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**Representing valued bodies in PE: a visual inquiry with British Asian girls**

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## 1 Abstract

2 *Background:* Status or value in sport and physical education (PE) contexts is often associated  
3 with performances of highly proficient sporting bodies (Shilling, 2008), which produce  
4 hierarchies of privileged and marginalised gendered and racialised positions. This may be  
5 communicated through text and images shared within school, physical cultures and media  
6 that young people consume. Understanding how students make sense of constructions of  
7 valued bodies in PE, and how this affects their sense of self, can assist in creating spaces for  
8 young people to experience alternative narratives.

9 *Focus:* The paper's aims are to explore varying ways British Asian girls visualise and make  
10 sense of themselves as active or sporting bodies, and what this means for their  
11 (dis)engagement in physical activity.

12 *Theoretical framework:* This study draws on a feminist poststructuralist approach (Davies &  
13 Harré, 1990; Weedon, 1997) concerning the ways in which young people create multiple  
14 subject positions through negotiating or rejecting verbal and visual narratives about physical  
15 activity and girlhood.

16 *Methods:* The data draws from a one-year collaborative visual ethnography conducted with  
17 25 students aged 13-14 in a predominantly British Asian urban secondary school in the UK.  
18 In this research, student-participants were included in the data production through being  
19 asked to create photographs over a two-week period that represented their views of valued  
20 bodies in physical activity contexts in and out of school. Focus group interviews used  
21 participant-driven photo elicitation techniques to talk through the images (Clark, 1999).

22 *Findings:* In this paper, two British Asian girls' photos enabled them to talk about, analyse,  
23 and reflect on valued or sporting bodies that they saw in visual media. The girls illustrated  
24 their performances of constrained or empowered physicalities, within a physical culture that  
25 values, among girls, racialised performances of active but feminised bodies. Many girls  
26 placed their physical activity significantly in school, and saw sporting bodies as male and  
27 elite. Where students do not associate people like themselves as sporting bodies, there may be  
28 implications for their continued involvement in physical activity. At the same time, girls were  
29 physically activity outside of school despite not seeing themselves as sporty. Reflecting on  
30 the invisibility of minority ethnic women in sports media, this research suggests that greater  
31 representation may enable young minority women to see themselves and people like them as  
32 valued bodies in sport and physical activity.

**33 Valued bodies in sport pedagogy**

34           Status or value in secondary PE contexts is often associated with performances of  
35 highly proficient sporting bodies (Shilling, 2008), given the continuing predominance of  
36 “traditional”, team, competitive sports in PE curricula and the centrality of corporeal  
37 performance in sport. Research on youth sport and PE finds that outcomes desired in sport  
38 put value on the display of specific normative body appearance and behaviour of proficient  
39 sporting bodies, producing hierarchies of privilege and marginality (Azzarito & Solmon,  
40 2006; Hills, 2006; McCaughtry & Tischler, 2010; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Shilling, 2008).  
41 Definitions of sporting bodies vary; in PE research, conferring privilege or status to bodies  
42 that perform appropriately either on and off the pitch in terms of ability (Evans, 2004; Hay &  
43 Macdonald, 2010; Redelius et al, 2009; Wright & Burrows, 2006), strength (Bramham, 2003;  
44 Hauge & Haavind, 2011; Parker, 1996), or muscularity (Gorely et al, 2003). The notion of  
45 “valued bodies” is useful to explore the ways in which certain bodily appearances and  
46 performances/actions attain high status because of their value within a social context such as  
47 a physical culture or PE context (Redelius et al, 2009; Wright & Burrows, 2006).

48 These narrow ranges of value are stratified along intersections of gender, race, class and age.  
49 In today’s public health context, certain cohorts of young people are more likely than others  
50 to be identified as having “bodies-at-risk”, a discourse that fixes and homogenises minority  
51 young people identities as “different”, unhealthy and physically inactive. Evidence from  
52 national reports in the UK indicates that “Other” girls, such as those from South Asian  
53 backgrounds, with low socio-economic status or with disabilities, have been identified as the  
54 least physically active and having the worst health status (Sporting Equals, 2007; Long,  
55 Hylton, Spracklen, Ratna and Bailey, 2009). Rather than valued bodies – bodies that are  
56 healthy, sporting, physically active – “different” bodies are presented as “deviant” from  
57 “normal” white bodies and Western ways of knowing (Evans, Rich, Davies & Allwood,

