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Gendered bodies under scrutiny: Women's embodied experiences of aquatic physical activity in the United Kingdom



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Introduction

- Participation in swimming has been shown to be consistently decreasing in England since 2002 (Evans & Sleaf, 2013).
- Existing sociological research which surrounds the Aquatic Environment identifies the significance that lifelong embodied experiences have on participation in aquatic activity (Evans and Sleaf 2012, 2013).
- Inequality still exists in terms of participation rates and ease of access between some social groups (Sport England, 2013).
- Preliminary research suggests that gendered roles within aquatic leisure can be strongly influenced by the presence of other bodies, including other parents and children (Evans and Allen-Collinson 2014).
- Embodied elements of these experiences, however, have yet to be studied in depth.



Presentation Aims



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Investigate Postnatal
woman's perceptions of
Aquatic Leisure
Activity from a
Foucauldian
perspective

Highlight how women
negotiate complex
discourses surrounding
motherhood in leisure



Discuss the study implications with
regards to health, wellbeing, safety and
the reproduction of gender within leisure

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Literature Review



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- Expectations for male and female roles within British society have altered over the past sixty years.

The gendering of family roles remains a contentious issue!

Functionalist perspective on
gendered family roles
(Structural Theory)



Michel Foucault
emphasis on
heterogeneity of roles
(Post-Structural Theory)

- Socialisation into gendered identities carries on into adulthood as individuals are created through the discourses which produce a person's reality (Harper & Rail, 2012, p. 71).
- Sociological research surrounding women's leisure has developed considerably over the past thirty years (Henderson and Gibson, 2013).

Michel Foucault



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(Michel Foucault; a leading theorist applied within sport sociology)



Four Analytic Tools

(illustrate how individuals are controlled and regulated, Foucault (1978))

*the art of
distribution*

*organisation
of geneses*

*control of
activity*



*Composition of
forces*

- Subjectivity, meaning and language form the foci of poststructuralist analysis (Weedon, 1987).
- Foucauldian perspectives offer feminist scholars concepts and theories that can be used to resist discourses that marginalise women's experiences, bodies, knowledge and existence (Weedon, 1987).

