them and supporting them.

Here we see Katie stating what she feels is a common sense 'truth' about sport and conversely Sara exploring how this truth is constructed through gender segregation and the trivialization of women in sport. When asked who sport is for, the young women felt sport was for 'sporty people' whom they defined as fit, athletic, competent at a particular sporting activity and committed to their sport.

By defining sport in this way, the young women were also positioning themselves as non-sporty. However, as noted by Hills (2007) a dichotomous understanding of 'sporty' or 'non-sporty' subject positions 'can mask more complex identifications and negotiations that may occur in relation to success, achievement and participation' (p.321) therefore further interrogation of the intricate and heterogeneous experiences of the young women is required.

The young women described how these discourses related to their own construction of 'non-sporty' identities:

> **Mafunda:** I don't do sport because I'm not fit enough

> **Katie:** No I don't do it, I'm not good enough at anything

> **Livvy:** I like smoking and eating too much to do sport!

These comments relate the young women's construction of 'non-sporty' subject positions to personal perceptions of inappropriate and incompetent bodies and related discourses of health and fitness, as outlined by Garrett (2004) who argues that 'understanding of the self is constituted within particular contexts through positioning oneself in relations to these discourses' (p.224).

In contrast to the exclusionary discourses of 'sport' for the fit, competent athlete, the young women viewed exercise as focused on redressing socially defined undesirable aspects of embodiment. Exercise was for

> **Lucy:** increasing fitness
> **Livvy:** getting your body into a better shape
> **Yetunde:** improving your health.

Descriptions of exercise comprised of activities prescribed for a particular extrinsic purpose and as:

> **Lucy:** not for fun

Sara revealed a further issue:

> **Sara:** I can't stand the thought of having to go and do boring things in the gym for like, the rest of my life, it's just not worth it and I wouldn't have the time anyway.

She paints a picture of exercise as uninspiring, tedious, perpetual and time consuming in contrast to explanations of sport as competitive and challenging.

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The young women failed to identify with motivations for exercise. They described participants in exercise as likely to be overweight people, ill people, older people, or people who may be deemed to be in some way physically deficient or lacking. These explanations resonate with media and policy discourses of an 'obesity crisis' and that construct weight related health issues as the result of individual 'failings' (Rich & Evans, 2005). When asked to reflect on why they did not wish to participate in exercise the young women voiced concerns about embarrassment concerning their current body shape and physical competence. Some, like Katie, felt unable to take part in exercise due to dissatisfaction with their current body shape:

> **Katie:** I would like to get fit and lose weight… but I don't want to be just another fat girl on a treadmill

Thereby confirming research that associates discourses of thinness with young women's continuing feelings of powerlessness and alienation from their bodies (Rich 2004; Garrett, 2004).

When asked to explain physical activity the young women described it as:

> **Yolie:** all the things included in sport and exercise… plus everything else!'

Their 'everything else' initially comprised a list of activities they felt unable to categorise as sport or exercise (such as circus skills, climbing and abseiling) but grew to include incidental activities such as walking to school or college, carrying shopping or dancing. They found that since there were less established discourses to draw upon relating to physical activity, it offered an opportunity for them to create their own definitions.

> **Yolie:** anything you use your body for

> **Livvy:** something we all do all the time, throughout our daily activities

Physical activity could include activities that can be fun or a chore but are not necessarily organized or planned exercise. They were unable to describe an exclusive population of people that take part in physical activity, thus regarding this as a universally inclusive pursuit which therefore included themselves:

Yolie: I suppose we all do physical activity

With the ultimate conclusion:

Livvy: so really all of us are physically active? We're not what you'd call sporty but we are physically active.

This was a pivotal moment in their deconstruction of self and it represented an addition to their 'non-sporty' subject position, a 'physically active' subject position. The discussions above demonstrate that the young women were reluctant to define themselves within either of the polarized fields of discourses connected to sport or exercise. In relation to sport they felt that the exclusionary practices meant they couldn't meet expectations; and with exercise they did not wish to be included, since this would mean accepting that their bodies were, like other consumers of exercise, incompetent, undesirable and lacking. The young women's withdrawal from sport and exercise can be explained in terms of a rejection of social discourses that define acceptable female embodiment narrowly. In rejecting these discourses they are enacting their own capacity to define their bodies. Their examination of the term physical activity presented a viable alternative. Garrett describes identities as 'constructed through a process of positioning within available discourses and negotiation with others, they are embodied through the internalization and 'living out' of these discourses' (Garrett, 2004, p.225). In the case of the young women, these discussions created a 'new' available discourse: 'everyone can be physically active'. Such a conceptualization legitimized and provided value to the unplanned physical activities carried out by the young women and therefore encompassed learning from other spheres of life (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). The term physical activity, with its lack of negative connotations of 'sporty' or 'exercise' was adopted as a better fit to the young women's embodied practices. It also allowed the young women to retain their nonsporty label which had a been given a positive spin by those who wanted to define themselves as outside of the perceived characteristics of traditional sport. The term physical activity, at once encompassed all activities associated with sport and exercise, as well as other activities, and in doing so encompassed all participants associated with such activities (see Fig 5). Therefore, simultaneously allowing the young women to perceive themselves to be within the boundaries of, or an active part of (rather than outside of), a group of people involved in physical activity (with sport

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and exercise as constitutive parts of this group). They could consider themselves included within a group of physically active 'others' without having to accept or resign themselves to subject positions they had previously rejected.
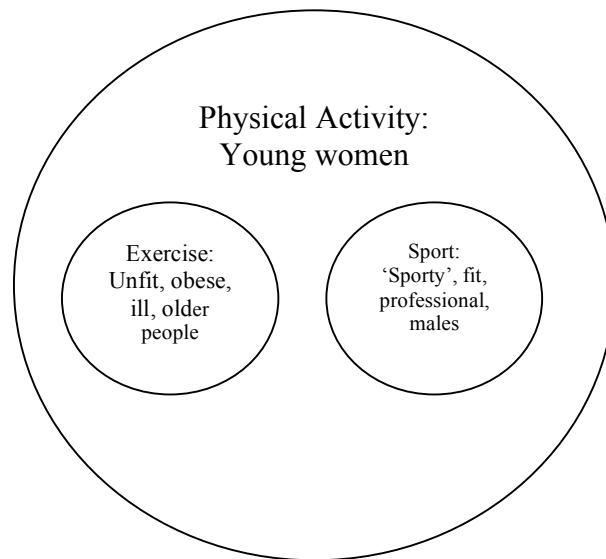
Figure 5: *Inclusive method of perception of physical activity*

These discussions can be recognized as an attempt to deconstruct the terms by investigating the discourses surrounding them. In the case of this study the terms 'sport', 'exercise' and 'physical activity' were considered in direct relation to the young women's own 'non-sporty' subject positions and how these were formed, thus exploring how the 'connections between truth, power and knowledge are critical to understanding the effects of discourse' (Hills & Kennedy, 2009). The young women's investment in discourses surrounding these terms reflects the impact on their embodied sense of self in relation to participation. This discussion served as a deconstruction of the societal implications of sports discourses as they relate to the young women's own experiences and knowledges of these terms and their effect on their own lives. These personal and everyday accounts can be considered useful in that they offer a critique situated within a specific time and place and with a specific population as do many other analyses of discourse (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Examination of discourse does not seek to establish universal truths but rather to explore situated understandings, as Markula & Pringle explain:

> Discourse should, therefore, *not* be considered as a simple translation between reality and language but as *practices* that shape perceptions of reality… he [Foucault] is referring to the unwritten 'rules' that guide social practices and help to produce and regulate the production of statements that, correspondingly, control what can be understood and perceived but at the same time, act to obscure. (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p.31)

In this case, the 'unwritten rules' implicit within discourses of sport and exercise meant that the young women chose to withdraw from participation. Adoption of the term 'physical activity', which was relatively unburdened by definitive discourses, freed the young women to create new discourses of their own and in turn experiment with new subjectivities. In this way, the project appears to work towards recommendations by Gorely et al. (2003) in respect of their concept of 'gender relevant physical education'. Gorely et al. (2003) suggest that through the direct critique of structuring discourses within physical culture, young people may be encouraged to disrupt stereotypical forms of gendered embodiment and experiment with alternative identity constructions. These group discussions eroded the 'discursive chains' (Gorely et al., 2003, p.445) of gendered discourses and enabled the young women to create a new subversive culture, with the power to defy normalizing discourses of embodiment (Oliver & Lalik, 2001; Garrett, 2004).

Analysing Representations of Women in Sport

Discussions stemming from media images of women in sport, proved fruitful ground for examining the complex and contradictory ways in which the young women related understandings of femininity and sports participation. Two particular activities that exhibited varying and conflicting negotiations of these topics were the photo elicitation interviews and the collective media analysis. The following section highlights key findings from these activities.

Bodybuilding and the boundaries of female embodiment

During the photo elicitation interviews the young women gave responses to a large number of photographs of women participating in sport. Typical responses generally highlighted positive and negative aspects of each sport. For example:

> **Mafunda:** Walking… that's just boring!

> **Livvy:** I don't understand archery either archery's crap?

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The young women used the photograph as a stimulus for discussing the sport depicted in all but one case. A photograph of a female body builder inspired a discussion of the athlete rather than the sport:

> **Yetunde:** what's this then body building, that's disgusting, er check this out it's vile.

Such assertions reinforce previous research which conceptualizes the female sporting body as a site of struggle regarding the borders of acceptable femininities and masculinities (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Skelton, 2000; Paechter, 2001; Gorely et al., 2003). While research shows that young people are developing increasingly tolerant attitudes towards the muscular female frame within elite sporting contexts, more conservative expectations of acceptable female embodiment persist in relation to non-sport contexts, as such, little physical capital accrued within these settings is perceived to carry value outside professional sports fields (Gorely et al., 2003). Yetunde's reactions to the photograph of the body builder emphasises traditional expectations of binary gender norms and, as will be explored below, demonstrate little acknowledgement of the potential for development of physical capital both within and outside of these settings.

The photograph of the female body builder generated vigorous discussion about the boundaries of acceptable female embodiment:

> **Mafunda:** where's that woman?
> (All laughing as Yolie holds up the female body builder picture, all pointing to it)
> **Mafunda**: that should be a man's sport
> **Yolie:** that's a man's sport
> **Yetunde:** cos that's just wrong!
> (All shouting and laughing together)

They associated the pursuit of a larger, stronger body shape with both a lack of femininity and a desire to actually become a man:

> **Mafunda:** I don't know I mean if it was me I wouldn't feel like a female
> **Yolie:** that's like wanting to be a man in a way, well I suppose she's still female but women are more feminine like the little girly girls, yeah you've got the tomboys at times but you wouldn't want to…
> **Mafunda**: that's too extreme

Such comments resonate with numerous studies that seek to unpack the social

reproduction of acceptable gendered embodiment. The ways in which 'the body' may be viewed as a site of discursive gender limitations is a persistent focus of feminist writings (Kristeva, 1982; Grosz, 1994; Gatens, 1996; Butler, 1989, 1990, 1993; Bordo, 1989; Kirkby, 1991). It is largely established that the ideal female body shape in Western society is slender and that the characteristic of slimness is synonymous with women and physical attractiveness, physical and emotional self control, success and youth (Grogan et al., 2004). As such, pressure to conform to this ideal body shape is powerful and represents a key element of feminist research (Brook, 1999; Marchessault, 2000). In relation to physical activity and sport, research has highlighted that the expectation for 'doing gender', combined with the privileging of male experiences, have established and reinforced gendered hierarchies which constrict opportunities for female embodiment within sport (Paechter, 2003; Garrett, 2004; Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Hills & Croston, 2012). Sawicki (1991) explains how an image such as this challenges the construction of femininity by troubling gender. She argues that 'female body-builders defy canons of the feminine aesthetic, building their bodies beyond traditional limits, they destabilize feminine bodily identity and confuse gender' (Sawicki, 1991, p.64). In the case of the photograph, the young women were resistant to associating their own understanding of what it means to be 'feminine' with the woman in the image.

A further contrast between the young women's analysis of the body-builder photograph and the other photographs were their attempts to pathologize the subject. When referring to the other photographs, their analysis was confined to their opinion of, or knowledge about the particular sport depicted:

> **Mafunda:** Cricket is really long isn't it? Too long for me to concentrate!

In the case of the body builder the young women attempted to also analyze the possible perceived personality traits and, in turn, personality flaws of the subject.

> **Mafunda:** she don't look smiley she don't look like she's happy to me
> **Yolie:** she looks like she's just doing it because that's how she looks now so she has to just keep going along with it

> **Yolie:** I can guarantee you yeah there's one time she'll look in a mirror and think I wish I was like that girl with like, like even though she works on her body, like thinking about the girls who's fine, like she'll think about not having that much muscles there's time she will day dream like having less muscles and actually being a girly girl
> **Yetunde:** and she is going to be jealous like when she sees other pretty girls in like heels and stuff looking all nice

Discussing her with a mixture of pity and scorn, they projected particularly negative emotions (sadness, jealousy, regret) and fears onto the subject which it could be argued in fact reflected their own fears relating to body image. The young women's responses to the muscular frame of the body builder largely corresponded with similar findings described by other scholars, for example Gorely et al (2003) who found that 'gender ambiguity created by a muscular female body was troubling for some young people' (p.434). Their reactions can be further theorized as a 'fear of masculinization' (Evans, 2006) which, within Western cultures, is typified by discursive constructions of gender revolving around binary corporeal norms: femininity as heterosexual attractiveness and masculinity as demonstrated through strength and physical ability (Jade, 1999). Sports, which encompass direct comparisons of strong and able bodies are therefore positioned as masculine, and the antithesis of femininity (Evans, 2006) or the 'culture of femininity' (McRobbie, 1978) depicted by weak, passive, non-muscular bodies (Johnston, 1996).

Hyper-muscularity and Abject Bodies
The hyper-muscularity of the body builder provoked strong and negative responses:

> **Yolie:** her thigh is huge she ain't got a breast or anything
> **Yetunde**: its because her breast has turned to muscle

It is well documented that Western society generally associates muscularity and strength with masculinity and therefore muscularity in women is viewed as inappropriate (Choi, 2000). Consequently, it was unsurprising that the young women were challenged by the image. As noted above, the picture of the body-builder stood out above all other photographs in terms of both the amount of time spent on discussion and the strength of feeling attached to this discussion. Discovery of the photograph prompted shock, horror and disgust as we can see in the previous

examples. The young women's significant responses to the image and their desire to discuss it at length can be somewhat explained by Johnston (1996) who reminds us:

> Female body-builders disrupt binary notions of femininity and masculinity. The matter of women's muscled (built) bodies provides the ground for contesting hierarchical dualisms such as femininity/masculinity, nature/culture, body/mind and sex/gender. Not only does body-building disrupt notions of the fixed biology of 'the body', it also provides new spaces for 'thinking through the body (Johnston, 1996, p.327)

In her study of female body-builders, Johnston (1996) theorizes reactions to their non-traditional body shapes using Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection Johnston draws correlations between this concept of abjection and common responses to built female bodies as both fascinating and disgusting (Johnston, 1996). This kind of behaviour is mirrored in the reaction of the young women in the study who simultaneously expressed both fascination and discomfort. The young women were particularly disturbed by the lack of ideal feminine characteristics the female body-builder possessed. Thus, reinforcing Johnston's assertion that 'without recognizable signifiers of femininity (breasts), the female body-builder becomes 'dangerous' and transgressive' (Johnston, 1996, p.333).