58 2008; Harris, 2004; Johnson, 2000; Ramanathan & Crocker, 2009). The cultural relationship  
59 between hegemonic masculinity and performances of proficient and strong sporting bodies  
60 (Connell, 1987, 1995; Wellard, 2006) simultaneously marks female sporting bodies as  
61 unfeminine (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002) or associates women's physical activity with  
62 maintenance of a "not too muscley", shapely and aerobicised appearance (Gorely et al, 2003;  
63 Markula, 1995). **Theoretical framework**

64 Feminist poststructuralism can add to understandings of how discourses surrounding  
65 what is and is not valued can be taken up and negotiated by young people in the construction  
66 of their identities (Weedon, 1997). Only subjectivities made possible in discourse can be  
67 taken up (Davies, 2004). Identities and subjectivities are formed in relation to the discourses  
68 and images (Wright, 2004) that young people encounter and (re)produce within institutional  
69 and media sites. By "positioning" (Davies & Harré, 1990) oneself in relation to the discourses  
70 available within a culture or social field, individuals become embodied by practising or living  
71 out discourses. Rail (2009: 143) uses a poststructuralist framework to conceptualise  
72 positioning as how the 'gendered, heterosexualised and racialised discourses to which one  
73 has access' provide spaces that individuals can inhabit or codes by which they can act,  
74 behave and perform in social practices. These rationales 'make available different modes of  
75 relating to the self, and lived relations of the body' (O'Flynn, 2008: 110). To this  
76 poststructuralist approach, postcolonial feminist scholarship adds that inquiry on the body  
77 must rethink assumptions of Whiteness, as the privileging of white peoples, knowledge and  
78 experience, perceiving them as universal (Frankenberg, 1993), in the ways bodies are able to  
79 move, behave and look, which is of especial pertinence in activity contexts. This perspective  
80 can aid researching the intersecting gendered and racialised discourses to which young  
81 women have access to construct meanings and position their selves (van Sterkenberg &  
82 Knoppers, 2004). Many studies on young women and physical activity address gender

83 constructions and relations; ethnicity and race in intersection with gender must also be the  
84 focus of study (Brah, 1996; Flintoff et al., 2008), for racialised discourse and practice have an  
85 impact on the physical active body.

86 Engagement with visual cultural resources through sports media, spectatorship and  
87 participation may inform or illuminate students' participation in school PE and the impact on  
88 young people's physical identity or sense of self from constructions of valued bodies. This is  
89 of keen importance especially in today's image-heavy, postmodern and individualised world  
90 where self-worth and one's place in society are closely tied to the self-managed, but fluid,  
91 body (Shilling, 2003, 2008; Turner, 2008). Tinning and Fitzclarence (1992) and Wright  
92 (2004) suggest that young people learn through their engagements with popular or physical  
93 culture, media and institutional sites and make meanings for their bodies that are relevant to  
94 their readings of popular culture. Together, the consumption of many ideal bodies in visual  
95 culture and the gaze of others put the body under examination. Visual cultures within schools  
96 may be a part of the hidden curriculum, as resources for teaching that are not explicitly  
97 planned for lessons (Harrison, Azzarito & Burden, 2004; Prosser, 2007). Research on both  
98 PE and wider schooling contexts has previously made use of the concept of the hidden  
99 curriculum to describe how students learn implicit, subconscious knowledge that reproduces  
100 certain values or dominant interests, which may explain how inequalities are enforced,  
101 especially in unconscious communication (Fernandez-Balboa, 1993; Kirk, 1992). The  
102 discourses and images constituting a visual or physical culture can offer students fixed ways  
103 of thinking about and visualising their own and others' bodies as valued or unvalued.

104 A physical culture in PE that valorises particular sporting bodies in gendered and  
105 racialised ways may have a negative impact on young people who are unable to conform to  
106 producing a sporting or normative body, do not gain status, and who feel excluded or  
107 marginalised in PE. Some studies have explored the practices or processes of negotiating

108 embodied identities in secondary school PE in first world countries, considering the PE  
109 classroom to be a site for empowerment through knowledge of the body, providing  
110 opportunities for young people to construct their own meanings of their identities and  
111 deconstruct dominant notions of sporting or ideal bodies (Armour, 1999; Fisette, 2011;  
112 Garrett, 2004; MacNeill & Rail, 2010; O’Flynn, 2008). Researching intersectionality of  
113 gender/race/class in PE, sport and leisure has become crucial in understanding diversity  
114 among young people and their engagements with physical cultures (Atencio, 2008;  
115 Fitzpatrick, 2011; Flintoff, Fitzgerald & Scraton, 2008; George & Rail, 2005; Scraton,  
116 Caudwell & Holland, 2005; Scraton & Watson, 1998; Rail, 2009; Wright, 2006).

