



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Young women, health and physical activity

Citation for published version:

Camacho-Miñano, MJ, Gray, S, Maclsaac, S & Sandford, R 2021, 'Young women, health and physical activity: Tensions between the gendered fields of Physical Education and Instagram', *Sport, Education and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1932455>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1080/13573322.2021.1932455](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1932455)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Sport, Education and Society

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of the following article, accepted for publication in [JOURNAL]. Maria José Camacho-Miñano, Shirley Gray, Rachel Sandford & Sarah Maclsaac (2021) Young women, health and physical activity: tensions between the gendered fields of Physical Education and Instagram, Sport, Education and Society, DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2021.1932455. It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Young women, health and physical activity: Tensions between the gendered fields of Physical Education and Instagram

Maria José Camacho-Miñano^{a*}, S. Gray^b, R. Sandford^c and Sarah MacIsaac^b

^a Department for Languages, Arts and Physical Education, Institute of Feminist Research, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain.

^b Institute for Sport, Physical Education and Health Sciences, University of Edinburgh Moray House School of Education, Edinburgh, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

^b School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.

* corresponding author

Faculty of Education

Avda. Rector Villanova, nº 1

28040 Madrid. Spain.

E-mail: mjcamacho@ucm.es

Young women, health and physical activity: Tensions between the gendered fields of Physical Education and Instagram

Drawing on the conceptual frameworks of Bourdieu and postfeminism, this article analyses extant tensions between young women's gendered habitus and the health-related learning spaces of Physical Education (PE) and Instagram. We draw on data from a two-phase qualitative research project with thirty-seven young women (aged 15-17) from three secondary schools in Spain who self-defined as physically active and engaging with exercise content on Instagram. Data obtained through focus groups and semi-structured interviews reveal how these young women's subjectivities are formed through negotiating the gender 'rules of the game' within these key pedagogical fields. Notably, most participants were critical of their learning in PE, which mainly remains a traditional masculine field. By contrast, they valued Instagram as an engaging space in which to learn about fitness to transform their bodies toward the feminine ideal. This involved a constant process of self-optimization, including the development of the 'right' mental dispositions, fitting strongly with their gendered habitus. Within this paper, we have developed the concept of 'postfeminist habitus' to explain the participants' engagements with health-related content on Instagram, which through language of choice and empowerment, disciplined the young women to achieve the normative body as a marker of success. We argue that while there are notably different patterns of engagement with PE and Instagram, in both spaces there is evidence of symbolic violence that reproduces the gender order. We conclude by suggesting changes that might make PE a more meaningful and hybrid learning space for young women.

Keywords: digital health, social media, fitness, fitspiration, gender, postfeminism, Bourdieu.

Introduction

In our neoliberal, 'tech-savvy' and visual society, social media operates as a relevant contemporary site of learning about bodies, health and physical activity (Goodyear, Armour, & Wood, 2019; Rich, Lewis, & Miah 2020). Recent research has found that many young people (53%) use social media actively to look for health-

related content, mainly related to physical activity, diet/nutrition and body image (Goodyear et al., 2019). Social media is also an effective pedagogical platform for the development of young people's subjectivities, instructing them to become 'healthy' subjects who understand the self as in need of constant work and transformation (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, & Rich, 2019; Rich et al., 2020).

The ubiquitous nature of learning about health through online platforms is unsurprising given young people's wide-ranging use of social media, especially girls, who are more frequent social media users than boys (OECD, 2017). Social media, as a form of public pedagogy (Rich & Miah, 2014)) in which learnings occurs beyond formal sites, has therefore become 'instructive' in nature, playing a pedagogic role in how young people come to understand both their own bodies (Rich et al., 2020), and gendered norms and identities (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; Rich, 2018). It is unclear how this learning might interact with pedagogical spaces such as physical education (PE) which have the formal responsibility to help young people form and negotiate health-related knowledge. Therefore, there is a need to better analyse the relationship between young women's experiences in formal education and their entanglement in these broader physical cultures that circulate in digitalized spaces. Expanding our previous work about how young females negotiated discourses around health and fitness on Instagram (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019), the purpose of this research is to analyse how young women's subjectivities are constructed when engaging with both PE and Instagram as competing health-related learning spaces through which tensions arise.

Using a postfeminist approach and inspired by Bourdieu's tools of analysis, we put forward the concept of 'postfeminist habitus' within the discussion, thus bringing together the key concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) and postfeminist subjectivities (Gill, 2017). We argue that such an approach is relevant and offers a valuable lens

through which to understand how young women negotiate their gendered subjectivities across different spaces of learning.