Methodology



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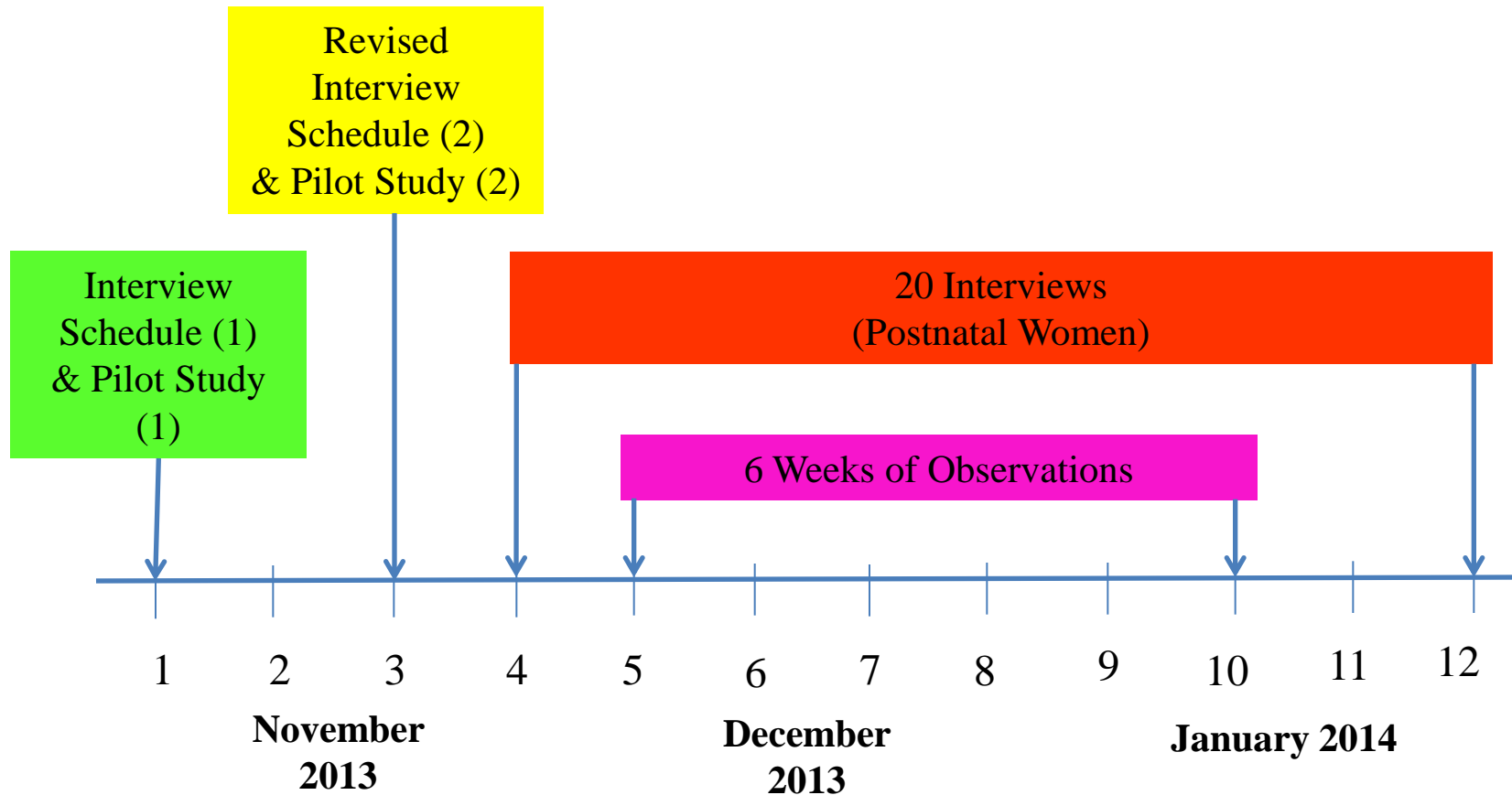


- **Ethics**
- **Case Study**
- **Procedure:**
 - Twenty semi-structured interviews were completed with postnatal women aged 18-45, who had given birth within the previous four years.
 - Non-participant observations were completed over a four week period at recreational swimming sessions and aqua baby classes.

Data Collection Timeline



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Methodology



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- **Data Analysis (Gratton and Jones 2010)**
 - Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed.
 - Transcripts were read and re-read in order to identify consistent themes and anomalous examples.
 - Codes were then grouped into higher order themes in order to avoid a large number of idiosyncratic examples.

Emergent Results/Discussion



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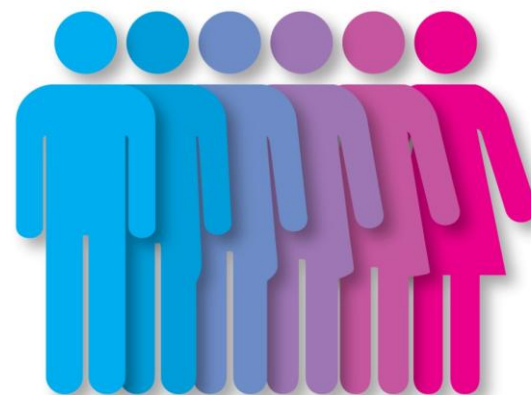
- Gender presentation of the self seemed to be age related and contoured by media discourses of gender
- Mothers' embodied experiences focused on managing their babies' bodies with regards to hygiene, pool temperature & safety
- Immersion of babies in water was problematic for mothers - threat to the bounded body

Conclusion



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- Health & Risk – perceptions of risk when swimming are not always commensurate with actual risk
- Wellbeing – linked to women’s socially produced role as ‘carers’
- This study helps demonstrate the need to challenge gender stereotypes in leisure in order to promote equal access to leisure activities for men and women





References

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Any Questions?



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