117         In particular, research on South Asians’ experiences in sport finds that they constitute  
118 identities and spaces for themselves among discourses of values, locations of and access to  
119 competitive sport (Scraton et al, 2005; Ratna, 2010); “Indo-Pak” masculine identities in  
120 recreational sport are formed in relation to Blackness and Whiteness (Thangaraj, 2010), while  
121 the cooptation of “stylish hybridity” by mass media and consumerism has been critiqued  
122 (Giardina, 2003). Asians are presented as structurally and discursively marginalised in some  
123 sports, including football in the UK (Burdsey, 2007; Crozier & Davis, 2008; Elling &  
124 Knoppers, 2005; Fleming, 1991). A perception of Asian young people’s low skill or  
125 submissive and frail bodies results in assumptions that they are little interested in sport, or  
126 that sporting bodies are not valued in Asian communities (Bramham, 2003; Fleming, 1991;  
127 Lewis, 1979; Lovell, 1991). Data is needed on whether there are multiple ways in which  
128 bodies come to be valued in diverse young people’s physical cultures and what impact local  
129 context, such as a school physical culture, may have on young people visualising themselves  
130 as valued sporting or active bodies.

131

132 **Methodology**

133 *Participatory visual ethnography*

134           This inquiry's design combined ethnography with participant-driven visual data to  
135 explore the meaning-making and practices associated with the discursive construction and  
136 visualisation of value and status for bodies in secondary PE lessons. To be critical about the  
137 meanings young people negotiate, we need to engage both with textual/verbal and visual  
138 discursive sources (Azzarito, 2010; Phoenix, 2010). Some research on bodies in PE has  
139 centred on surveillance of movements, appearances and interactions, indicating that a visual  
140 approach to studying PE classes and young people's experiences within them is important  
141 (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Fisette, 2011; Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Wright, 1995).  
142 Acknowledging that 'simply interviewing students ... is insufficient for understanding the  
143 complexities and nuances of their worlds', (Oliver, Hamzeh and McCaughtry, 2009: 96),  
144 visual methods are a strategy incorporated into interpretive research with young people that  
145 can provide both verbal and visual engagement. Three strands have developed in the use of  
146 visual methods: researcher-created or collected images; participant-created, existing images;  
147 and participant and researcher collaboration in the creation of images (Banks, 2007;  
148 Thompson, 2008). Taking up an epistemology that promotes situated knowledges and where  
149 researcher and participants co-construct knowledge through interaction (Haraway, 1990), this  
150 research combined collaborative data production with design informed by the principles of  
151 visual ethnography.

152           Ethnographic research can uncover the complexity of social settings, understanding  
153 that emplaced and embodied knowledge and experience is co-constructed among participants  
154 and researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Pink, 2007, 2009). The turn to research *with*, rather  
155 than *on*, young people and children, that seeks to address power relations has led to greater  
156 participatory or collaborative work (Christensen & James, 2000), acknowledging that young  
157 people are active agents able to invest in research and to interpret and negotiate discursive