How young women learn about health and fitness in formal and informal pedagogical spaces

Health-related knowledge and messages are embedded in and disseminated through various social spaces such as families, school sport, PE and, more recently, social media. Such sites can be understood as fields in a Bourdieusian sense, structured spaces of relationships in which individuals' practice is shaped by a shared understanding of rules, processes and valued resources (capital) (Iisahunter, Smith, & Emerald, 2015; Sandford & Quarmby, 2019). Importantly, practices within these fields are intensely gendered, inscribed with gender norms that define expected behaviours and dispositions based on what constitutes male or female identities. These gender norms function within a gender order (Connell, 1987) that is often reduced to binary and oppositional understanding of masculinity and femininity, sustaining masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2000). Such ideas are then reproduced via the logic of practice of these fields and become deeply embedded (Iisahunter et al., 2015).

PE has been acknowledged as a key formal learning space in which individuals acquire health-related knowledge and the associated valued practices and norms. However, research has long confirmed how girls' experiences in PE continue to be constrained by dominant gendered norms (e.g., Metcalfe, 2018; Roberts, Gray, & Camacho-Miñano, 2020). The 'superiority' of the male body and of characteristics such as aggression, competitiveness and strength, contributes significantly to how the concept of ability (Wright & Burrows, 2006) or the 'good' student (Iisahunter, 2004) in PE are understood. Therefore, young women are globally marginalised in PE, a tendency consistent with their persistent disengagement from the subject (Roberts et al., 2020; Scraton, 2018).

Despite much research in this area, PE continues to be an ‘unsafe space’ (Scraton, 2018) for many young women, where exposure of the body, public displays of performance and normative comparisons prevail, resulting in discomfort and positioning them as powerless and inferior (Metcalf, 2018). Many PE teachers subconsciously reproduce the gender order, reinforcing the relevance of masculine ability and performance through their own beliefs, embodied practices and curriculum activities (Brown, 2005). However, the scenario is becoming more complex as the field begins to embrace burgeoning new active femininities (‘can do’ girls) and neoliberal discourse of opportunities that provide an illusion that everyone can achieve their own destiny (McRobbie, 2009; Scraton, 2018). The co-existence of such evidently conflicting ideas within the same field, could create spaces of contestation that are difficult to navigate for young women. For example, as girls demonstrate their physical capital in PE, they risk being labelled as ‘trouble-makers’ or ‘tomboyish’ when they defy convention (Roberts, Gray & Camacho- Miñano, 2020) or behave ‘like men’ (Hill, 2015).

Like other social media platforms, Instagram has become a highly influential space where young women experience and learn about their bodies, health, and identities. Here, they can easily access popular culture fitness practices (usually via the ‘fitspiration’ hashtag) shared by fitness influencers or celebrities (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019). Through liking, commenting and sharing photos and videos, they can also actively participate within these online communities, giving ‘producers’ a sense of belonging and positive affect (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2020). Such fitness content is often rooted in discourses of healthism (Crawford, 1980), which encourages a neoliberal moral imperative towards constant self-improvement as an individual responsibility (Rich, 2018). These discourses are intensely gendered, functioning for young women as a postfeminist biopedagogy (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019) which bring together a

postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007), neoliberal notions of the self and discourses of health consumption. This biopedagogy functions to instruct and regulate young women's bodies and subjectivities through a language of choice, empowerment and health while, simultaneously, conceiving exercise as disciplined aesthetic work to achieve the normative body.

Postfeminism describes a cultural sensibility that 'has become the new normal, a taken-for-granted common sense that operates as a kind of gendered neoliberalism' (Gill, 2017, p. 609). It defines contemporary gender relations through contradictory but patterned features, such as the relevance of the body for women and for their femininity; intense surveillance of women's bodies; and normative beauty disciplines concealed by notions of individual choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007, 2017). Postfeminism also has a distinctive 'affective life' as it increasingly establishes the emotions and feelings that women are expected to nurture (Gill, 2017). Specifically, the focus on a positive mindset (Favaro & Gill, 2019) functions as a regulatory force that suggests that women are responsible for their own futures, but no longer constrained by structural inequalities or power relations. Therefore, the postfeminism that 'circulates' in digital health cultures (Rich, 2018) also shapes and become deeply engrained in the subjectivities of young women (Author, 2019; Gill, 2017).