Heteronormativity

The young women discussed the body-builder's potential for achieving compulsory heterosexual attractiveness.

> **Yolie:** imagine being stronger than your boyfriend
> **Mafunda:** your man yeah that is disgusting
> **Yolie:** yeah you'd be the one lifting him up.
> **All:** eerr!

Informed by heteronormative assumptions that the subject of the image is heterosexual, the young women's comments show concern for the body-builder's ability to meet the sexual expectations of men and for the potential discomfiture of male onlookers:

> **Yetunde:** no way does she have a boyfriend looking like that?
> **Yolie:** she must not have a man because that's… what man would like that

Mafunda: no I reckon she would have a boyfriend but he would be really muscley as well
Yetunde: it would make a guy feel like really weird and stuff

Such contentions demonstrate the power of heteronormative limitations on young women in the pursuit of bodily pleasure (Butler, 1993). Socially constructed boundaries of gender, sexuality and physicality restrict the possibilities for experiencing the physically active body as pleasurable (Wellard, 2006). Their comments also align with work by Bartky (1990) and Holland et al. (1998) who contend that heterosexual women are subject to the 'Male in the Head' who facilitates judgment on their own bodies and those of others in terms of sexual attractiveness. For the young women, the unwillingness of the body-builder to conform to heterosexist ideals is abhorrent, shocking and 'abnormal'. Diane Richardson describes how this disregard for a socially acceptable body may be viewed by the young women as a kind of disobedience, that is in direct contradiction with traditional rules of socialization: 'heterosexuality infuses the social realm; it represents the idea of normal behaviour which is central to the concept of the social and the process of socialization into the social realm' (Richardson, 1998, p.13).

The young women's analysis of the body builder therefore, emphasizes their viewpoint on femininity and embodiment. At this stage, the young women do not critically reflect, are quick to judge, and are rooted in heteronormative thinking and associate the body builder with risk, in relation to the transgression of stereotypical expectations of heterosexuality and femininity (Paechter, 2001; Gorely et al., 2003).

In summation of the young women's responses to the body builder image, it is important to reflect on the potential impact of their value judgments. In line with Gorely et al. (2003), I identify the significance of such responses as indications of the impact of discourse on youth sport participation:

> 'The extent to which young people were able to see sport specifically, and physical activity more broadly, as meaningful and valuable to them was to a large extent circumscribed by the discursive formations created by the articulation of degrees of muscularity, sport and gender-appropriate embodiment' (Gorely et al., 2003, p.437).

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The young women's disidentification with muscularity necessarily produced barriers to unrestrained participation in physical activity.

Strength and Femininity

Aside from these judgments, discussion of the body builder prompted a wider discussion on the subject of femininity and strength. The young women commented that it was acceptable for women to be 'mentally stronger' than their male counter parts as long as this was not also manifested as a form of physical strength:

> **Mafunda:** imagine being stronger than your husband
> **Yolie:** lift up your husband like you're going somewhere and you go (makes gesture as if lifting something out of the way)
> (All laugh)
> **Laura:** do you think you can't be stronger than your husband then?
> **All:** erm….
> **Yetunde:** no wait
> **Mafunda:** no it depends what you're talking about, mentally or physically
> **Yetunde**: because mentally women are stronger anyway
> **All:** yes
> **Laura:** so you don't think it would be good to be physically stronger than you're husband?
> **All:** no
> **Mafunda:** no that is disgusting
> **Livvy:** no hang on you could be physically stronger but not looking like that
> **Yolie:** because women are mostly stronger like mentally than physically and in that picture it just shows the opposite
> **Yetunde:** yeah but nowadays there's a lot of females that are stronger than men
> **Yolie:** yeah physically and mentally
> **Mafunda:** but my mum and my step dad you'd think my step dad's stronger but
> **Yetunde:** your mum
> **Mafunda:** my mum's crazy do you know what I mean?
> (laughter)
> **Yolie:** my mum is mad, my mum is mad!
> **Mafunda:** like seriously my mum is crazy, my mum, my stepdad would like sit down if my mum says like keep quiet and I don't think that my mum feels like she has to get like… find ways to make herself bigger, like there's ways of women being stronger than making themselves…
> **Yolie:** looking like a man

This revealing conversation, exposed the complexity of the young women's feelings in relation to gender and strength and which would seem to attempt to separate body (physical strength) from mind (mental strength). Post-structural feminists such as

Prokhovnik have explored Cartesian mind-body dualisms and dichotomous thinking which associate reason/rationality/logic in the (masculine) mind as opposed to irrationality/emotions within the (female) body therefore prioritizing 'a narrow cognitive understanding of the mind as separate from lived and inscribed corporeality' (Prokhovnik, 1999, p.9). She argues that we may instead view emotions as located in the mind, which is in turn, part of the body. Here we see the young women negotiating their understandings of gender seemingly through a Cartesian lens, attempting to separate strength of mind and strength of body and choosing to assign these characteristics to particular genders. Adherence to the association of the feminine with emotions and irrationality *is* reinforced by Mafunda's later comments about her mother, however the young women present a different viewpoint when discussing women and men, and superiority in terms of mental and physical strength. This would seem to show that there is a contradiction in the discourses and subsequent subject positions that young women adopt when negotiating ideas of femininity and strength, these discourses are complex and shift depending upon the circumstances under which they are examined. In this case Mafunda equates her own mother's 'mental strength' and power in relation to her step father as 'crazy' however, when presented with the question of whether women can be stronger than men the young women were clearly troubled and did not wish to position women as inferior in every way to men. They therefore opted for describing women as 'mentally stronger' than men satisfying their desire to position men and women more 'equally', whilst simultaneously identifying gendered differences that dismiss the legitimacy of a physically strong woman (i.e. the body-builder). However, as outlined by Hills and Croston (2012) such attempts still rely 'on a foundation of binary thinking that reconfigures within group capabilities while reinforcing difference' (p.599).

We can also see from the above section of dialogue the way in which the young women struggled against the idea of accepting men as consistently stronger. With further questioning the young women began to express that, of course, not all men would be physically stronger than all women, as a result the discussion was brought back to physical appearance and how this related to strength. They surmised that it was acceptable for a woman to be stronger than a man but that this should not show; they should not build their bodies as the subject in the photograph had, but instead conceal their strength within a body that is of an acceptable size.

Challenges to Binary Thinking

After this discussion the young women began to make comments that appeared to take a different critical stance:

> **Laura:** so you think looking like that would stop her from being able to get a job in other places?
> **All:** (nodding) yes
> **Yetunde:** it sounds like discrimination but yeah

They began to use words such as discrimination and stereotyping in their analysis. Subsequent discussions considered the body-builder's possible motivations:

> **Mafunda**: I think she's doing it to prove a point
> **Mafunda:** oh I don't know I just think she's doing it to prove a point so if something happens she can say wait a minute, like you know how we're talking about stereotyping
> **Laura:** yes
> **Mafunda:** like how football is not just a man's sport and more girls are going out there doing it yeah to prove a point
> **Yolie:** yeah to prove a point
> Mafunda: but you don't have to prove a point, if you believe that then you believe that but I don't know
> **Emma:** is it to prove a point or is it because they choose to do it and they enjoy doing it and want to do it
> **Yetunde**: it could be all of it yeah they choose to do it, they like doing it and they want to prove a point by like saying we want a proper team and a league and that
> (Silence)
> **Mafunda:** yeah I don't know

In this exchange the young women recognized that a possible motivation for building one's body may be as an act of resistance to society's expectations of women and their bodies.

> **Yetunde:** I know you're not supposed to like stereotype and that but that's like taking not stereotyping to an extreme

Thus, the young women acknowledge gender-stereotyping, inequality of women in sport and women's right to make choices about their bodies. This discussion provoked the young women to consider the tenuousness of gender identities and to question the association between gender hierarchies and physicality. The conversation created space for reflection on whether it is possible to consider the body

as a site for political resistance and saw the young women beginning to raise questions around gender inequality.

In their analysis of the female body builder we can recognize the young women's paradoxical position as both receivers and reinforcers of gender surveillance. Far from simply existing as 'victims' of societal hegemonic discourses, the young women themselves are active agents of discipline, of self and others, powerful in their own right in policing the bodies of other women and at once conforming to and strengthening the gaze of emphasized femininity. Their policing and denigration of 'the other' ensures the positioning of self and 'the other' (such as the female body builder) as binary opposites, thus through dismissing transgressive body-work, they in turn valorize their own (greater) achievements in 'doing femininity'. By conceptualising the young women as powerful agents of socialization *through discourse* it was feasible to investigate the 'conditions of possibility' for experimenting with alternative subjectivities by *deconstructing discourse*.

Collective Media Analysis as 'Feministing'

The final group discussion activity involved analysing media samples for messages about women and sport. Previous media analysis research has focused on magazines as a means of investigating girls' subcultures (McRobbie, 1991; Cockburn, 2001) and analyzing discourses (Kehily, 1999) and is generally conducted by adult researchers. Here I present findings gathered by the young women themselves through the analysis of sports magazines. The findings are based around discussions of three of their posters (photographs of the posters can be found in appendix 11, 12 & 13). Upon beginning this activity, the young women were surprised by how few articles they were able to find relating to women's sport:

> **Yetunde:** To begin with I was a bit worried that we wouldn't find enough articles about women's sport to be able to make our photographs! I mean where are they?

This observation supports assertions that the paucity of women's sports in the media can serve to render it invisible (Lont, 1995; Alper, King & Jhally, 2002; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Von Der Lippe, 2002) and can limit the

available sporting role models for young women (WSF, 2004; Lines, 2001) that can serve to reassure them that women can embody sporting subjectivities (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). It also provided a forum for recognising and questioning the continuing privileging of male sport experience in the media.

The poster created by Yolie and Mafunda (see appendix 12) focused on an article that documents the career of Serena Williams, they were drawn to this article because they felt, as black young women, that Serena Williams provided an excellent role model for them.

> **Yolie:** Basically our title is sports focus and we've got a picture of one of the sisters… don't know which one… oh it's Serena, Serena Williams and in bubbles I've put never giving up because she's tried so many times and many time she would come third and she still goes and then there is a picture of both of them and I've written even a woman can get gold medals because sometimes women are put down and people say they're not able to do certain sports, then in the green we've got words and little phrases, there, there and there, just little quotes
> **Laura:** so why did you find that an interesting article to use?
> **Yolie**: because she's like one of those women that have tried so hard in life to get where they want be
> **Mafunda:** because she's a positive role model for other girls basically especially for us cos like we're Black…ha ha obviously you know that! It's just nice to see a Black woman that's really doing well in sport.

This quotation illustrates that the young women were beginning to articulate dissatisfaction with the way women are presented in relation to sport. Despite the article that they chose having been perceived by them as very positive, they comment on the rarity of such an article. It is also interesting to note that despite research studies (Spencer, 2004; Douglas, 2002; Schultz, 2005) highlighting negative responses to Serena and Venus Williams (as unfeminine or conversely overtly sexualized, or as targets for racism) the young women perceived them positively and as much needed role models for Black young women in sport.

In addition, from this quotation, it is possible to observe the contradictory discourses the young women were wrestling with in terms of conceptualizing women in sports. On one hand, Yolie asserted a strong neo-liberal approach emphasizing individualism and meritocracy in sport, however, this was followed by a more critical reading which acknowledges that Black women are underrepresented in the elite, middle class sport

of tennis.   However, the article does appear to make some attempt to adopt a 'hero narrative' usually reserved for male athletes (Kennedy, 2000). The young women expressed pleasure at discovering an article that describes a female athlete as being 'tough' and relate this to female struggles within sports:

> **Laura:** tell me about the bit that says talking tough that's in the middle
> **Yolie:** because that's what they are
> **Mafunda:** that's what they had to do to get to the top
> **Yolie:** talk tough
> **Laura:** talk tough, and tell me about the big picture that you chose
> **Yolie:** it shows the power and the kind of 'talk tough' thing

The young women felt that the image of Serena Williams presented a challenge to historical constructions of gender, power and physicality. They explained that the reason they especially appreciated this article was that it compared favourably to other articles on female athletes that seek to trivialize women's contribution to sport:

> **Laura:** and is that how women are usually shown in sport?
> **Mafunda:** no
> **Yolie:** no they're shown as in naked and…
> **Mafunda:** weak
> **Yolie:** yeah, they're shown as if they do weaker sports but tennis is really hard and this picture shows the power and the motivation on her face, so there you go
> **Laura:** So what do the rest of you think about what they found out about it? Livvy?
> **Livvy:** yeah I think it's good, I think it's a good positive portrayal of women in sports which you don't normally see, it's good

This reading of the article would seem to correspond to findings by Daniels (2009) who found that images of female athletes in the process of performing their sport 'have the potential to empower female viewers to focus on what their bodies can do unlike the large volume of media that sexualizes female bodies' (p.415). She argues that performance images disrupt discourses likely to facilitate poor body image, may positively affect young women's body concept and possibly reduce self-objectification (pp.418-9). The portrayal of Serena Williams therefore presented a possible positive role model within the media, which according to Whitehead and Biddle (2008) may enable young women to view sport as compatible with femininity.

Yetunde concurs with the other young women that the article is positive, however, we can observe contradictory readings of the discourse of a 'tough female':

> **Laura**: Yetunde what do you think?
> **Yetunde:** I like the picture of Serena Williams because she looks all like 'I mean business' usually they show them all in little skirts and that and they all go uh (pretends to hit a ball with a weak wrist) and with like the hair all back and stuff and smiling but she's all like 'yeah I'm getting into the game' (said in deeper than normal voice). That's what I like.

Yetunde's adoption of a deep voice here belies a contradiction in her analysis, while she favoured the article for positioning Williams as 'tough' and a serious sports woman, she clearly associated such attributes with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2002; Birrell, 2000). She was not able to separate toughness from masculinity even though she valued the challenge this presented to other representations of female athletes.

Further to showing and highlighting the lack of female images and an understanding of inequality in representation of female athletes, the young women also acknowledge further techniques of the symbolic marginalization of such athletes (Bernstein, 2002; Wensig and Bruce, 2003). They describe the use of images taken out of the sporting context:

> **Mafunda:** in most pictures about sports about women they have to do a whole different photo shoot they don't show them in action
> **Livvy:** yeah in underwear and stuff
> **Yolie:** so they do the photo shoot and then they write, they write about what they do
> **Laura:** why do you think that is?
> **Yolie:** because women are not seen as sporty, they're seen to be the…
> **Mafunda:** housewives
> **Yolie:** they're the handbag a man a needs
> **Laura:** they're what?
> **Yolie:** yeah you know the latest accessory, we're supposed to be the cook, the cleaner be in the house, we're not seen like we can be independent so that we can get where we want to be.