158 messages (Greene & Hill, 2005). Young people's perspectives on images and visual cultures  
159 are necessary to deprivilege adult understandings of the body, provide insights into corporeal  
160 meanings and make visible the norms and values of the hidden curriculum (Oliver & Lalik,  
161 2000; Prosser, 2007). Giving participants control over producing visual data can encourage  
162 involvement with a project. Although the participants here were not involved in the design of  
163 the study, they were able to select from their worlds the people, places and activities they  
164 wished to share. Photo-elicitation from researcher-produced or collated images (Azzarito &  
165 Solmon, 2006) and increasingly from participant-produced photographs (Azzarito & Sterling,  
166 2010; Pope 2010) and drawings (Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006; MacNeill & Rail, 2010)  
167 has offered alternative ways of engaging young people in sharing non-verbal embodied  
168 experiences. Ethnographic studies with long-term engagement in a PE context have also  
169 become common (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Enright & O'Sullivan, 2011) for their 'capacity ... to  
170 capture a sense of the relationship between individuals, differences between them, and their  
171 perceptions of the discourses and practices that occur in different social fields' (Hills, 2006:  
172 544). Long and Carless (2010: 216) suggest that "alternative" or creative methods may help  
173 to 'include the experiences – and therefore 'voices' – of individuals who might otherwise fail  
174 to be represented within more traditional interview methods'. At the same time, the voices  
175 heard through visual methods are not perceived to be more authentic or to uncover any  
176 "truer" identity or reality (Gauntlett & Holwarth, 2006) than through verbal methods, but a  
177 combined verbal and visual approach may enable researchers to think differently about the  
178 experiences that are communicated by participants (Buckingham, 2009; Phoenix, 2010).

### 179 *Setting and participants*

180 This study took place in one urban secondary school site in the East Midlands, UK,  
181 with an ethnically diverse student population that was 80 percent British Asian. Students  
182 were timetabled for two hours of PE lessons per week. Year 9 (age 13 to 14) classes were

183 chosen for the research in consultation with the PE teachers. The research participants were  
184 drawn from four PE classes: two girls' and two boys' classes of around 30 students each. The  
185 school was mixed (co-ed) but PE lessons were gender-segregated. Research observations ran  
186 throughout the school year from October to May. A number of weeks into the observation  
187 period, all students from both classes were informed about the focus of the study and were  
188 invited to join the participatory elements of the project. 25 students volunteered to participate  
189 (14 boys, 11 girls; 20 British Indian, two white, one black African, one Asian-African and  
190 one Anglo-Asian).

### 191 *Data collection*

192 A number of sources of data were used: field notes, group interviews, participants'  
193 photography and researcher's photography. Group interviews were carried out in single sex  
194 groups, to mirror the structure of the participants' PE classes. Identified as a potentially  
195 feminist method (Wilkinson, 1999), group interviews were deemed to offer ways of  
196 reproducing some of the social interactions and peer dynamics among the students, and  
197 ethically to assuage some of the researcher's authority and put the young people more at ease.  
198 In the first interviews, the participants discussed their experiences in physical activity and the  
199 ways that bodies become admired or valued in PE. Following these group interviews, each  
200 participant was given a digital camera for a fortnight and asked to create photos recording (1)  
201 what do you do when you're (not) being active? (2) what sorts of bodies are valued in your  
202 PE class, sports club or peer group? All participants were instructed in use of the camera's  
203 major functions including flash, zoom, exposure length and colour. They were permitted to  
204 delete any photos they did not want to share. At the end of the fortnight, cameras were  
205 collected by the researcher, all photographs uploaded and printed on gloss paper. Second and  
206 third rounds of group interviews were structured around photo elicitation techniques (Clark,  
207 1999; Harper, 2002) whereby questions assisted participants in explaining the meanings of

208 their photos and the representations they offered of their experiences of physical activity  
209 during the fortnight with the camera. Field notes created by the researcher aimed to provide  
210 contextual data of the school community.

### 211 *Analysis*

212 In categorising the data, an iterative approach of multiple layers of coding (Bryman,  
213 2008; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) was used to inductively and deductively categorise. Coding  
214 began line-by-line using emic themes and language. A content analysis of the images further  
215 noted people, place and activity (Wright, 2004; Rose, 2012), however the participants'  
216 photographs and interviews were viewed and coded side by side avoided removing the  
217 images from their verbal explanations. Where students used their photos to explain their  
218 verbal narratives, this highlighted themes surrounding how sporting or active bodies were  
219 visualised, which individuals could gain status in sport or PE and students' ways of  
220 positioning themselves with or against locally dominant values. All names used in this paper  
221 are pseudonyms.

222

### 223 **Findings**

224 Of the 14 girls involved in the research, only three were active in organised  
225 competitive sports outside of school. A vast majority of the photographs (156 of a total 195)  
226 of the photographs that the girls created to answer "what do I do when I'm being active?"  
227 were taken inside the school, specifically in PE lessons or after-school sports clubs, reflecting  
228 the centrality of school-based physical activity in their lives. In interview however, many of  
229 the girl participants reported their engagement with recreational activities, raising questions  
230 about their means to articulate physical activity participation.