Developing a gendered habitus through online and offline health-related pedagogical fields

To explore young women's health-related learnings in different contexts, we turn to Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 1991, 2000). The concept of habitus, fundamental to the theorization of young women's subjectivities, explains how cultural values, including what constitutes masculine and feminine, are embodied, performed and reproduced through social practice (Bourdieu,

1984). Representing how the social is ‘inscribed in the body’, this concept is useful for simultaneously analyzing the experience of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible (Reay, 1995). Habitus is a form of ‘socialized subjectivity’ referred to dispositions, tastes and embodied ‘ways of being’ (McLeod, 2005) p. 13). As such, gender is a fundamental dimension of habitus (Krais, 2006; McLeod, 2005), as it includes gender norms which become internalized and embodied. Thus, gendered habitus ‘defines how the body is perceived, forms the body’s habits and possibilities for expression, and thus determines the individual identity - via the body - as masculine *or* feminine’ (Krais, 2006, p. 121).

Importantly, although deeply embedded and durable, habitus is not always fixed or imposed but is formed – and, at times, reformed - in relation to practices within social fields (Bourdieu, 1991; Krais, 2006). Field refers to a ‘structured system of social positions occupied by either individuals or institutions engaged in the same activity’ (Thorpe, 2009, p. 496). Fields do not stand alone but co-exist temporally and spatially, configuring and intersecting dynamically with malleable boundaries (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). They are characterized by struggles and strategies to obtain control of power within the field (lisahunter et al., 2015). Those who are successful in a field, have learned the ‘rules of the game’, abide by those rules and are therefore complicit in maintaining the structure of this social space. Bourdieu refers to this as *doxa* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; hunter, 2004), an unquestioning sense of knowing, belonging and behaving.

The structure of fields is determined by the distinction between, and division of, various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For those possessing valued forms of capital, their sense of identity and belonging is supported and they are able to maintain their position within the field (lisahunter et al., 2015). For Bourdieu (1986), capital represents the

various resources that individuals both bring to and acquire within social fields and can be economic, social or cultural. The body can also be a form of capital in its own right (Shilling, 1993) with greater value afforded to bodies that better align with the dominant norms and ideals of a particular field (Sandford & Quarmby, 2019). Forms of capital that are valued - or deemed legitimate - within a given field are described as symbolic capital, which influence one's position or power within the field and shape options for accumulating more capital and privilege (lisahunter et al., 2015).

Over time, the structures within the fields that individuals engage with become internalized, embodied and shape subsequent social practice. Thus, using Bourdieu's work as a conceptual framework allows us to understand how gendered habitus both constitutes and is constituted by practices within these different social fields. This dynamic relationship between gendered habitus and field, between the micro and the macro levels of society, allows us to understand subjectivity as always in process (Reay, 1995). Bourdieu's recognition that fields interrelate and configure in dynamic ways (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) also facilitates an understanding of how the boundaries of fields are malleable and, thus, how PE as a field might be influenced by intersections with other fields (e.g., health and social media), presenting opportunities for new forms of habitus to emerge.

PE has been described as a weakly autonomous field, highly permeable to the influence from other fields (Brown, 2005), which has rendered PE susceptible to the influence of sport and masculine values. It is unsurprising, therefore, that many young women do not view PE as a space 'for them'. This positions them further away from the discourses operated by the teacher (hunter, 2004) and allows only some subjectivities to be deemed legitimate. Thus, they become complicit in reproducing the *doxa* associated with PE (hunter, 2004). The imposition of this arbitrary gender order is considered a form of

symbolic violence: a covert power in which the dominated accept their own condition of domination as legitimate, perceiving it as ‘common sense’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Research shows that online social spaces for health and fitness are also influenced by wider social structures and practices, many of which are rooted in intensely gendered discourses of healthism (Rich, 2018). Women within these online spaces can become complicit in maintaining this gendered space by ‘producing, evaluating, and consuming content online that is held together by a shared interest and a set of power relations among agents sharing this interest’ (Levina & Arriaga, 2014, p. 477). Here, the broad field of social media – and its component platform-based subfields such as Instagram - can be understood as a site in which informal pedagogies (including those about health and the body) are both produced and reproduced. Through consuming and producing, largely visual, content which is legitimized by the accumulation of symbolic capital through likes and comments, young women learn what is valued and what constitutes healthy practices. These online social practices are significant, therefore, because they shape young women’s gendered habitus, nurturing their health-related preferences, interests, and tastes (Sandford & Quarmby, 2019).

While PE and Instagram privilege different forms of capital and habitus, the intersection of these fields holds implications for young women in relation to their gendered subjectivities and their health-related learnings. Indeed, Sandford and Quarmby (2019) suggest that these areas of overlap can create spaces of conflict, where multiple messages and perspectives compete for prominence. Thus, how young women learn about physical activity and health within and between both fields is an important area for investigation.