This example demonstrates the attempts the young women made to link inequalities in sport to those mirrored in wider society. They directly related their media analysis

to the way in which women are confined to the private sphere. Media analysis enabled the young women to reflect upon the relationship between sport and 'everyday domestic and familial gender constraints' as well as 'differing feminine ideals and gendered norms' (Thorpe, 2009, p.504). In doing so the young women produced 'questions as to the "naturalness" of established gender practices' (Krais, 2006, p.131)

Yetunde's poster drew on a number of images from a 'Sport Woman' edition of the supplement (see appendix 13). She revealed that despite this being expressly a 'women focussed' supplement, the number of articles related to women-only sport was still small and she had concerns about the way that the articles were structured. Yetunde explains her choice of images and articles for her poster:

> **Yetunde:** I got my stuff from a magazine called Sport Women, and the first one is that woman and in her quote it says 'some members of my family were against me playing, but football was my life and they came to understand that' and I think that that's just because they usually think like 'oh my little girls going to grow up to be a nurse or she's gonna do like a girly kind of thing'. When a girls says 'oh I want to do, like, football' most people think it's wrong, or the family don't accept that or they don't think they'll get that far because they're girls. And I picked that one (indicates a picture of Venus & Serena Williams) because of powerful women in sport, because Venus and Serena Williams, because even though they only do tennis they're really well known and stuff and they're really good at the sports they do. And then this bit on pole position was because in the quote it states that the only reason that they chose that picture was because erm, 'like a toddler drawn to the sunlight we were taken by the bright colours, and the sensational juxtaposition of light and dark in it' so really they only liked it because it looked nice and then in the bottom of the picture she had skimpy little knickers on and it just looked nice because of her tan and how everything was but they didn't actually care about that fact that she was actually doing like pole vaulting and that.

Her rationale covers a number of key points relating to the representation of sports women in the media: female athletes as 'unnatural' and subject to disapproval; successful women in sport; and the significance of aesthetically pleasing images in the construction of female athletes. An interesting observation that she made concerned the differing structures of the women's supplement as compared to the generic sport supplement:

> **Laura:** so you looked at the Sport Woman magazine do you think that was different to the other sport magazines?

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> **Yetunde:** Yeah as it in had loads about like, women but it also even though it's supposed to be a women's sport magazine it didn't have that many articles on women's sport
> **Laura:** okay…
> **Yetunde:** it still had quite a few on men, but it mostly just had pictures of women. It didn't really have that much to do with sport, it wasn't set out in the same way that a men's sport magazine would be set out, it was a lot more bland it wasn't like actually about the sport so much as it was about like they're personal lives. And most of them talk about how difficult it is for them to be a woman in sport.

Her description of the magazine as 'bland' reinforces research that examines the way women's sport is positioned as less exciting, fast or skilled than men's sport (Messner, 1992). It also shows the way in which women are constructed as not natural sports persons by this constant narrative relating to the difficulties faced by female athletes. While including some stories of this nature may be regarded as a challenge to the pervasive inequalities of gender and sport, over emphasis of such stories to the exclusion of any other narratives may serve to stabilize or 'naturalise' such experiences and further assist in reproducing such narratives (Birrell, 2000).

The final poster was entitled 'Sport Vs Sex' (see appendix 11). Livvy selected an article that focused on a female javelin thrower. She was drawn to this article because of its sexualized image. She cut out the main image of the article for her poster which was a young woman wearing white underwear reclining on a bed. Her disgust for this image was so strongly felt that she crafted a skirt from red tissue paper and added this to the image. She explained the rationale for her poster to the group:

> **Livvy:** my poster is called sport verses sex, as you can see that is the picture that's in the magazine, bar the skirt, she's a bit undressed
> **Laura:** you put the skirt on?
> **Livvy:** yes to make her a bit more decent and basically in the whole article that little box there (indicates box outlined in orange) is basically all they had of her sporting achievement and it's supposed to be a sport magazine, they even go as far as saying 'it doesn't matter that she wasn't actually considered all that good at her event as soon as the world clocked that she was runner up in the Miss World beauty pageant that's when they liked her'. So it's like her sporting life didn't really matter, it was just she looked good so they clocked on to that.

The sexualisation of female athletes by the mass media is well documented (Messner, Duncan & Cooky, 2003; Schultz, 2005; Christopherson, Janning & McConnell, 2002;

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Davis, 1997; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Shugart, 2003; Harris and Clayton, 2002). Steinham (1992, p.217) reminds us of the frequency with which these kinds of trivialization are naturalized in the media: 'All patriarchal cultures idealize, sexualize, and generally prefer weak women'. While Apler et al., (2002) consider this a technique to reproduce patriarchal power within sport and undermine women's athleticism. In a recent study, (Thomsen, Bower & Barnes, 2004) young female athletes were asked to respond to sexualized images of other female athletes in sport and fitness magazines. Responses revealed that the girls regarded these women as role models and, on comparing themselves to such images the girls felt 'depressed' and 'discouraged' because they felt they were unable to measure up (p.274). Media images play a significant part in the development and reproduction of societal standards of desirable bodies (Thompson et al., 1999). Stereotypical media images of thin, idealized female bodies often present standards of beauty and slenderness unrealistic and unattainable for the majority of young women (Ward & Harrison, 2005). Despite this, research shows that young women continue to evaluate their own bodies in comparison to such representations (Field at al., 1999; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Fredricksen & Roberts, 1997). Exposure to these media images, has been shown to correlate with poor body image, disordered eating and body hatred (Levine & Murnen, 2009; Slater & Tiggemann, 2006; Frost, 2001; McKinley, 1999; Muehlenkamp, Swanson & Breausch, 2005; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

Livvy's assessment of this article produced strong feelings of sadness and disillusionment and she indirectly related this to her own lack of participation in sport:

> **Laura:** and how you feel about that?
> **Livvy:** erm, (long pause), it is kind of like disheart… not disheartening but it just kind of makes you feel that like compared to their poster (points to Mafunda & Yolie's poster) it's kind of like a put down for women, because it's like as if the only reason that they even noticed her in the sports competition was because she looked good not because of how she actually performed in the sports. If that's how they treat someone that's a proper athlete then what chance do we, us lot here, have of being taken seriously?

Livvy's anger grows as she explains how the article not only uses images that position the athlete in an overtly sexualized way, but goes further by blatantly stating their sexist intentions for the article in the text accompanying the images:

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> **Laura:** what sport does she do?
> **Livvy:** javelin, which you can just about see in that little picture
> **Laura:** and that was the only
> **Livvy:** that was the only thing about sport in the entire article
> **Laura:** what are the other quotes you picked to go on there?
> **Livvy:** erm it says, 'from the moment the cameras picked up on her at the opening ceremony in Bejing her fame rocketed' so it's not even her doing the sports, its just they just saw her and they liked the way she looked and then er… then it says 'she may well be straight from the Anna Kournikova school of sporting underachievement but javelin thrower Leryn Franco looks great non-the-less and of course that's all that matters' so basically all they're saying that all that matters is she looks good and so even if she does sport it doesn't matter because she looks good.

Sexualisation is an all too common technique for creating gendered sporting images where 'facial expression or the way they [subjects of images] are posed helps to discursively construct a viewing position for the reader to adopt in relation to the person portrayed' (Hills & Kennedy, 2009, p.82). In this case the viewing position is intended to reflect an erotic gaze upon this idealized female form. The pose adopted by the subject of Livvy's article, like that of a jockey analysed by Hills & Kennedy, 'conveyed divergent significations of femininity in relation to sport. The glamour pose emphasized [the athlete's] femininity, coding her as conventionally heterosexually attractive.' (p.82). The other young women provided equally outraged responses:

> **Mafunda:** that's so sexist
> **Yetunde:** I agree with that I think that's true
> **Yolie:** I agree with that, … it's not really seen as oh she's a good athlete, she's seen more as a good model, oh she looks nice like this

They analyse how this approach to media reporting reflects patriarchal discourses of femininity: highlighting differing expectations for male and female athletes; expectations of conformity to ideal body shapes; the need to balance sporting identities with acceptable levels of femininity; and the wider effect this has on their own perceptions of embodiment and is likely to have on the female readership:

> **Laura:** what message do you think the media giving about women and sport?
> **Yolie:** being slim is being perfect or something like that
> **Mafunda:** yeah you have to be sexy first then do sport
> **Yolie:** yeah they think slim but not muscly is sexy

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Mafunda: you have to do sexy first though, if you're fat and that or don't look sexy they ain't going to put you in a magazine
Yolie: and they're not going to show a man half dressed and say he does javelin are they? They would really show him doing the sport, they don't need to, but with women they're supposed to have assets (indicates her breasts) we're supposed to show them off, to present them to
Mafunda: to men! And I think if… most of the time, you didn't put a woman the way she is now (indicates poster) people wouldn't actually read it
Yolie: yeah and if they did actually put other women who are not that small, who actually do sports that are just real women not just athletes that look good and put them in the magazines as well it would make other people confident as well to actually start a sport instead of thinking 'oh I'm big I'm not good at sports' It would make more people have a chance to do other sports.
Laura: what do you think Yetunde you're being very quiet?
Yetunde: yeah I think that's true because they never really show a woman like wearing what men wear, like tracky bottoms and a top, like it's always like skimpy clothes to show that they've got a sexier side so that they get more coverage and stuff because if they wear like all that baggy stuff or whatever no-one would really care about them. But the problem is if they act sexy and that they will get the coverage but it's not about their sport, it'll be about how good they look.

While Livvy's chosen article represents an extreme example of sexist and heterosexist media reporting it is by no means unique and is an all too familiar formula for the discursive construction of the female sporting body. Seagrave et al (2006) note that 'by concentrating on looks and sex appeal rather than athletic performance, women are not only symbolically denied athleticism but they are also forced to conform to standard, stereotypical, and ultimately constraining ideals of femininity' (p.32). This is reinforced by Thorpe (2009) in her analysis of female snowboarders, she describes the narrow discursive line the women in her study tread between performing heterosexual femininity and competent sporting ability. Bourdieu (2001) describes this as the 'double bind' women are subjected to in their efforts to access power in sports contexts: 'if they behave like men, they risk losing the obligatory attributes of 'femininity' and call into question the natural right of men to the positions of power; if they behave like women, they appear incapable and unfit for the job' (p. 67).

Overall, the young women's media analyses are particularly interesting when compared to some of their comments from the previous sessions during which they expressed desires to conform to traditional ideals of femininity (with Yolie even commenting *'All I want is to look like the girls in magazines'*); as well as showing contempt for women that choose to disobey unwritten rules of emphasized femininity

(such as the body builder). Working in groups and participating in media analysis elicited new ways of discussing and negotiating femininity, bodies and gender in relation to sports.

The use of media analysis is not unprecedented in work with young women. Interventions aimed at reducing poor body image have occasionally included media literacy (Stice, Shaw & Marti, 2007) with the intention of challenging the internalization of discourses of thinness as an idealized body form (Richardson et al., 2009; Levine & Piran, 2004). Psychology based research has utilized media literacy interventions that educate young women on the artificial production of media images in an attempt to prevent negative exposure effects (Prosavac, Prosavac & Weigel, 2001; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac & Posavac, 2005; Halliwell, Eason & Harcourt, 2011). One study found that interventions focusing on artificial images:

> disrupted the upward social comparisons that many young girls make when viewing idealized media images…the comparison is avoided because the media models have been construed as artificial and, therefore, an inappropriate comparison target (Halliwell, Easun & Harcourt, 2011, p.401).

The media analysis carried out in this study makes a significant contribution to this limited body of work. In addition, this approach goes some way towards fulfilling recommendations by other scholars that 'through understanding the construction of knowledge that frames the field, more students might become more aware of the discourses operating as well as the need to critically act towards these discourses' (Hunter, 2004, p.189). It further provided opportunity for 'critical interpretation that challenged and resisted dominant and often harmful discourses of the body' (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010, p.204) and sought to 'create spaces where they can overcome traditional societal role constraints and construct an identity that includes an active healthy lifestyle. (Ennis, 1999)

This activity enabled the young women to adopt new 'subject positions' (Weedon, 1997) from which to critically appraise discourses surrounding women in sport. It provided opportunities to 'resist pressure to conform to ideal images as presented in the media, which focus on sport as a 'tool' to construct a 'healthy', good looking body, rather than as an enjoyable activity' (Evans, 2006, p.558). From their revised subject positions they were able to explore 'practical feminist politics' (Kesby, 2005,

p.2037) and experiment with conditions of possibility that might pose a challenge to dominant sports media discourse. While other activities created shifts in subject positioning for example, from 'non-sporty' to 'physically active', this activity presented a shift in regarding sport as a unique category, to a recognition of sport as a mirror for wider society.

Planning the Physical Activity Projects

Following the discussion activities, the young women's group discussed together how they wished to proceed with the physical activity projects. Phase 2 of the research involved planning and implementing physical activity sessions. The young women began by choosing the activities that they wished to try and considering how the sessions might be organised. One of the key concerns raised by the young women was that of personal injury. They worried that because they were not competent at sport they might be hurt, so to try to overcome this, the young women risk assessed all activities in advance. There were positive outcomes to this in regards to both enjoyment and control of the project:

> **Mafunda:** I actually quite enjoyed doing the risk assessments! It made me feel like a proper boss.
> **Yolie:** Yeah and kind of made me feel like I was in control of my own destiny if you know what I mean, I felt like we were prepared.

In addition, as part of the planning process, the young women discussed what they felt was most important for ensuring they felt comfortable to participate. Their criteria for the projects were (see appendix 15):

- o Friendly environment
- o Approachable people
- o Commitment
- o Fun Activities
- o Relaxed environment
- o Teamwork
- o Unity
- o Friendliness

- o Kindness
- o Responsibility
- o Co-operation
- o Fun
- o Confidence
- o Effective Communication
- o Open minded
- o Love

The young women listed the following as potential threats to the project:

- o Tension
- o Arguments

This list offers an indication of the values the young women seek to attach to their projects. Their suggestions can be recognized as characteristics of a physical activity space where they could feel comfortable. It may, in part, be viewed as a reaction against their previous negative experiences of physical activity; and also the desires of the group, which reflect values legitimized within the social space of the youth work groups. These lists provide a strong indication of the forms of engagement preferred within the young women's group. Drawing on past histories of perceived unfairness in PE facilitated a disinclination to participate within comparable circumstances. The development of particular norms within the group included a rejection of a 'competitive, evaluative space where it is possible to succeed or fail' (Evans, 2006, p.556) in favour of more inclusive practices which valued 'kindness', 'friendliness' and 'fun'.