231 As part of the field work, notes were kept of the visual media lining the walls of the  
232 PE corridor, including posters, notices and sports club advertisements. During the interviews,

233 girls discussed their responses to the images in the PE corridor, noting that they contemplated  
234 the messages communicated through this medium. Literature on the hidden curriculum  
235 suggests that the visual culture of a school, especially where PE departments display images  
236 of bodies engaged in activities, inform students which bodies are valued within the school,  
237 and hence which bodies can legitimately participate (Prosser, 2007). A number of these  
238 posters displayed elite athletes engaged, often competitively, in a number of sports. Over half  
239 the posters portrayed white men. Only one portrayed women of colour and no Asian women  
240 were represented in the posters. As such, legitimate sporting bodies promoted in the school  
241 site were embedded in Whiteness. That is, greater visibility in school poster displays was a  
242 marker of greater legitimacy for bodies in sport; Birrell and Theberge (1994) noted similar  
243 with respect to women's sport as a whole. This context provides a useful starting point for  
244 considering how some girls articulate their embodied identities as active or inactive as they  
245 negotiate and challenge dominant constructions of valued sporting and racialised feminine  
246 bodies. Photographs, and accompanying explanations, have been selected from two girls'  
247 photo diaries.

248 *Bhavana*

249 Bhavana was a highly active, confident and competent mover in PE. She was also a  
250 black belt in Tae Kwon Do which she participated in outside of school. Bhavana used two  
251 images of black males to illustrate her conceptualisation of valued bodies (an Olympic  
252 sprinter who is at the pinnacle of sporting success; and a teacher who is valued for supporting  
253 students). Black males here seem to be central to Bhavana's understanding of people who are  
254 involved in sport while girls like her are represented as passive or inactive. She photographed  
255 her brother demonstrating Tae Kwon Do moves as an example of an active, skilled and  
256 disciplined body (Figure 1). However, she does not photograph herself doing the same  
257 despite her own achievements in this sport. To represent her taekwondo participation,

258 Bhavana laid her kit out on the floor (see Figure 2), not even wearing it to pose in or to create  
259 photos similar to those showing her brother. The only time she was visible in the photo set  
260 was in a self-portrait. Bhavana explained that this photo answered “what I do when I’m not  
261 active”. Bhavana is an example of many girls in the project who did not include themselves  
262 in photos. The photography instruction sheet given to the students advised that it was  
263 acceptable for them to hand the camera to a friend in order to take photos of themselves, if  
264 they wished. While the lack of self-photos may at times have been a technical issue – no one  
265 around to take photos – in those instances where friends and family are photographed in  
266 action, as we see Bhavana’s brother, it would have been simple for the photographer and  
267 subject to switch roles. Bhavana (and others) chose not to do this. This young woman met  
268 with few images within the school space of girls like her as active or sporting bodies.  
269 Bhavana was confident and able in PE and active in martial arts outside school, but where  
270 South Asian girls’ bodies were invisible in the physical culture, her perception of herself was  
271 affected such that she did not represent herself as active in her photos – making herself  
272 invisible in her photo set apart from through the ideal femininity portrayed in her self-portrait  
273 photo.

274 *Figures 1, and 2 here*

275

276 *Meena*

277 Meena also offered an important insight into the ways students’ embodied  
278 subjectivities and activity participation could be affected. For Meena, Olympic athletes  
279 represented the sporting bodies that she admired. She talked about being inspired by watching  
280 the Olympic Games on the television:

281 I only watch the Olympics and it’s because the athletes are so good. It’s like it  
282 inspires you like, oh, even if I go towards sports sometime I’m going to try and do my  
283 best and maybe one day if I start to get really good at it I might take it forward, like,

284           you can imagine yourself there but then you realise like I don't go anywhere, I've got  
285           to go and join a club first. (Meena)

286 Measures of status included exposure on television: because Meena only saw men's sport on  
287 television, she saw men as more naturally suited to sport:

288           You watch telly and then you always see like in football they are always um, men  
289           playing football and men playing rugby so it's like, and cricket and all that, but you  
290           hardly see like women and girls playing all those sports, so it's like, it's just naturally  
291           suited for [men]. (Meena)