As noted above, this article is concerned with exploring the tensions that are evident between young women's habitus and the specific health-related learning spaces of PE and Instagram. In each case, these spaces are recognised as social fields – albeit with recognition that they themselves are embedded within broader fields of practice, notably education and social media. Specific research questions that informed this study were: What and how are young women learning about the body, physical activity and health in the contexts of PE and Instagram? What tensions exist between these gendered fields and how do these tensions impact on young women's learning and subjectivities?

Method

This study was carried out in two phases. In Phase 1, we adopted a participatory approach, involving participants in the initial design of the research and thus positioning them as active contributors within the process (Lamb, Oliver, & Kirk, 2018). In this first phase, the first researcher used personal contacts to invite four girls (aged 14–16 years) to discuss the research over three 90-minute sessions and help shape the research design. In Phase 2, young women were recruited from three Secondary schools (two state schools and one semi-private school) from a medium-sized town (50,000 inhabitants) in the centre of Spain. With support from PE teachers, meetings were arranged with seven PE classes, in which girls were provided with information about the study. Selection criteria were that girls should self-define as physically active and as viewers and/or followers of fitness content on Instagram. Parental consent and pupil assent were collected and ethical guidelines for educational research and for researching online technologies with children were also adhered to (see Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019). Ethical approval was granted by the ethics committee of the first author's institution.

In total, thirty-seven young women aged 15-17 years volunteered to take part in this phase of the study. Focus group interviews took place with six groups and each group was interviewed twice. Following a preliminary analysis of this data, face-to-face interviews were conducted with ten participants, purposefully selected to explore key ideas in-depth. The questions paid attention to the participants': experiences of Instagram fitness cultures and PE; justification of their interest and choices in both spaces; criteria to trust digital health content; and recommendations for their PE teachers.

Data were analysed thematically, following Braun, Clarke and Weate (2016). First, the transcripts were read several times to become familiar with the data, followed by an inductive analysis to identify key passages of text and assign units of meaning (codes) to that text. Second, themes were developed through the initial organization and cluster of codes for each candidate, which were subsequently reviewed and revised. Broad theory-driven themes were then developed in relation to key tenets of postfeminism (e.g., female body value, body disciplines as choice, surveillance), (Gill, 2007, 2017) and Bourdieu's conceptual tools (field, habitus and capital). The process of building the discussion around these themes also became an important part of our analysis and helped to refine the analytic narrative, which is outlined further below.

Findings

Conflict between habitus and the gendered fields of PE and Instagram

All young women in our study were clear that they perceived Instagram and PE as different spaces of cultural production. Most participants reported that they learnt more about physical activity and health informally through Instagram than in PE. These parallel and competing learning spaces generate distinct learning practices that align

differently with young women's internalized dispositions. When a habitus encounters a social field that has shaped its construction, it feels like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Thus, differences in value that the young women assigned to Instagram compared to PE may be attributed to their gendered habitus, and the perception that Instagram provides a better environment for gaining valued (and gendered) body knowledge. From this perspective, Instagram nurtures their desire to transform their bodies as key sites of their own value as females (Gill, 2007, 2017):

Silvana: PE is more... football, volleyball... and (Instagram) is like more for toning up and for having a good body..... PE is more sport, but... collective.

Domi: Yes, that's true

Elsa: And more running and stuff...

Interviewer: So, you're interested in both, but for different things...

Elsa: Exactly.

Silvana: Because these Instagram exercises are for...

Domi: Toning up and all that.

Silvana: Exactly. And ... the PE thing is to learn to play volleyball

Interviewer: What interests you most?

Silvana: Instagram. Because in the end you want to have a good body, I think.

[Two others agree] (focus group 1).

Here, learning through Instagram was related to exercises for 'toning up' to have 'a good body'. Interestingly, for these young women, physical capital is not seen as the embodied capacity to use the body, rather it is linked to the outcome of 'body work' to achieve the toned female 'ideal' (Wright & Burrows, 2006). In this way, the centrality of the body as a key feature of postfeminist culture (Gill, 2007; 2017) is clearly inscribed in the participants' gendered habitus:

In this age, above all... it's [the body] kind of super important, because damn it... you want to have a good body, you want to be beautiful, you want that (Silvana, Focus group 1).

These bodily experiences, desires and practices reflect a habitus shaped by the symbolic gender order (Krais, 2006) that reproduces the traditional value of femininity linked to body appearance. Paradoxically, this is presented as a choice and source of women's empowerment hiding the extent to which these body disciplines are normatively demanded (Gill, 2007, 2017).