A key specification identified by the young women was the importance of maintaining a female-only environment for the projects:

Katie: I want it to be all girls, I can't do this in front of boys

While young people report differing preferences for single sex or mixed sporting opportunities (Stidder, 2000; Derry, 2002; Osborne et al., 2002), previous literature

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surrounding physical education, has highlighted the benefits of single sex environments particularly for girls (Osborne et al., 2002). Perceived benefits include potential to create a compassionate atmosphere that enhances the opportunity for participants learning and enables students to interact with and receive feedback from adults, without the negative effects that have been linked to the attendance of male counterparts (Lirgg, 1994; Jackson, 2002; Osborne et al., 2002; Hannon & Ratliffe, 2007). Observed effects of male presence in physical education classes alongside girls include harassment and bullying, as well as dominance of space, time and teachers' attention (Derry & Phillips, 2004). Scholars also highlight the unhelpful impact on young women's confidence in physical ability, and anxiety relating to appearance and self-presentation (Derry, 2002). It is professed that single sex environments may present opportunities for more equality in girls' experiences especially related to team sports (Kenway & Willis, 1998; McCaughtry, 2006). Ennis argues that mixed sport opportunities are unlikely to provide equal experiences for girls and boys since 'many girls continue to enter sport as low-skilled, second-class citizens' (1999, p.46). She highlights that even within the space of her 'Sport for Peace' project, with specific objectives to enhance gender equality, mixed sport 'fails to overcome repressive social constraints on girls' construction of their subjective identity as an active, engaged, mover' (p.46). Therefore, while mixed sport may offer an enjoyable and positively challenging experience for highly skilled girls, those with less skills and experience are likely to feel subordinated (Williams & Bedward, 2002).

Further to this requirement, there was a preference for the groups to consist of young women already known to the group:

> **Mafunda:** I want it to be just us lot, you know cos we know each other, we know that we're all nervous and nobody is going to try to show off or make anyone else look stupid

This comment reinforces arguments that social aspects of sport such as peer approval and the prospect of strengthening friendships has a considerable influence on young women's choices to engage in sport and the potential for enjoyment (Cox et al., 2006; Sportscotland, 2006; Mason, 1995; Harris, 1995; Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). In addition, the potential to develop social relationships can be a motivating factor in participation (Adler & Adler, 2001; Harris, 1998; O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008, Smith, 1999) particularly where particular friendships are viewed as opportunities to

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gain access to high status or desirable social groups (O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008). Garrett (2004) cites 'active settings' as providing fruitful ground for friendship, humour, pleasure and motivation (p.233) while Hills outlines the importance of peer groups in young women's interpretations of their experiences of physical activity in addition to 'understandings of desirable physicality' (Hills, 2007, p.321).

Further clues exist as to the impact of previous experiences on the young women's planning process:

> **Yolie:** I'm not doing anything that I've done before, I want to do new things
>
> **Yetunde:** I want to pick activities that we've never done before
> **Laura:** Why's that?
> **Yetunde:** Because I want to try something that I haven't already failed at
> **Livvy:** Yeah, like the… them sports we did in PE I already know I'm crap at those so I don't want to do them again, I want to try something totally new that I might actually be good at.

This powerful account highlights the feelings of failure experienced by the young women as a result of their previous engagement in physical activity. They regarded their previous sport experiences as mostly unsuccessful, to such an extent that they were not prepared to revisit them even in the relatively safe space of our projects. Like the young women in Hills' study, they sought out activities with the potential to 'minimize the need for public display' with 'less clear markers of successful performance' and 'a more similar starting point in terms of ability and prior knowledge' (Hills, 2007, p.325).

The culmination of these planning discussions saw the young women selecting a number of activities to try out, these were Pilates, private gym sessions, a non-contact boxing course and a day out at an outdoor adventure centre.

Responses to Participation in Activities

Similarly to young women in Enright and O'Sullivan's (2010) study, the young women selected physical activities that were largely individual and non-competitive activities. The activities that the young women's group chose had specific implications for their experience of the projects in comparison to previous encounters with physical activity. For example, Livvy compared the non-contact boxing with a

previous experience of self-defence classes at her school:

> **Livvy:** I like the non-contact boxing because the focus was on the skills and getting your stance right and maybe a bit of controlled aggression. I've only done self-defence in the past and it made me feel more scared than before, like lads might be out to get me and the focus was all on getting away and nothing to do with being strong or practicing your skills.

From this quotation it is evident that previous experiences of self-defence classes served to reinforce gendered power relations by positioning males as dominant and to be resisted (Connell, 1995), as dangerous 'others'. In this way the '"internal relation" of the gender order is kept alive through the dynamic principle of alterity or otherness, 'always constructed in relational opposition to each other' (Brown, 2006, p.165). While intentions may have been to provide an empowering experience for the young women, instead it promoted fear, thus reinforcing and reproducing the gender order. Although non-contact boxing may be perceived as a similar activity, the approach of personal skill rather than self-preservation produced a different response and served to increase rather than reduce feelings of achievement and competence. Deem & Gilroy (1998) argue that the accumulation of physical capital women experience through sports participation may be converted into social capital in respect of an increased sense of assertiveness in relationships and in feelings of self-confidence. Likewise, Garrett argues that a sense of empowerment could be gained 'through a sense of bodily strength, control, discipline or mental focus where an individual could resist traditional constructions of femininity as fragile or weak' (Garrett, 2004, p.233).

Participation in Pilates allowed the young women to consider their bodies in new ways:

> **Yolie:** Some of the muscles we were working I never knew I had before. The instructor wasn't like really thin she looked normal like us so we had to forget about the idea that we would get thin quick and think about the body differently like trying to get a bit better at controlling it each time. It wasn't so obvious as the other activities we did, like we weren't always out of breath and sweating but it was difficult at the same time

Through Pilates the young women were able to appreciate participation for new reasons, the 'normal' body shape of the instructor provided new ways of thinking

about their bodies, they set aside desire for body shaping and instead focused on strength and control. The young women viewed their 'slow progress' in Pilates as positive and enjoyed experiencing their muscles in new ways. Bourdieu (2001) valorizes female participation in physical activity for its potential for 'profound transformation of the subjective and objective experience of the body' (p.67). He argues that through physical activity the body 'no longer exists only for others or, which amounts to the same thing, for the mirror… Instead of being a body-for-others it becomes a body for oneself; the passive body becomes an active and acting body.' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 67)

While undoubtedly body image remained a significant issue for the young women during and following the projects, Yolie's comment above highlights that engagement in physical activity offered additional ways of perceiving embodiment. Like girls in Garrett's study of PE classes 'a strong sense of physicality and pleasure gained from being active enhanced their experiences' (Garrett, 2004, p.233). As such, careful consideration should be given to the choice of physical activities included in projects for young women and where possible, young women should be involved in this choice.

Conclusions

This chapter has documented the young women's journey through the PAR and physical activities and is largely characterized as a series of negotiations and subject positions. The young women's' discussions revealed a multitude of varying and often contradictory understandings that framed their perceptions of femininity in relation to sport. The same discussions demonstrated the young women's ability to deconstruct previously taken-for-granted discourses and reflect on the ways in which gender practices have impacted their own participation in sport. Throughout the activities the young women negotiated multiple, fragmented and often contradictory subjectivities in their exploration of their 'non-sporty', 'physically active' and 'angry' selves. Engagement with the planned physical activities enabled the young women to experience their bodies in new and fulfilling ways. The PAR and physical activities embraced recommendations from other sport scholars to enhance girls' experiences by highlighting diverse experiences, raising awareness of gendered discourses,

disrupting gender norms, challenging labels and providing opportunities for young women to engage in critical reflection on gender, physicality and physical activity (Penney, 2002; Lines & Stidder, 2003; Oliver & Lalik, 2004; McCaughtry, 2006; Hills, 2007; Hills & Croston, 2012).

Chapter Eight: Young mums in action:
Re-envisioning sporting spaces

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the young mothers that took part in the physical activity projects. The young mothers group consisted of 14 women, aged between 15 and 22 years old, who gave birth to at least one child during their teens. The young mothers involved in the study self-defined as white working class women. This chapter examines the experiences of this group drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical tools. In addition to commonly explored forms of capital, this chapter considers the use of emotional capital to help explore young women's physical activity experience. Study of emotions in sport has typically utilized psychological models focused on professional athletes (Hanin, 2000) and improving performance (Robazza et al., 2008). Recently a growing interest in sociological debates around emotions (Barbalet, 2002) has been taken up by sport sociology researchers, for example perspectives that understand emotions in sport through the lens of process sociology (Maguire, 2005); social interactionist methodologies that draw on Goffman's model of 'presentation of the self' (Allen Collinson, 2003) or 'emotion management' (Klein, 2001). However, no studies exist that employ the concept of 'emotional capital'. With a few notable exceptions (Hills, 2006, 2007; Thorpe, 2009; Atencio, Beal & Wilson, 2009, Brown 2006; Hunter, 2004), Pierre Bourdieu's theories remain underutilized within analyses of gendered experiences of physical activity. This chapter examines the interplay between emotional capital and other forms of capital (social, cultural, physical, and symbolic). It discusses how the projects in this study served as vehicles for accumulation and conversion of capitals. Using Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field, I explore how the young women's re-creation of a physical activity session offers new ways of understanding women's active embodiment.

While previous scholars (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2000; Reay, 2004) have considered emotional capital as a gendered capital that exists in the private sphere of the family and exists to the benefit of children rather than their mothers, I argue that emotional capital can also be usefully explored in young women's friendship groups to the benefit of the young women themselves. This chapter examines how young mothers

attempted to create a 'safe space' for participation in physical activity and the relationship this had to their embodied subjectivity.

Withdrawing from the Sports 'Field'

In a similar way to the young women's group discussions in the previous chapter, the young mothers described their journeys out of sport and their disidentification with, and subsequent withdrawal from, the 'fields' of sport and exercise by their unwillingness to conform to particular normalizing discourses. This section explores the young mothers' perceptions of their previous embodied experiences in sporting spaces.

The Body in Sport Spaces

Throughout discussions of previous experiences of sport and physical education, the young mothers persistently returned to the issue of body image and their perceptions of their body shapes as inappropriate for sport:

> **Ellie:** I won't go to the gym because I'm fat, that's what puts me off, I don't want to show my fat off.
>
> **Sara:** I hated sport, it's cold and it's… you're wobbling and stuff when you move

In a similar way to the young women in the previous chapter, comments relating to both their physique and perceived level of physical control highlight the ways in which the young mothers possessed a bodily hexis (Bourdieu, 2001) that they felt precluded them from competent sports participation. Bourdieu adopts the term hexis to refer to the habitus in its embodied sense, for example deportment and gestures (Jenkins, 2002).

> **Leanne:** I had to do mixed swimming lessons so we had to swim with the boys in this scummy swimming pool and it was just my idea of hell because at the time I was very self –conscious about my body and to be showing it off in a swimming costume in front of boys was just my worst nightmare
>
> **Clare:** I know I must admit, it is intimidating like, when you walk in everyone goes 'oh'

> **Kelly:** yeah people do look at you I mean I went with my   partner, he signed up for the gym and I went with him and had a look around and just walking around there scared me I didn't want to go back in there

> **Karen:** At school when we had to do PE, a lot of the time I just felt sick to my stomach, I found it so embarrassing you know? I used to start feeling nervous even before the lesson started, and if the teacher ever asked me to do anything specific I just used to go bright red.

The young mother's comments above can be related to findings by Ennis (1999), when she describes the social space of sport and physical education as 'an environment where self-concepts are crushed and intimidation and alienation are commonplace' (Ennis, 1999, p.39). The above comments reveal deep-seated emotional responses associated with sport and physical activity. They revealed that as they grew older they experienced an increase in feelings of fear, humiliation, and embarrassment; and a reduction in sense of achievement or exhilaration. Negative emotions often manifested in real physical responses such as blushing, shaking and nausea which seemed to the young women to confirm their assumption that their bodies were not equipped for sport. Probyn (2000) highlights the weight of 'shame' in constructing identities, particularly in relation to sport. Similarly, Wellard (2006) argues that shame plays a significant role in developing understandings of the body as unskilled or incompetent and something 'which for many needs to be concealed at all times' (Wellard, 2006, p.115).

The young mother's concerns, particularly in physical education, echo those revealed in other studies that the discipline, control and surveillance of young people's bodies is commonplace within school settings (Gore, 1998; Reid, 1998). This is particularly the case in physical education where 'the body' comes directly under scrutiny and observation (Hunter, 2004). PE is discursively driven by attentions to bodies but with the addition of practices that are specifically concerned with gendering and shaping the 'objectified body' (Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Vertinsky, 1992) and, as a discipline poses little challenge to the dominant discourses of physical culture (O'Donovan & Kirk, 2008; Rich & Sandford, 2006). Likewise, in other sport settings 'it is clear that the body plays a central role in determining who the appropriate participants should be' (Wellard, 2006, p.109). Young people's developing awareness of suitable bodies and bodily performances becomes a significant factor in determining continued

participation in sports (Wellard, 2006). While young women have been continually problematised for their perceived lack of skill and motivation to participate in PE (Skelton, 1998; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Williams et al., 2000; Williams & Bedward, 2002), feminist scholars have highlighted that the problem is, in fact, rooted in PE and sport itself as a site of reproduction of the gender order and promotion of conventional femininities (Skelton, 1998).

Valued Emotional Capital in the Sports Field

Within further discussions, obvious links appeared between perceptions of physical capital and a subsequent lack of emotional capital relevant to the field of sports:

> **Carrie:** I wasn't like, the worst at PE but my PE teacher knew I didn't really like doing PE so she just stopped bothering with me. At the beginning she used to tell me off for not putting in enough effort or talking too much or laughing, a lot of the time because I had a miserable look on my face, but after a while she just switched to ignoring me. I never once got told I had done anything right by her.

Ability, or displays of physical competence may be decoded as bodily hexus (Bourdieu, 1990). Within the social fields of sport and physical education, Wellard (2006) argues bodily hexus 'effectively presents a social performance of where the individual is located within the habitus' (p.107). He further argues that such bodily performances form the basis for discrimination against less 'able' athletes with little regard for willingness to participate. Such differentiations exaggerate 'differences between 'sporty' and 'non-sporty' girls' (Hills, 2007, p.321) and disadvantage girls with little experience or ability in sport (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis 1997; Skelton, 2000; Williams and Bedward, 2001; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). In a further example, Chelsea explains how her lack of competitive drive was regarded as a negative characteristic by her PE teacher:

> **Chelsea:** I wouldn't have minded a lot of the sport we did at school if it wasn't for the teachers. Like, I just wanted to have fun with my mates, I wasn't particularly bothered about winning, or being the fastest runner or whatever, and the teacher hated that. She'd be all like, 'come on lets see some proper competition here' or going on about beating other people.

The notion of emotional capital is useful here, as it enables us to conceptualize the importance of emotion practices within sports settings. In PE, valued emotional capital is characterized by stoicism, enthusiasm, demonstration of effort, striving for success as well as attempts to adhere to a sports ethic (Hughes & Coakley, 2001). Norms and expectations for particular emotional performances construct 'affective economies' (Zembylas, 2007) that are maintained through power relations within the field, they therefore act as strategies for shaping and disciplining the habitus through emotion management and communication between actors (Zembylas, 2005).