292 While Meena suggested that she might, in the future, take up a sport in a competitive way, it  
293 really has little relevancy to her life and self as she constructed herself here. She positioned  
294 herself as different to the competitive sporting bodies she recognised in the Olympics and  
295 media sport cultures. Although Meena said that she enjoyed watching elite athletes, her sense  
296 of herself as articulated in her photo diary and interviews was not informed by being a sports  
297 person. Meena reported that outside of PE she was not very active. In PE lessons, she did not  
298 resist participating, but neither considered herself to have high ability. Here emphasis is  
299 added to highlight how her language suggests she's not interested in sport but she thinks  
300 other people might be:

301           They've got different sports so that there's something for everyone and it *could* like  
302           *possibly* make *others* want to go and join the sport because it's so much variety so it's  
303           like, um, you *might* go and join a club after you've done the sport in PE. (Meena)

304 Meena seemed unable to speak of herself as a sporting body. In Meena's set of 26 photos, she  
305 emphasised seven that showed large groups of male students on the playing fields engaged in  
306 football and running games at break times (see Figure 5). Photos of Meena and her friends  
307 displayed them chilling out at lunchtimes, posing for the camera (Figure 6). In line with her  
308 admiration for Olympic athletes, Meena explained that both her friends and the boys at  
309 school are to be admired because they are committed to sports participation in extra-  
310 curricular clubs at school. She discussed the support and team work she valued from them in

311 PE and their recreational dance activities at home. She perceived her friends as being active  
312 in extra-curricular sports clubs at school, but resisted joining in with them, claiming that she  
313 had other hobbies, including Art Club, that she preferred over sports.

314 *Figures 3 and 4 here*

315 The only activity that prompted Meena to talk animatedly was dancing with her  
316 friends at home. She talked about making up routines and teaching each other new moves,  
317 just to perform to each other in the home. She said,

318 It builds up my confidence and before I don't think I was really confident, but after  
319 I'd taken up dancing I used to um perform everywhere and I've learn the actual dance  
320 and everything. I think my confidence has gone up and I think it helps me to do things  
321 other than dance as well. Sometimes. (Meena)

322 Dancing, and particularly the performance of dancing, offered Meena confidence that she  
323 uses in other aspects of her life. Some girls talked about leisure/recreational spaces and  
324 activity forms (such as dancing) as being free and offering emotional satisfaction and  
325 kinaesthetic pleasure. As Atencio (2008) argues, alternative cultures or styles of, in this case,  
326 dance, can enable young women to avoid the disciplinary practices of dominant white  
327 culture. This contrasts with the space of the school wherein behaviour and movements are  
328 monitored by teachers, activities are constrained by certain objectives and students feel  
329 watched at all times. Students *invest* in the forms of activity that give them this sense of  
330 freedom, pleasure and positivity. Meena felt ambiguous about any connection between her  
331 physicality in expressive activities such as dance and the physicalities of her sportier friends.  
332 Although Meena did what was expected of her in PE, her experiences suggest that she  
333 simultaneously resisted subjectivity as a competitive sports player while promoting  
334 cooperative situations such as dance.

335 Meena's "sport is not for me" stance can also be seen in the way she spoke about  
336 sport as not being an acceptable career path for people of a certain background:

337           It's like different types of people expect different things, so like some people who um,  
338           say if for example, weren't educated and they want to educate their kids as far as they  
339           can, and they don't want to take the risk that oh, if they go round doing sports then  
340           what are they going to earn later on? So I think it's a bit like that. (Meena)

341   While she did not explicitly refer to British Asian or another specific ethnicity, using instead  
342   indicators of class or socio-economic background, Meena's speech recalls the common  
343   notion that British Asian parents want their children to be doctors or lawyers, devaluing sport  
344   if it has no academic or career use (Ramanathan & Crocker, 2009; Strandbu, 2005). Meena,  
345   while talking impersonally, may have been positioning herself and her family as devaluing  
346   sport as a career. Some of the ways in which sport was constructed in the school physical  
347   culture led Meena to think that an investment in sport means a large commitment, a life of  
348   sport and aiming for a high level of success in it. Participation-level or recreational  
349   engagement were not associated with valued sporting endeavours.