Both Carrie and Chelsea's comments expose an expectation within PE classes to conform to particular emotion norms: enthusiasm, drive, and competitiveness. Interestingly, these characteristics can be viewed as contrary to prevailing societal expectations of young women such as empathy and deference to powerful others (Guy and Newman, 2004). Participation in reverent and polite emotion work is required of girls and is a key element of developing valued standards of femininity at a young age (Froyum, 2010). Emotional deference to others is a form of socialization, particularly for middle-class white girls, to gain endorsement as appropriately feminine. As Brown (2005) explains, 'Nice girls are kind, caring; they listen; they do not hurt others, get in trouble, or cause scenes; they do not express anger openly or say what they want directly; they do not brag or call attention to themselves' (p. 155). Research demonstrates that adults ignore or discourage girls' displays of anger and conversely provide emotional rewards for expressions of anxiety, fear and sadness (Chaplin et al. 2005; Garside and Klimes-Dougan 2002). Therefore, while competitive, aggressive and self-interested emotion work may be prized within sport settings, outside of the sports field such behaviour might in many instances be regarded as gender deviance (Morris, 2007). Silva (2007) relates this directly to sport by drawing on Lenney's (1977) concept of 'situational vulnerability'. She explains that women may experience a lack of self-esteem and confidence 'in situations deemed to be masculine' (Silva, 2007, p.87), such as sport, as a result of gendered expectations of appropriate behaviour.

The construction of sport as an alienating social field was described by the young mum's in similar ways to the young women in chapter 7. The young women

identified idealised bodies and their views were perceived to be reinforced by their teachers:

> **Karen:** my teachers were quite competitive as well
> **Laura:** in what way?
> **Karen:** well they'd be more praising to the girls that were the good ones and they'd point out the good ones every time rather than focusing on the others
> **Clare:** they wouldn't try and encourage you?
> **Karen:** no I wouldn't get any encouragement at all, no, never any encouragement, I just presumed that obviously I wasn't good for sport so I just gave up, I made up excuses every PE time like I'd forgotten my shoes or something like that, I always came up with something. I'd always try and miss it.

Bourdieu (1993) argues that for fields to become functional 'there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes, and so on' (p.72). It can be observed from the above quotations that teachers and some pupils demonstrated recognition of valued habitus within the field. Hunter, (2004) mobilizes Bourdieu's (1990) notion of 'illusio' to describe the ways in which norms and values in sport settings are legitimized and reproduced through the replication of the doxa. She argues that, in order to maintain their position in the field, PE teachers and 'good students' attach value to distinctions between actors such as 'competent display of skill performance, appearance of health and, ideal body type (not being fat), knowledge about the objectified biomedical body, displays of competitive fitness indicators, and being a good student' (Hunter, 204, p.180). As a result, 'good students' accrue capital and are therefore invested in stabilizing and maintaining the 'game' and consequently their own field position. In doing so, contrasting experiences are provided to those unable to embody the habitus of 'the good student'. Therefore, 'those who did not value PE for the reasons the teacher did arguably had less access to capital and less influence on the construction of the field' (Hunter, 2004, p.181). Like the 'bad students' in Hunter's study, the young mothers in this study were marginalized from physical education classes and accrued little capital that might elevate their position within the field. As a result, they possessed little real power to reconstruct the field and this experience of marginalization was extended to after-school activities:

> **Karen:** I preferred PE at primary school
> **Chelsea:** I didn't
> **Karen:** I did
> **Laura:** why?
> **Clare:** because you could play on the maypole?
> **Karen:** well no because you got to, you got, I mean the out of school one's like netball and that, you got to choose to do netball, where as at secondary school you had to be picked
> **Laura:** oh so you had to be the best
> **Karen:** yeah you had to be good at it, I obviously wasn't, so that was it
> **Laura:** so you wanted to do it for fun
> **Karen:** yeah and they only wanted you to do it if you were going to win, you know if you were good at it you could go on to compete but obviously I wasn't up to that so I didn't get picked (makes sad face)

In the above example, practices of exclusion from after school activities reinforced experiences of failure in PE and positioned the young mother's abilities as inferior, thereby 'reducing their ability to recreate the field and increasing the maintenance of dominant discourses complicit in the practices of the teacher and affiliate students' (Hunter, 2004, p.181). At the same time such practices separate young people into defined categories of 'winners' and 'losers' which are identified at an early stage (Evans, 2006). Ennis (1999) suggests that experiences such as this have a significant impact on participation, since 'it is not sport itself that makes the experience negative and repressive, but the ridicule, exclusion, and lack of feelings of contribution that often accompany these experiences' (Ennis, 1999, p.46). Bailey et al. (2004) found that girls do enjoy participating in physical activities, however it is the sporting practices that ultimately deter or exclude participation, in this way, many physical education and sport spaces can be identified as permeated with 'institutionalised symbolic violence' (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012).

Exclusion and Resistance

Many of the young mother's recollections confirmed previous assertions (Cox et al., 2006, Sport England 2006, Sportscotland, 2006) that life transitions played a pivotal role in reduction in participation. Shifting subjectivities, particularly from 'girl' to 'mother' acted as a catalyst for sudden disengagement with physical activity:

> **Kayleigh:** The first time I went for football trials I wasn't quite good enough, I went back again the following year and I got in but then I found this lump in my belly and it turned out to be a baby so that was the end of that, I never went back.

In addition, perceptions of teenage motherhood affected the young mother's ability to participate in sport and other leisure activities:

> **Carrie:** You know what? When you're a teen mum, it's not good enough to be a good mum, you have to be the best mum in the world because the social workers are watching every little thing you do. You can't risk being called selfish or them saying that you are neglecting your kids, that's why I hardly ever do anything for myself. It's alright for my partner, he goes of to play football, but nobody's really watching him, I'm the mum, I'm the one they are watching!

Young mothers available subjectivities and ways of being are therefore, structured in complex ways through the gaze of professionals, by subjection to judgment and by the desire to perform as good mothers. Similar to women in other studies then, the young mothers viewed their 'ethic of care' as a barrier to physical activity (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Brown et al. 2000; Henderson et al. 1990). They conceptualized 'good motherhood' as being willing to 'remain on-call, putting their own needs on hold' (Currie, 2004, p.226) and demonstrate sacrificing and unselfish behaviours (Thompson, 1999). The young mothers' views are broadly consistent with other research that highlights 'the guilt associated with leaving children with others to take time out for themselves' (Brown & Miller, 2005, p.410).

Another example of this is provided by Karen who became pregnant at 14 and was moved from mainstream school into a pupil referral unit (PRU) where sport was no longer on the curriculum:

> **Karen:** things were different like, after we had our children
> **Laura:** so tell me like, where you went to and what happened
> **Karen:** I had my daughter and I went to a school in [town] in [name of street] but it was just a house converted into classrooms and it didn't have any sports facilities so we didn't do any sort of sports and the only thing you're taught there was like how to make a good home basically like how to keep fit, we were taught how to keep fit, we were told to we had people come in and tell us how to keep fit but we weren't ever given the structure where we actually practiced it in the school
> **Laura:** so although you were still in education PE wasn't on the curriculum anymore?
> **Karen:** no neither was science, we couldn't do science because obviously they couldn't have the laboratories and things like that so we couldn't do that. The only things we could do there was things like child development, because like the teachers all knew that side of things, and maths and English and what was the other thing? Some girls did art there was that and cookery obviously,

they taught us how to cook and look after your baby and healthy eating but that's all we did. They didn't have things like any facilities to do PE or anything so we just didn't do it.
Laura: and did you miss it or did you not.
Karen: yeah I did. I think I did miss, just more because when I did leave my other school, I did, I did feel, I was just doing trampolining and although it was a bit basic I did really enjoy doing that so I was sad that it was all over, like forever.

This quotation reveals a wealth of structuring practices relating to young motherhood. The PRU curriculum provided Karen with a prescriptive agenda of those activities perceived to be of importance for young women 'like her'. Physical activity was no longer deemed appropriate. Research has shown that within the sphere of leisure, mothers may be able to challenge social and gendered expectations (Miller & Brown, 2005; Wearing, 1990) and 'resist definitions of **'mother'**, **'carer'** or **'wife''** (Currie, 2004, p.239) and the 'normalising gaze of the stereotyped motherhood discourse' (Currie, 2004, p.240).

Caroline and Karen's conversation illustrates a differentiation between students who did and did not do PE, re-enforcing the role of PE in providing narrow notions of sporting bodies:

> **Caroline:** I never did PE at school, I used to bring in a note or skip school and so did lots of my friends, we were the ones that ended up getting pregnant, you know I bet if you asked most young mums whether they did PE at school they would say no. Its just a personality type I think.
> **Karen:** Yeah I definitely agree with that it's the same with me

Although, PE is tasked with providing young people lifelong learning skills and encouraging participation in sport it is clear that Caroline and Karen felt a sense that young mum's shared similar disaffection with PE. Young women's disengagement with PE can be viewed as a rejection of the norms and values associated with PE spaces. It can also be conceptualised as exclusion by teachers and other students through the privileging of ideal bodies and the lack of a participatory ethos, and as part of broader social and cultural interpretations of gender and sporting bodies. One way of understanding the commonplace disengagement of young women from PE is as the result of a specific 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1972, p.51) that is constituted by positioning the young women's exclusion from the sports 'field' as common sense,

natural and inevitable. Young mum's disengagement is potentially less remarked on as it is in some ways anticipated or expected, reflecting discourses suggesting that sport and PE are incompatible with adult femininity.   This is reinforced through a range of social institutions as has been shown above including peer relations; discourses of 'ideal bodies' that permeate PE and sport, and practices which serve to exclude the less able, dedicated, and serious.

Similar to young people in related studies (Thompson et al. 2003; Brooks & Magnusson, 2006; Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012), young mothers felt disrespected, undervalued and excluded in PE. However, by taking the view of social theorists that refute the position of the dominated as powerless (Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1989), it is possible to observe the young women's behaviour as resistance to social forces. Reid (2009) asserts that 'it is through the use of the body that agency, in the form of resistance and rebellion, is often first expressed… the (emotional) body is therefore a means by which youth can insert their own desires onto the social world' (p.629). The young women's decision to withdraw from participation in physical activity and their actions, such as deliberately forgetting sports kit or bringing sick notes, can be regarded as attempts to establish resistant practices (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Garrett, 2004).

Young Women's Subcultures

In this chapter, the examination of practice inside the social space of the young mothers group is carried out. This space, like other social spaces, is constituted through the interplay of capitals. Specific capitals hold value within this space or subculture and common appreciation for such capitals form the basis of the dynamics of the space and the mobilization of power within the field. This section gives an indication of what is perceived by the young mothers to be legitimate and valued.

Counter Culture: Valued Capital in Young Women's Groups

While resistant practices within physical education have been highlighted by previous scholars (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Evans, 2004; Hills, 2007) this study reveals that these practices extended beyond the space of the physical education class and became a key element of the young mother's individual and group subjectivity:

Carrie: I haven't done sport for years and I don't really know anybody sporty. The last lot of sporty people I knew were, like, PE teachers at secondary school, and I hated them
Laura: What about you Karen?
Karen: I dunno, I mean I only really hang around with this lot and none of us are into sport, we're all smokers I think, no-one in my family even does any sport.

Their group consisted entirely of 'non-sporty' women, they considered this to be part of their identity, and this was shared by other group members. In the above conversation it is possible to view the young mother's 'non-sporty-ness' as forming a part of their bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). It can be argued therefore that 'particular affects and emotions between social groups reinforce other forms of capital' (Zembylas, 2007, p.455). This finding resonates with work by Hey (1997) who argues 'the so-called private, marginal realm of schoolgirl friendships is a significant place where the "social" is indexed. It is between and amongst girls as friends that identities are variously practiced, appropriated, resisted and negotiated' (Hey 1997, p.30). Friendship is understood as a fundamental element of girls' experiences (Hey, 1997; Kehily et al., 2002). This has particular implications for physical activity because according to Hey, (1997) young women's friendship groups engage varying relations of power that are used to 'identify idealized notions of physicality and define, include, dismiss and critique others' (Hills, 2007, p.322). In her own study, Hills argues 'interactions between girls proved central to physical education experiences' and further, friendship groups were observed as important in girls 'diverse negotiations of femininity and privileging of particular forms of embodiment' (Hills, 2007, p.322).

The young mothers in this study created a small field within which sporty subjectivities are not only absent, but also devalued. Instead, their shared habitus embraced being non-sporty, smokers, mothers, young parents, and in many ways 'rebellious' due to societal perceptions of young mothers. Jenkins (1992) argues that whilst individual embodiment of social spaces manifests in an individual habitus, those individuals taking up parallel positions within a social field are liable to occupy a similar habitus. Therefore, young women are likely to join together with others that share a similar habitus and thus reproduce acceptable forms of embodiment within the field. Chambers (2005) describes the inclination for actors to reside within fields that

are compatible with the habitus, such fields therefore reinforce rather than challenge the habitus.

This can be further theorized in relation to subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995) or 'hipness' which is appropriated in cultural and embodied forms. In this case the group culture rejects the legitimacy of sporty subjectivities as 'uncool' and simultaneously the young mother's embodied subjectivities represent resistance to physical culture. Like other studies of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995; McRobbie, 2007) this study reveals that while membership of these subcultures offers opportunities to engage in sub-field micro-economies (McRobbie, 2007), they offer little possibility for transferring capital outside of the subculture. In creating bonding social capital that precludes sporty subjectivities, they in effect exclude individuals that may have provided possible role models. As Carrie points out, the young women lacked any local role models related to sport, as such, they possessed little social capital within the field of sports, and did not desire to do so.

Planning the Physical Activity Project

The planning of the activity project led to discussions about desired sporting spaces. Several conditions set out by the young mothers provide clues as to the ways in which needs and desires of the group shaped expectations. A requirement raised by this group was the need to include their children in their physical activity project. During the planning stages with the young mother's group it was constantly asserted that plans for the project must incorporate their children:

> Today we finally got around to trying to decide on the activity for our project. They didn't finalise an actual activity but all unanimously agreed that it was important to choose an activity that could involve their children as well as themselves. All said that they would not even consider an activity that the children couldn't do with them (Field notes, Young mothers group, Week 23).

The young mothers struggled to come up with agreeable ideas for their project activity, so they made a list of all of the activities generated during the sports alphabet activity and then eliminated activities that any member of the group objected to. As explained in chapter six, the final choice was cheerleading. As such the young

mothers used the internet to identify cheerleading coaches locally and emailed to express interest and set up interviews.

After a suitable coach had been recruited, the young mothers arranged for the cheerleading coach to come in and speak to them before the beginning of the project so that they could explain their vision. I wrote the following in my field diary:

> The cheerleading coach came to meet with the group today to discuss the project, she sat down at the table while we were all having lunch, I asked the young mums to go around the table and introduce themselves. It was interesting that each of them stated their name and then introduced their child and spoke at length about their child but none of them wanted to say anything more about themselves (Field notes, Young mothers group, Week 28).

These extracts offer a perspective on the ways in which the young mothers viewed 'motherhood' as a integral aspect of their valued perceptions of self and appreciated capital within the group. Feminist scholars describe various forms of 'feminine' capital (Huppaz, 2009; Lovell, 2000), for example, Skeggs (1997) describes femininity as embodied but also as the acquisition of competence and therefore a facet of cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1997) gender is an 'absolutely fundamental dimension of the habitus that, like the sharps and clefs in music, modifies all the social qualities that are connected to the fundamental social factors' (trans. Krais, 2006, p.128). Therefore, while gender by itself is not a form of capital, it does provide the relations through which capital comes to be organized and valued (Skeggs, 1997).

As such, scholars must 'recognize agency and reflexivity as central to understanding both young women's capital accumulating strategies, and how they negotiate their gendered habitus across different fields' (Thorpe, 2009). For the young mothers in this study, in other sectors of their lives, performing femininity, exemplified by displays of 'good motherhood', selflessness and putting the children's needs first, afforded them access to cultural capital for which they received social rewards from more powerful others such as social workers and parents. However, as has been noted: 'feminine capital holds limited exchange value' and 'always operates within constraints' (Huppatz, 2009, p.61). For example, researchers have noted that women with children find it difficult to make time for themselves for leisure activities

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because of their commitment to their families as well as a sense of 'selfishness'. This is exacerbated by class and working class young women as a group evidence low rates of participation in physical activity. Discourses of commitment and responsibility that are awarded value with respect to motherhood, therefore, can serve to limit young women's capacity to care for themselves and their own needs and interests. From this perspective, combining care of the children with leisure emerges as a potential reasonable solution to limitations on leisure time.

A final extract from my diary outlines the way in which this approach by the young women carried through to the initial cheerleading session:

> Today was the first cheerleading session and at one point I thought I'd made a huge mistake and rushed the group and that it was going to fail! The coach arrived and set up her music and the next thing you know the young mums are all finding other things to do- a few went outside for a cigarette but most said that their baby needed a nappy change or to be fed or was crying. They all drifted off to do other things and there was an atmosphere of nervous tension in the room. In the end we just started, the coach began instructing and there was just me and two of the young mums joining in the warm up. After a while the rest began to drift over, some of them holding hands with their children, one of the mums joined in whilst carrying a child on each hip! During the session there were small children running and riding bikes between and around us while we were trying to copy the routine it was chaos (Field notes, Young mothers group, Week 32).

It is possible to theorize the young mother's behaviour as attempts to shift the focus of the projects to align them with their accumulated cultural capital. These efforts by the young mothers can be understood as an attempt to retain their status within their particular field. Bourdieu & Waquant explain it thus:

> Players adopt different tactics to protect and augment their capital. They may play 'trump' or master cards whose capital values vary according to the game. They may play more radically, to transform the game, such as by changing the token colours or devaluing the particular colour of tokens held by opponents (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.99)

By implementing this model of thinking we can view the young mothers continued focus on mothering, and use of child related diversions to delay or avoid participation in the cheerleading session, as attempts to shift 'the game' back to their own comfort

zone: the 'field' of mothering. The specific space of the young mothers group, predicated on motherhood, can be regarded as an exclusive space or subculture, in which the young women could develop their own 'subcultural capital' which is measured for its distinction within their small, specific situation (Thornton, 1995). The characteristics of this subcultural capital revolved around good mothering, childcare, providing learning experiences for the children and offering advice to other mothers. Like the working class women in Skeggs' (1997) study, femininity and mothering formed a significant portion of the cultural capital of the group, and is valued in terms of access to interpersonal relationships and the potential for 'respectability'. Respectability is particularly valued among the young mothers, who are the subject of constant scrutiny by others such as social workers and mother-in-laws. Bullen and Kenway (2005) underline the importance of such forms of capital:

> The cultural, social and symbolic capitals they deploy have currency within their social groupings, providing resources and strategies for survival … indeed, for surviving the positional suffering they experience there. From this perspective and within this context, their strategies may well constitute a high volume of subcultural capital and not, as the underclass thesis would have it, an impoverishment of social, cultural and symbolic capital (p.52)

As such, attempts to maintain a focus on mothering, offered opportunities for the young mothers to import learning accumulated from other social fields (Holroyd, 2003) into the physical activity projects. This presented a way for subcultural capital to remain valued and in turn, the emotional and physical capital required for participation in the cheerleading course could be subordinated.

Changing 'the Game'

The young mums in this group had chosen to withdraw from sporting activities citing dissatisfaction with previous sport domains, a lack of bodily confidence and an embracing of other identities not consonant with sport. Part of this research offered young women a chance to define and create their own sporting experience which could change the 'game'.

Recruiting a coach

A key moment in this research was the process of recruiting and selecting a cheerleading coach.

> **Carrie:** (to cheerleading coach at interview) How do you think you will be
> able to know the best way to coach us?

As I have discussed, their previous experiences of PE teachers were described by young women as lacking in empathy, exclusive, and judgemental. The spaces created by PE teachers were perceived as contributing to young women's feelings that they lacked the requisite capitals for successfully engaging in sport. Within this project, the young women were positioned as recruiters and employers who were able to apply their own criteria to desirable qualities of a coach. This allowed young women to interject their own priorities into a sporting space. The funding that was allocated to their group afforded a form of economic capital that contributed to their capacity to create an alternative sporting experience. More significantly, the projects provided the group with a degree of 'symbolic capital'. The group members were positioned as employers, they provided information on how they wished the project to run and therefore assumed the role of 'boss'. In this way, the project troubled traditional coaching relationships. Enright & O'Sullivan (2010) employ Shor's (1992) concept of 'change agency' to theorise the ways in which young women in their study took 'responsibility for rethinking and changing' (p.211) the conditions they found themselves in by working on curriculum design. In this case, the young mothers acted as agents of change throughout the physical activity project by shaping, reviewing and reshaping the programmes. They provided feedback to the coaches on their experiences of the session for example saying what they enjoyed and what they did not. The young women felt that being able to express displeasure helped to ensure their continued engagement:

> **Carrie:** It's quite cool that we get to say to the coach when we don't like stuff,
> you know, it's like listen to me, I'm in charge! Before, when I've gone along
> to things, if I didn't like it I just wouldn't bother going again.

The opportunity to feedback on coach performance meant that the young women did not have to resort to 'voting with their feet' by avoiding sessions, arriving late or leaving early. This can be understood as them becoming aware of the symbolic capital they possessed within the project. Skeggs describes symbolic capital thus: 'legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power. Cultural capital has to be legitimated before it can have symbolic power' (1997, p.8). In the case of this

project, the young mother's symbolic power is legitimated by their ability to shape projects and by the ways in which coaches were expected to respond to their feedback. This echoes work by Ennis who found that sport spaces perceived by young people to be emotionally safe may help to foster 'positive self-concept and identity development' which particularly benefits girls since 'girls relish continued opportunities to be taught skills, treated with respect and nurtured as viable contributors' (Ennis, 1999, p.47).

Shifting the Social Field

Small shifts in the social fields of the young mother's group were observed when they began to participate in the physical activities. Despite their initial reservations, explored earlier in this chapter, involvement in the first cheerleading session prompted a change in ideas about how the project should proceed. Following the first session I spoke to them about how they had found the experience and what they felt might be improved for the next session:

> **Carrie:** oh, it was good, I worked up a sweat so that must mean I'm getting fitter but no it was fun actually I was pleasantly surprised
> **Laura:** what do you think that we could do to make it better next week?
> **Karen:** get rid of the kids
> **Carrie:** yeah get rid of the kids
> **Karen:** at least get someone to sit in the other room with them and stick a video on or something
>
> **Laura:** how did you feel before you started?
> **Ellie:** I was a bit worried about it I was a bit like ahhh do I really have to, but then it was actually quite fun, it's something to do innit
>
> **Laura:** and what did you like least what would you like to do to improve it next time?
> **Dawn:** not have our kids there
> **Ellie:** not have the kids running round underneath our feet, we should get the painting out and get the youth workers to do painting with the kids and then while we could do the cheerleading

The above quotations describe an increase in confidence and expectations for enjoyment of physical activity. Despite earlier claims that their children must be involved in the activity, all of the young mothers unanimously agreed that to improve future sessions they would prefer for one of the youth workers to take the children out of the room. This shift was made possible in large part because the young women's

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concern about childcare and mothering responsibilities were considered as part of the overall programme:

> **Chelsea:** It's only possible because the session is here and I know my baby is in the next room and I know who they are with. I wouldn't have felt like I could leave her with someone and go off and do stuff yet, but it's okay here they can just call me if she cries, and I trust them to do that.
>
> **Karen:** I like that we do the sessions here because we come here anyway, I haven't had to find an extra time in the week. Having five kids does make it kind of difficult to get a babysitter! (laughs) Even their Dad doesn't like me going off and leaving him to look after them on his own.
>
> **Dawn:** I would feel bad going off somewhere else, I don't mind doing it here. I feel good after too.
>
> **Carrie:** Do you know what? This is the only thing I do for myself all week, it's quite good really isn't it.

The young mothers' comments encapsulate many of the barriers experienced by other mothers of young children (Currie, 2004; Miller & Brown, 2005; Brown, 2001). Incorporating childcare as part of the project eased the young mothers' feelings of guilt associated with taking time for themselves or leaving their children with others (Brown & Miller, 2005). Their willingness to participate separately from their children may support arguments by Shaw (2001) who emphasizes the possibility of mothers' engagement in physical activity as providing "resistance to dominant ideologies" (p. 188) but, significantly, this was made possible by enabling the young mothers to design their own sporting space and their own rules for engagement. It is argued that these experiences may provide benefits described by mothers in Currie's study (2004) such as opportunities for 'self nurturance, recuperation and renewal' (p.242).

The young mothers' choice to continue to participate independent of their children suggests that having participated in the sessions the young women generated enough emotional and physical capital to feel secure in relinquishing, for a short time, some of the 'feminine' and subcultural capital described earlier. For all subsequent sessions, the children were removed from the main hall to do other activities so that the young mothers could take part in the cheerleading unburdened by childcare responsibilities. These changes to project priorities can be attributed to small shifts in

confidence and perception of physical capital, as such, they may be understood as a readjustment of the habitus. Bourdieu states the tendency for constancy in the habitus, which he explains 'at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences' and is 'modified by new experiences' (p.60). However, in later work Bourdieu (1998) explores the potential for new situations to create critical moments of misalignment between habitus and field which consequently provides opportunities for 'reflexive awareness' (Thorpe, 2009, p.503) and, as a result, the development of new possible subjectivities. One way that this can be facilitated is by introducing individuals to experiences of new, challenging fields therefore providing encounters of the 'destabilizing and potentially subversive effects that might arise from movement across fields' (McNay, 1999, p.107). Chambers (2005) argues that greater reflexivity in relation to the gendered habitus may occur 'through interaction between fields, between communities or ways of life, so that individuals become aware of new options' (p.340). In this project the young women were exposed to new experiences and thus new possible subjectivities. These shifts occurred, in no small part, as a result of emotional responses and engagement. Probyn (2004) elaborates Bourdieu's theories by conceptualizing emotion as the understandings of self we affix, by means of the habitus, to affective experience, in such a way the habitus can be understood as the connective space for embodied, everyday experiences of emotion and affect. Therefore 'affects are filtered through habitus into emotions (as self-perceived) and emotional performances (as displayed by enculturated social actors) in this model, emotion and emotional performances may be redirected by readjusting our habitus' (Zembylas, 2007). The young women's projects allowed a shift in the field to occur which did not rely upon a conversion to traditional sports values and emotion norms, instead emotions were accounted for which opened possibilities for flexible engagement in physicality. The valuing of young women's emotional capital therefore strengthened the social and physical capital of the group.

Valuing Emotional Labour

Within the project an environment was created that challenged preconceived norms and created safe spaces for the young mothers to experiment with sport and sporty subjectivities. Giulianotti (2005) describes how Bourdieu envisages sociologists can pose a challenge to existing structures in sport:

> Social analysts must go beyond doxa to produce 'para-doxal modes of thought' that destabilize this practical sense, unsettling the habits of the conservative bourgeoisie, and forcing Left liberals to dissect power relationships more clinically (Giulianotti, 2005, p.157).

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1998) calls for academics to '[question] the things that are self-evident' and challenge the 'acceptance of commonplaces' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.8). In this project, we sought to disrupt established dynamics which would see the young women as passive receivers of instruction from coaches and instead create a new set of norms that positioned the young women as powerful agents with the ability to reshape practice. The participatory and voluntary nature of the project meant that the young mothers felt able to verbalise how far they were able to participate with the activities on each occasion. On some occasions, this meant making adjustments to the program of activities:

> Chelsea came in today and said that she was shattered because the baby kept her up all night. She said she was too tired to do cheerleading and instead offered to help look after all of the children in the other room so that one of the other youth workers could join in for a change. After about 20 minutes she returned to the session and said she had changed her mind and would like to join in, so youth worker 4 went watch the children and she joined in. (Fieldnotes, Young mothers group, Week 36)

Taking a participatory approach allowed youth workers, coaches and the young women the ability to shape activities depending on emotions, for example cancelling sessions or providing opportunities to opt out and spend time with a youth worker if there were more pressing matters. This can be viewed as having benefit to the overall experience of the group. Emotional capital is convertible into social and cultural capital such as strengthened relationships between actors and feelings of empowerment within fields (Zembylas, 2007). In other settings the young mothers lacked the authority to construct emotional norms or dominate through emotion management. In this group they developed their own affective economy which provided opportunities for trade off with others. The opt in- opt out approach allowed the young women to prioritize for themselves without feeling pressured to participate. In this group, members occasionally chose to remain with the children rather than joining the activity therefore taking a supporting role for the rest of the group, thereby reinforcing the reciprocal element of social capital. In other sport settings the young mothers would be forced to choose between either participating in sport, or not. This

process ensured continued engagement with the program without sacrificing time for emotional work outside of the project. The young mothers regarded this as a positive element of the project:

> **Chelsea:** It's so nice that we can be flexible, I know if like I was going to an aerobics class or something today I just wouldn't have gone. I would have stayed at home and then probably found it hard to go back again after missing one. It's nice that here we can do other stuff too, we can choose.

The decisions made on their level of participation were valued as personal choice and the groups avoided the use of bribes or coercion, instead preferring to employ valued forms of emotional capital 'such as support, patience and commitment- built over time' (Zembylas, 2007, p.451).

> **Clare:** I don't think this would have worked if we weren't all friends and helping each other out

This gives greater credence to proposals by others for the use of peer or mentoring approaches in youth sport (Cox et al., 2006; Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000). These findings in particular, resonate with work by Ennis (1999) that promotes the inclusion of an 'additional focus on conflict negotiation, self and social responsibility, and care and concern for others' (Ennis, 1999, p.36) and suggests extending the length of sports intervention programs to allow time for 'affiliation, creating a family atmosphere' (Ennis, 1999, p.39). Further, this approach offered the young women an opportunity to enhance their social capital. While a significant part of social capital is generating social connections from which to gain social advantages, it is also about being beneficial for others to know, by possessing value for others, 'social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more of less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1983: 249).

Within this project, the young mothers were able to offer emotional and practical support to one another, and provide reciprocal elements of social capital. Thus supporting Ennis' claim that 'authentic cooperative environments' are characterized by spaces in which the girls could engage at a level in which they felt successful and like productive group members (Ennis, 1999, p.40).