350

## 351   **Discussion**

352           While some measures were identified among teachers as attempts to increase girls'  
353   participation in PE and school sport, such as allowing freer interpretation of the PE kit rules;  
354   including traditionally female activities on the curriculum; and dividing PE into single sex  
355   classes, there appeared a divide between the recreational, school-level activities that were  
356   available for girls, and engagement in higher levels of sport that was reserved for male  
357   athletes. Theories of discursive practice (Weedon, 1997; Davies, 1989), visual culture  
358   (Prosser, 2007) and hidden curriculum (Kirk, 1992) highlight that the dominant visual  
359   messages offered within the school space affected these girls' constructions of themselves as  
360   active or sporting.

361           With girls such as Meena positioning sports as predominantly for boys, images  
362   displayed throughout the school rarely offered an alternative visualisation of girls' legitimate  
363   place in physical activity. Although it is clear that not all young people will become



364 successful in competitive sport, findings here suggest a link between the visibility and  
365 legitimacy of elite female athletes and girls' positioning of themselves as active or sporting  
366 bodies. Yet among these narratives suggesting Asian students' low ability and engagement in  
367 physical activity, it is also evident that these girls *were* active outside of school, that despite  
368 the construction of girls like them as inactive, they were able at other times to resist. Young  
369 people's own body narratives give them the ability to make multiple readings of bodies that  
370 they encounter in educational or media sites (Atencio, 2008; Davies, 2004; van Sterkenburg  
371 & Knoppers, 2004). The school physical culture appeared to offer few alternative narratives  
372 for producing subjectivities, so that within the meanings the girls had available to them, they  
373 did not define their recreational engagement as sporty. Yet outside of school, the girls found  
374 meanings that enabled them to engage in physical activity and thus resist notions of Asian  
375 girls and women as passive and physically inactive (Fleming, 1991; Lovell, 1991). Bhavana  
376 and Meena became involved in, respectively, taekwondo and dance through female friends or  
377 family members, who did represent active minority ethnic women. Peer and family networks  
378 have been found important for minority girls' recreation (Scruton & Watson, 1998).

379         This paper has explored a number of the ways that young women visualised valued  
380 bodies and their active or inactive embodied identities within PE contexts. By interrogating  
381 the discourses that educational institutions are offering to young people through the hidden  
382 curriculum, ways can be found to deconstruct assumptions of Whiteness in the ways sporting  
383 and gendered bodies are given value in school sites (Wright, 1995). This paper is part of a  
384 broader study that engaged a diverse group of young people in visual and verbal methods of  
385 data production to investigate their physical activity practices in the context of their diverse,  
386 urban secondary school. If researchers and teachers are committed to deconstructing  
387 Whiteness that is embedded in the visual physical cultures of activity spaces, and which  
388 informs how bodies may be valued in schools, participatory visual methods within

389 ethnographic studies have the potential to enable highlighting the complexity of young  
 390 people's meanings of their selves in culturally and gender sensitive ways (Vertinsky, 1992).  
 391 Although Bhavana and Meena were participants in physical activity, if they do not position  
 392 themselves as active within the discourses defining what active means there may be  
 393 implications for their continued engagement (Garrett, 2004b). Given the increasing  
 394 importance placed on competition in school sport and at the same time lifelong activity, a  
 395 commitment to representing diversity among elite sports players may assist objectives to  
 396 increase young people's engagement. Young people are able to verbalise and visualise what  
 397 valued bodies mean to them. If they are given potential to create alternative narratives and  
 398 selves within educational settings they may have more space to articulate and experience  
 399 active identities.

400

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- 577 Word count: 6904
- 578
- 579 Summary abstract:
- 580 Learning about the body in physical education, students often construct meanings based on  
581 their engagements with sporting or valued bodies in popular culture and media. The visibility  
582 of elite sports players in media, predominantly white and male, can affect the ideas that  
583 young minority ethnic women have about who can be sporty or active, and hence their own  
584 value within physical activity. Using visual methods, research was carried out with British  
585 Asian girls aged 13-14, who created photographs that represented their involvement in  
586 physical activity, and their ideas of which bodies are valued as sporting. Many girls placed  
587 their physical activity significantly in school, and saw sporting bodies as male and elite. At  
588 the same time, girls were physically activity outside of school despite not seeing themselves  
589 as sporty. Reflecting on the invisibility of minority ethnic women in sports media, this  
590 research suggests that greater representation may enable minority girls to see themselves as  
591 valued bodies as part of working to increase their engagement in sport and physical activity.