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the young mother's previous encounters of physical activity and a lack of perceived sport related capitals on embodied experiences. It is established, that participatory projects might provide opportunities to mobilise emotional, physical, social and symbolic capital within secure spaces. The findings go some way towards addressing Evans' recommendation that 'understanding emotions surrounding girls' embodied experiences of sport is vital in understanding their decision to participate or not' (Evans, 2006, p.548). However, I concur with Zembylas' assertion that 'the conversion between emotional capital and other forms of capital is certainly an issue that needs deeper investigation' (Zembylas, 2007, p.455). The following and final chapter of this thesis summarizes key findings, outlines contributions to the academic field and makes recommendations for the practice and research of young women's physical activity projects.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to work with two groups of self-identified 'non-sporty' young women to understand and address barriers to their participation in physical activity. The study took place over the course of one year within women-only youth work settings in the south east of England. The research was underpinned methodologically, theoretically and philosophically by a feminist participatory action research orientation and poststructural theories. The study was premised on a belief that young women can offer unique and valuable points of view on femininity, physicality and embodiment, and that their voices deserve to be heard, respected and acted upon. As such, young women were positioned as partners (as much as possible) in research that sought to change their experiences in physical activity.

The research questions addressed in this thesis were:

- o How do young women come to define themselves as 'non-sporty'?

- o How do young women negotiate, conform to or resist dominant expectations of femininity and physical activity?

- o What issues would young women consider important in the construction of a physical activity project?

- o How do young women experience participatory physical activity projects?

In this final chapter, I will return to the research questions that shaped this study and outline the key findings. The following section discusses key issues emerging from the empirical data, theoretical and methodological aspects of the research and draws out implications for both practice and future work. Through this final chapter I seek to elicit and discuss the claims for knowledge made within the previous empirical chapters and thereby outline the contribution I believe this study makes to a growing knowledge base on young women's voices in physical activity. I also argue for the development of research that builds upon the proposals created by this study.

Young Women, Subjectivity, Embodiment and Physical Activity

From the analysis of the empirical data, four key themes emerged in relation to the research questions:

- o Shifting Sporty Subjectivities
- o Embodied Experiences
- o Important Factors for Successful Young Women's Projects
- o Young Mothers and Physical Activity

Shifting Sporty Subjectivities

A core focus of this thesis is the processes through which young women negotiate 'sporty' and 'non-sporty' subject positions. The research has shown how young women can display various gender identities, frequently adapting to diverse circumstances and situations within their everyday lives. Examples of this include the young women's conceptualizations of being 'physically active' as opposed to 'non-sporty'; variations in perceptions of acceptable femininity from abject responses to built female bodies to feminist critiques of sexist media images; and moving from perceiving sport as irrelevant to enjoying participation in physical activities. Poststructuralist theories of discourse (Foucault, 1972), subjectivity and subject positioning (Weedon, 1997) have been used as the framework to underpin part of this analysis. Exploring the young women's subjectivities using this approach has illustrated how subject positions are socially constructed and can fluctuate in relation to the discourses governing particular social contexts. The previous discussion chapters have highlighted the ways in which these subject positions are shaped by both discourse and practice but they also uncover the deployment of both power and agency throughout processes of exclusion and withdrawal.

It is possible to claim that the groups of young women were aware of a combination of structuring discourses and practices. Initial discussions demonstrated that their perceptions of appropriate subjectivity were centred around dominant western beliefs that a slim, female body is sexually desirable and a signifier of femininity (Grogan et al., 2004). Further, recollections of early experiences in physical activity revealed interactions with powerful others that, in a similar way to Hunter's (2004) study,

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served to cement their withrdrawal from physical activity. However, analysis of the empirical data reveals the complex and nuanced ways in which the young women were also active in the process of their marginalisation from physical activity. Agency is defined by Kabeer (1999) as:

> the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or the power within (p. 438).

Exploration of the meanings and motivations that influence young women's participation in physical activity reveal both the strength of dominant discourses and discursive practices and the ways in which these are challenged, reflected on and acted upon by young women. It is evident that dominating discourses of appropriate femininity were taken up by the young women, and eventually contributed to their choice to prioritise femininity and thus, disengage with physical activity. In a similar way, the young women experienced normalising practices of physical educators and, finding them in conflict with their own valued capitals, withdrew from the field of sport. These two examples provide evidence of resistance and the ways in which agency was deployed by the young women, by removing themselves from the potentially harmful realm of physical culture. However, it is also possible to observe the young women's capacity to engage in positively framed practices of resistance throughout the participatory projects. They utilised skills of critique and reflection to open up new possibilities, such as 'physically active' subject positions, and to develop new boundaries to their social field that encompassed the valued capitals of the group and provided scope for these to be enhanced through experiences of physical activity.

By examining the young women's individual stories it was possible to build up a picture of unique experiences, battles and triumphs in relation to physical activity. However, it was the collective sharing of narratives that revealed the pervasive workings of power, heterogeneity of experiences and possibilities for resistance. Hearing their stories highlighted the intricacy of subjectivity, and the necessity of continually confronting unitary conceptualisations of young women's experiences. While all of the young women identified as non-sporty, closer investigation revealed the diverse ways in which these identifications came to be made, for example some

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young mothers felt motherhood signified the end of sports participation, while other young women's experiences of structural inequalities prompted this shift. By developing work that makes use of individual and collective experiences, researchers can acknowledge diversity and explore more complex interpretations of subjectivity, whilst encouraging collective understandings and possibilities for collaborative action. Comprehending young women's construction of subjectivity should be a preliminary aspect of any project that seeks to transform experiences of, and create perceptions of meaningful engagement with, physical activity (Hills, 2007; Evans, 2006; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010).

Deconstructing discourses of femininity in relation to physical activity was key to this process. Davies & Banks, (1992, p 4.) stress that 'it is to the detailed examination of subjectivity that we turn to try to understand how old patterns are held in place and how they might be let go'. Throughout this research, the young women were questioned taken-for-granted truths and through these analyses evaluated the impact of discursive practices on their construction of self. In such a way it becomes apparent that the voices of those young women who come to self-identify with, or are labelled as 'non-sporty', must be at the heart of any reading or interpretation of their subjectivity, so that such interpretations might avoid claims to universal truths. The use of media analysis as a technique for deconstructing discourses proved valuable in making links between femininity and physical activity, femininity and wider society and femininity and feminist politics. As the young women began to identify and confront inequalities they became critical, political and angry. This provided space and motivation to decide how things might be improved and how their approach to planning a physical activity project could be different.

Embodied Experiences of Physical Activity
Embodiment played a crucial role in young women's interaction with and interpretation of physical activities, from anxieties about competence and bodily appearance to positive expressions of strength and capability. Physical capital prized in sport setting includes strength, agility and display of skill (Shilling, 1993). The young women's previous negative experiences of embodiment reflected their self-perceived deficiency in this type of embodiment which produced consequences for enjoyment and continued engagement. Embodiment within this context was strongly

related to perceptions of competence in sport. The young women assessed themselves and felt that they were evaluated by others as 'fat', weak or uncoordinated, which they linked to emotions such as embarrassment and shame. These experiences and feelings served as signifiers to the young women that their bodies were inappropriate for physical activity. Participants stated that their negative perceptions were heightened following corporeal transitions such as the onset of puberty, or pregnancy, and young women evaluated their changing bodies as falling short of expectations of slenderness. These concerns about appearance also contributed to young women's withdrawal from participating in physical activity settings where their bodies were on public display.

In contrast, the young women described their experience of physical activities within their projects as providing pleasurable embodied experiences. The young women described enjoyment of controlled aggression, strength and physical control and explained how these embodied experiences enabled them to think differently about their bodies, and also about the purposes of physical activity. Importantly, these experiences transformed the young women's understandings of their physical competence, and the prerequisites for competence in physical activity. They began to view the body as an endlessly changing entity that continuously develops skills, in contrast to previous notions of appropriate bodies for physical activity as finished and proficient. Comparing these divergent accounts disputes embodiment as an inherent individual experience and rather allows it to be theorized as socially constructed, context specific, relational and subject to change over time (Grosz, 1994; Connell, 2002). These findings help to explain some of the reasons that young women disengage from sport and the potential for bringing them back into physical activity contexts.

Important Factors for Successful Young Women's Projects
The design of the physical activity projects started with the young women themselves and the ideas and expectations they brought to the sessions. These expectations can be understood as representing the valued capitals of the groups. Ideas and specifications incorporated in the planning process were inevitably shaped by previous negative experiences of physical activity, and subsequent desires to develop spaces that did not reproduce these experiences. The young women's preferences for

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physical activity projects can be outlined as incorporating the following elements: emotional security, single sex settings, friendship groups, access to new types of physical activities and flexible expectations of participation.

The young women's desire to create emotionally safe spaces were evident from initial planning which specified, among other things 'open mindedness', 'kindness' and 'love'. Indeed, their list of necessities for a successful project was entirely related to protecting emotional security. Such preferences are in direct opposition to previous physical activity settings where norms and expectations specified emotional restraint (Hughes & Coakley, 2001; Ennis, 1999). The young women's groups issued a number of specifications that they felt would ensure successful projects. The young women echoed other research (Kenway & Willis, 1998; McCaughtry, 2006) in their preference for single sex environments. In addition, desires for the projects demonstrated aspirations towards a collective and cooperative orientation.

Friendship groups were highlighted as key influences of enjoyment and engagement, or withdrawal and disengagement. In the past, the young women's friendship groups' valued forms of feminine subcultural capital discouraged involvement in physical activity. The young women in this study sought opportunities for collective and cooperative activities reinforcing the importance of peer relationships and networks. They also wanted an environment that felt supportive rather than judgemental as their worries about competence and appearance still formed part of their concerns about physical activity contexts. The success of these physical activity sessions demonstrates how friendship groups can also provide the basis for new subjectivities, re-envisioning acceptable femininities and re-imagining the possibilities for developing physical and emotional capitals.

The young women's choice to engage in activities that were completely new to them drove the projects forward in three ways. Firstly, the young women left behind previous perceptions of 'failure' or deficits in competence in physical activities, thus allowing the projects to provide a 'fresh start' in physical activity. Secondly, the young women were positioned more or less equally in terms of knowledge, experience and ability at the commencement of the projects. Thirdly, engaging in new activities provided possibilities for experimenting with alternative subject

positions. These findings contribute towards an understanding of the needs of non-sporty young women and provide insights on techniques that might be successful in increasing activity levels. The significance of this is that it demonstrates how projects might reduce feelings of incompetence, since all participants are new to the activities a less comparative or judgemental atmosphere is created and thus it is more difficult to determine winners or losers.

Flexible expectations for participation reduced the possibility of the projects conflicting with young women's other priorities. For example, an opt-in, opt-out policy ensured continued engagement, allowed the young women to manage their own levels of engagement and developed self-motivation. Further, this approach created stronger empathy within the groups and thus greater reserves of emotional and social capital.

Through these projects it is evident that local interventions that incorporate young women's ideas and expectations can provide positive experiences of physical activity and can allow for the development of shared learning practices which reflect young women's needs and desires. The research offered in this thesis acknowledged the young women themselves as the best people to define and transform their physically active experiences.

Young Mothers and Physical Activity

Importantly, this thesis represents the voices, experiences and values of young mothers who remain relatively invisible and silent within research on young women and physical activity (WSFF, 2005). The research explains the ways in which transitions to motherhood represented for many of the young women a simultaneous transition to 'non-sporty' subject positions. Even those young women that had previously identified as very sporty, considered sport no longer relevant once they became pregnant. In addition, some young women experienced tangible structural inequalities that served to reinforce this reprioritisation of their lives and subsequent marginalisation from physical activity. While little work exists that explores the experiences of young mothers, these findings are consistent with research exploring mothers with young children and their participation in physical activity such as a lack of free time or feelings of guilt when leaving their children (Currie, 2004; Miller &

Brown, 2005; Brown, 2001).

For the young mothers the watchful gaze of parents and professionals created limitations on their willingness to take time out for physical activity. Perceived judgements from powerful others influenced young mothers' perception of valued 'feminine' capitals that were viewed in direct opposition to sport related capitals. Like other mothers of young children, the young mothers experienced their 'ethic of care' as a lack of sense of entitlement to finding time for, and accessing, physical activity and leisure more broadly (Kay, 1998; Blair & Lichter, 1991; Brown et al. 2000; Henderson et al. 1990; Currie, 2004; Miller & Brown, 2005). Young mothers regarded being 'a good mother' as a valued subject position and as such, it was necessary to consider this as an essential part of the physical activity projects. Designing physical activity projects that allow young mothers to involve their children can demonstrate respect for young mothers lived experience and provide a stepping stone to shifting their social field. While the young mothers ultimately chose to proceed with the cheerleading sessions without their children, the process of engaging them in the first place would not have been possible without this initial approach.

Providing physical activity provision at the already established young mothers group enabled participation in several ways. Firstly, the young mothers did not have to seek additional childcare to enable them to attend the sessions. Secondly, childcare duties were carried out by people known to the young mothers and whom they trusted. Thirdly, the children were in the next room and therefore the young mothers did not feel as if they were leaving them. Importantly, they knew that the people looking after their children supported their choice to take time out to participate in physical activity. Finally, the flexibility of the opt-in, opt-out approach enabled the young mothers to choose week-by-week whether they wished to prioritise childcare or physical activity.

Theoretical Implications

Overall, this study has incorporated a combination of theoretical perspectives to explore femininity, and physical activity. The research has emphasised the ways in which young women become 'non-sporty' through discursive practices that create

'common-sense' assumptions informed by hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, and their relevance to physical activity. Poststructural theories have provided a useful way to conceptualise femininity and physically active subjectivities as social constructions, with complex and contradictory meanings that shift and transform within changing social environments. Poststructural perspectives were helpful in highlighting the heterogeneity of young women's experiences of engagement with physicality and associated power relations.

As Garrett (2004) argues, interactions with discourses surrounding gender and embodiment have a powerful influence on young women's constructions of self in relation to physicality and physical culture. However, this study has also determined the potential for collective analysis of such discourses for providing access to a wider range of possible subject positions. Applying a feminist approach enabled challenges to be mounted against previously taken-for-granted assumptions on femininity and allowed for lively critique, which revealed the fallacy of singular understandings of gender. In a similar way to previous feminist poststructural critiques (Hills, 2007; Garrett, 2004; Evans, 2006), these reflective spaces highlighted the fluid, shifting, fragmented and complex dimensions of gender and gender inequality. This thesis has argued for the value of such processes of reflection with marginalised young women and it is asserted that further work of this nature is required to enhance young women's experiences of physical activity. The findings of this study suggest that a capacity for agency in the poststructural subject may be deconstructed and reconstructed through an individual's deliberate and reflective engagement with multiple subject positions. Importantly, engagement with discourses of femininity and physical activity may generate potential for subversive practice, disruption of social norms and alternative perceptions of subjectivity and truth. Such efforts may also form the basis of political action and provide oppotunities to eexperiment with social change.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu was used to understand and critique particular discursive practices within physical activity settings. The concept of symbolic violence provides understandings of power relations, systems of domination and the ways in which these are created and sustained (Brown, 2006). The study found that young women's practices of resistance were paradoxically generated by, and came to constitute, part

of their habitus and often operated at the unconscious level, masquerading as 'natural' and arbitrary. Consequently, the power exercised in the young women's previous experiences of physical culture can be understood, in a similar way to young people in Hunter's (2004) study, as internalized and consented to by both the dominant: teachers and 'good students', and the dominated: the young women and other 'bad' students. Symbolic capital has been revealed as inextricably linked to emotional capital since close links between physical and emotional capital make it possible for symbolic force to be applied to the embodied subject by way of the habitus (Bourdieu, 2001). Future studies would benefit from the application of Bourdieu's framework as a basis for examining the cultural and discursive workings of power used to create and sustain everyday practices in physical activity (Brown, 2006).

The study of emotions has been subordinated within academic sports literature, which generally shows preference for the study of embodied or cognitive influences on individual performance and participation. This thesis argues that there is a need to reject Cartesian mind-body dualisms that place the affective sphere separately to cognitive and embodied states (Gendron, 2004, p.30). Emotions, in fact, offer a useful conceptual tool for researchers seeking to adopt 'embodied subjectivity' (Grosz, 1994) as a theoretical foundation, since the notion of affect has the potential to bridge the divide between conceptualizations of the body as either abstract and esoteric or as a 'natural' biological entity.

Emotional capital is 'more than just another capital', it should be viewed as a 'booster capital, i.e. a capital which potentializes or energizes the human, social and cultural capitals' (Gendron, 2004, p.30). In the case of this study, it was evident that creating a social field that made use of the valued emotional capital of the young women, such as providing peer support and assisting with childcare, succeeded in strengthening social capital, and consequently provided space for experimentation with new subjectivities, which accordingly provided access to physical capital. However, as explored in this study, it is essential to avoid conceptualizations of emotional capital in terms of, for example, emotion management, where more powerful others attempt to socialize individuals to adopt emotion norms dominant within a particular setting. For example criticizing perceived levels of enthusiasm or using negatively framed comments as demonstrated by Coach 3. In this study, the young women revealed the

ways in which conflicting ideas on valued emotional capital between themselves and physical educators directly affected their decision to disengage. Adults have the power to construct and enforce 'affective economies' (Zembylas, 2007) that act as tactics for shaping and disciplining the habitus (Zembylas, 2005) as such the converse must also be possible, adults may acknowledge affective economies of specific groups and seek to create programs that respect valued emotional capital. Froyum (2009) explains that adults operate as gatekeepers of emotional capital by 'reinforcing group-specific emotion work strategies' (p.39) through rewards and punishments, leaders of physical activities should be critically aware of their own role in this type of work.

The use of Bourdieu's theoretical framework can offer researchers in gender and physical activity a set of tools to structure research. This framework is particularly useful because it acknowledges the agency of young women, manifested through the habitus, which includes analyses of powerful, gendered meanings in sport but also the possibility for resistance. This schema could be usefully employed by anyone (young people, teachers, youth workers, coaches) within the field of physical activity to reflect on the part they play within affective economies.

Methodological Issues

This research represents one of only a small number of FPAR projects focusing on young women and physical activity. FPAR as a methodological approach is well suited to feminist projects because it seeks to acknowledge inequality, rebalance power relationships in research, value praxis and importantly take steps to change social circumstances perceived by research partners to be problematic. FPAR is also highly compatible with poststructuralist approaches because within such projects there is automatically an acknowledgement of the fluid, shifting nature of research processes and participants engage in the process of 'co-creating their reality through participation; through their experience; their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action' (Reason, 1998, p.262).

The research utilized a qualitative multi-method approach that was interactive, dynamic and young person friendly. Through the combined use of images, memory work, media analysis and focus groups the young women were able to exchange and

share ideas in numerous ways. However, it must be noted that, as with most youth work activities, these methods operated as a catalyst for conversation. It was the dialogue between the young women and their willingness to contribute and analyse personal narratives that provided the depth and richness of the data.

The FPAR approach had far reaching benefits in terms of the young women's engagement with physical activity. In a similar way to the girls in Enright & O'Sullivan's (2010) study, the young women's sense of ownership in the project served as a motivating factor. They were happy to engage, even outside of their comfort zones, because they had set the goals and decided the activities themselves. In addition, the adoption of an FPAR approach had positive effects on the group in terms of strengthening friendships and increasing the power of the group within decision making processes.

Positioning young women as co-constructors of the projects also presented some challenging consequences. While the participatory aspect of the project was broadly recognised as beneficial to professional practice, there were times when this created difficulties and conflicts. Other FPAR researchers will need to consider how wider organisational agendas, personal politics and funding arrangements may have implications for the level of 'true participation' that is achievable.

A further limitation of this methodological approach relates to potential for generalisations of this research, it is important to emphasise that the projects were constructed according the specific location, community and groups of young women involved. Therefore, future projects in new spaces and with new groups of young women will require a re-envisioning of the best kinds of methods, the types of research questions that will be appropriate and renegotiation of the participatory and political underpinnings of FPAR methodology. This research took place within girls-only youth work settings, with youth workers known already to the young women and within established youth work relationships. This may have positively impacted the richness of the data and the young women's willingness to engage in frank and open discussions of their experiences, therefore insights might be regarded as specific to this context (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). However, while the findings of this study are drawn from particular groups, in a particular local contexts, there is resonance with

other research that focuses on young women's experience (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010; Garrett, 2004; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002). In addition these findings provide opportunities for transference of ideas, hope for improved experiences of physical activity and young women's potential to take action.

I acknowledge a further limitation of this research, that despite the FPAR approach adopted, the analysis and dissemination of the research data is limited in the sense that it is largely voiced through my own interpretations.   In order to fulfil the criteria for an academic standard of research, a level expected for a doctoral thesis and quality deemed appropriate to academic forms of dissemination such as conference presentations and peer reviewed research, it was necessary to 'intellectualise' the findings of this research. I believe that the young women's voices remain central to this thesis. I have made as much use of their words as possible and they have had opportunities to comment on some of the core findings, however I am conscious that I remain the writer and editor of this thesis. It is probable that the young women would little recognise their insights in the later chapters of this document. I am reminded of the words of bell hooks:

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Rewriting you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the centre of my talk (hooks, 1990, p.343)

I have wrestled with this throughout the research process and concluded that the burden of appropriating the young women's words for an academic audience should quite rightly rest with me. However, I think there is more work to be done here, further research must highlight this fragmentation of the process of FPAR and seek to understand how the young women's world and the world of academia might negotiate a more comfortable relationship.

Implications for Practice

It is useful here to revisit the recommendations the young women made in relation to planning future physical activity projects:

1. We want fun and variety and not routine
2. We need time to deal with our issues!
3. We want to choose our own projects
4. We want to be with our friends
5. We don't want to look stupid
6. We want flexibility in commitment levels
7. We need help to make our projects work

These recommendations are helpful as a framework for considering implications for practice. I have picked out a few that encapsulate some of the key implications that were derived through the projects.

We want fun and variety and not routine

The first recommendation focuses on the types of activities in which non-sporty young women wish to participate. Post-Olympics UK policy proposals to increase young people's activity levels, have tended to focus on increasing opportunities for participation in competitive team sports, and agendas for physical education that adopt a similar approach within schools (DCMS, 2008). In relation to the young women's suggestion above and the findings of this thesis, I argue that such approaches may result in further disaffection of those that already feel marginalized from physical activity. I agree with Evans (2006) that it is likely that such approaches will only prove 'appealing to those who are already catered for by current school sports provision' (p.558). This research has ascertained that young women that feel alienated from sport benefit from access to new and alternative forms of physical activity. However, it is also not sufficient to simply organize and provide activities that are *perceived* to be attractive to young women. This project, in a similar way to Enright & OSullivan (2010) and Frisby et al. (2005; 2009) has shown the importance of engaging women in the planning of physical activity projects from the outset and I shall explore this further below. Another key consideration when attempting to provide interventions for non-sporty girls relates to the young women's work

exploring the existence of particular discourses attached to the terms 'sport', 'exercise' and 'physical activity'. This has implications for the ways in which interventions aimed at young women are discussed, promoted and advertised. The use of physical activity as a descriptive term for this project allowed the young women to view themselves as part of the population of people that might be expected to take part. Terms such as sport and exercise had the opposite, exclusive effect.

We need time to deal with our issues!

The young women identify that their 'issues' with sport and physical activity influence their motivation to participate. More specifically the issues the young women relate to, preconceived ideas of appropriate femininity (Skelton, 2000; Paechter, 2001; Grogan et al., 2004; Brook, 1999; Marchessault, 2000); heteronormative assumptions and fear of facing homophobia (Bartky, 1990; Holland et al., 1998; Richardson, 1996); fears relating to body image (Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis 1997; Skelton, 2000) and competence (Williams and Bedward, 2001; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002); and previous experiences of rejection in physical activity (Beltran-Carrillo et al., 2012; Hunter, 2004; Ennis, 1999). As such I concur with previous scholars (Hills, 2007; Evans, 2006; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) that advocate the importance of providing space for reflection on these 'issues' as integral to the planning process. In addition, as demonstrated through the media analysis activity, such opportunities also present possibilities for transferring this kind of knowledge beyond the realm of physical activity and sport.

We want to choose our own projects

This research has reaffirmed that young people must be viewed as valuable resources, able to offer unique and inventive insights and solutions to identified problems. The young women in this project were viewed as experts on their own experiences, ideas and preferences. Adopting this viewpoint means that young women are the people best placed to devise physical activity projects which incorporate specifications that will be required to create environments in which they wish to participate. In our physical activity projects the young women proved themselves competent in both assessing and evaluating their previous experiences, and in discovering ways that their experiences could be transformed. Throughout the research the young women

and I explored our relationship with physical activity with a view to improving our experiences.

Importantly, the young women were key decision makers not only in choosing the activities, but also choosing how they wished the projects to proceed, how they hoped to interact with adult instructors and how their ideas would shape the projects. The young women's feedback to coaches which specifically requested emphasis be removed from 'fat burning' and 'body shaping' and instead be placed on promoting strength and skill acquisition demonstrates an ability to articulate their needs and desires. Therefore, this thesis reinforces work by other scholars (Bragg, 2007; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010) that critiques traditional boundaries in these kinds of relationships and has highlighted the benefits of readdressing and redefining power relations between adults and young women in physically active settings.

We want to be with our friends

Friendship groups were a salient aspect of the projects and were observed to influence young women's choice to engage in and enjoy physical activity and physicality. As suggested by Hey (1997) norms created within friendship groups may act as de/motivating factors as well as control perceptions of acceptable behaviour and physicality. The close bond of youth work groups enabled the young women to offer support to one another and being with people they already knew was a prerequisite for safe and comfortable involvement. As such those wishing to implement similar projects would be well advised to develop work with intact friendship groups of young women and ensure time is made available to explore and understand the shared norms and expectations of these groups.

We need help to make our projects work

While the young women in my study might be viewed within a framework of empowerment, having taken control of their projects and driven them forward, it is important to consider this in broader terms. Skeggs (1997, p.11) points out that 'to challenge powerlessness does not mean that one automatically shifts into positions of power'. It follows therefore, that although the young women in the projects managed to resist the pervasive influence of the gender order and create spaces in which to challenge symbolic violence, they remain disempowered and disadvantaged when

viewed within broader hierarchies of power in physical activity and sport. If young women are to continue to gain ground within this male dominated field they require support from adults sympathetic to their struggle. In this study, the young women were able to wield power because they were positioned as decision makers (and therefore possessed symbolic capital), retained project funds (and therefore possessed economic capital), had a sense of ownership over the spaces in which the projects were delivered (therefore possessing subcultural capital) and finally had access to peers and youth workers they trusted to assist them (therefore possessing social capital). Other projects will need to consider how these conditions might be replicated. Within youth work settings this may be relatively easy, however it may be less straightforward in more formal setting such as schools and sports clubs where the balance of power might be different.

Contribution of the Research

The significance of this thesis is the contribution made to a growing field of research on young women and physical activity. The study makes an original contribution in three particular areas: presentation of non-sporty young women's experiences; feminist participatory action research; and emotional capital.

The first area, as previously outlined, is the contribution to research on the ways in which non-sporty young women come to be constructed as such. This research reveals the agentic, discursive and embodied practices that prompt young women to disengage from physical activity. This thesis has uncovered the potential of shared reflective spaces for creating conditions of possibility for the evolution of alternative subject positions. In this sense, shared discussions of discourse can be conceptualised as potential sites of individual transformation and collective action. A further contribution of this study is the provision of young mothers' voices in relation to physical activity.

The FPAR approach adopted throughout this research was key to the success of the physical activity projects. The positioning of young women as research partners allowed research agendas and project activities to be driven by rather than for, those that were implicated. In addition, this thesis offered a critical reflection on the

complex elements of participatory projects therefore providing insights that will be of use to researchers contemplating similar approaches.

Finally, the thesis develops an under-utilised theoretical tool, 'emotional capital', as an analytical framework. In this way, the study contributes to a growing interest in both the interplay of capitals within physical culture and the relevance of emotions to engagement with physical activity.

Future work

This work has begun to address non-sporty young women's experiences of physical activity and has identified a number of key problems that underpin barriers to participation. There are gains to be made from further exploration of these issues. Feminist Participatory Action Research has provided an empowering and rich experience for all involved, there is scope for FPAR approaches to be implemented in future projects of this nature. From a theoretical perspective, the notion of discourse was helpful in analysing and shifting young women's subjectivities and therefore work that seeks to promote this kind of critical reflection would prove useful. The deployment of Bourdieu's notions of capital, was helpful in analysing the workings of both power and agency within physical activity settings and would be useful for future reflective studies that incorporate the views of various participants in physical activity settings. Finally, there is a need for more studies that explore the workings of emotional capital.

I am hopeful that the findings of this study will actively inform future research and in particular youth work-based physical activity projects with non-sporty young women. While the majority of research on young women and physical activity is still conducted, on, as opposed to, with, young women, this thesis has provided scope for new and creative research approaches that value local participatory strategies.

Final Summary

This study has drawn attention to the potential of girls themselves to create environments conducive to positive experiences of physical activity. I close by proposing that such environments can help girls explore and resist understandings of femininity within both the culture of physical activity and wider society. Further, work of this nature can establish challenges to divisive, disempowering and discriminatory practices of physical activity and sport. It is important to acknowledge that many young women do wish to participate and achieve in physical activity, but that they find this difficult because of structuring discourses and practices. An approach that allows young women to traverse the polarized stereotypical locations of 'sporty' and 'non-sporty' subject positions opens up possibilities for new ways of understanding femininity as continually constructed, reconstructed and modified. By providing spaces for young women to reflect on, discuss collectively, and question their relationships with physical activity we can begin to build alternative perspectives that seek to avoid heteronormative, sexist and alienating experiences and instead present possibilities for pleasurable embodiment, empowerment and transformative action. It is argued that feminist participatory action research projects are ideally suited for this task, particularly where they may be complimented by the values and professional skills available in youth and community work settings.

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