Participants' comments also pointed to the prevalence of traditionally hegemonic content within PE, such as 'collective sports' and fitness ('running'). Performing well in these areas was seen to represent the valued symbolic capital within the PE field (hunter, 2004; Wright & Burrows, 2006). Far from being neutral, this symbolic capital is associated with masculine embodied dispositions (e.g., competitiveness, strength, toughness) (Beltrán-Carrillo, Devís-Devís, Peiró-Velert, & Brown, 2012; Wright & Burrows, 2006).

Interestingly, none of the young women practiced team sports in their free time, although some were involved in individual activities (gym, dance, swimming, skating), as current forms of informal sport participation (O'Connor & Penney, 2021). Thus, despite being physically active, they did not have the required capital to be successful in a subject dominated by team sports. The participants seemed to value alternative activities within PE, such as climbing, canoeing or gym activities, suggesting a closer alignment with their own physical culture practices. However, these activities were marginalized within the PE curriculum, which was perceived to reflect the priorities and interests of PE teachers:

Almu: You don't even get all the sports, I mean... you get the ones that...

Alena: The most important ones

Almu: Those that are liked by the teacher or the department.

Alena: Those that are more striking [makes quotation mark hand gesture] and maybe there are a thousand more fun sports that we don't know about (Focus group 5).

PE teachers often enter the profession precisely because of their sporting achievements (e.g. Brown, 2005), thus reproducing in the field ‘the conditions of its own perpetuation’ (hunter, 2004, p. 183). They also often embody masculine dispositions that are reinforced through their university studies and later reproduced ‘as a vicious circle’ in their own teaching (Brown, 2005), privileging curricula that require and develop masculine physical capitals. This scenario – alluded to in the quote above - results in a ‘miserable position’ (Bourdieu, 1993 as cited in Reay, 1995, p. 359) for the young women whose postfeminist habitus is discordant with the PE field. Thus, the structure of PE as a field is a form of symbolic violence that restricts participation of those not embodying hegemonic masculinities, leaving them to assume their ‘natural’ positions on the margins (Beltrán-Carrillo et al., 2012).

Our data evidence the nuanced ways that gender enters into the ‘game’ of these distinct pedagogical spaces (Krais, 2006), thereby shaping different relationships with young women’s postfeminist habitus. However, there were subtle signs suggesting porous boundaries between the two fields. For example, Lili commented ‘there are times when we do [in PE] as a circuit, when we do various exercises such as crunches... or squats, what I like most is that type of exercise’ (interview 4). It is perhaps unsurprising that these activities were preferred, given their resemblance with those exercises that are ubiquitous within the Instagram field (see below). Interestingly, in these intersecting or ‘borderland spaces’ (Sandford & Quarmby, 2019) some participants saw the potential for PE to connect with their online practice, suggesting that if the PE teacher ‘put the Instagram in PE it would be perfect’ (Lili, Interview 4).

Meaningful engagement as a matter of ‘choice’

In navigating Instagram, the young women positioned themselves as active learners that looked for specific information (e.g., about physical activity and diets) to

change their bodies toward the perfect body (Camacho & Gray, in press). This learning was positioned in opposition to the imposed knowledge that PE teachers ‘try to teach you’:

In PE there are many times when I feel that the information given to us is not very useful; because (teachers) try to teach you... a series of variations of themes and things like that of sports but...I'm not interested... in knowing how to play paddles. So, on Instagram I can look for exactly what will be useful and what I am interested in[...]I think I learn more from Instagram (Carma, Interview 6).

Instagram was valued as a ‘useful’ space in which to learn about healthy lifestyle practices because it was more tailored to the participants’ interests and appeared to afford greater agency than PE. However, as habitus is ‘reflective of the social context in which they were acquired’ (Reay, 1995, p. 537), we can appreciate how these young women are perhaps predisposed towards this way of feeling, thinking and behaving. In fact, their agency - through the capacity to search content - is strongly influenced by Instagram’s algorithmic functioning. Here, the participants’ online health-related interests are translated into data, which enables Instagram to respond to them in real time, customizing posts, images and ideas, related to their preferences, actions and networks’ actions (Andrejevic, 2002). Therefore, the structure of the field creates the illusion that the young women have freedom to pursue that which is of value to them, revealing the close interaction between structure and agency.

Some participants, however, described a more passive engagement with Instagram. Ali, for example, admitted that she did not look specifically for fitness content; it ‘just appeared’ in her account and she naturally began to view it. Thus, it permeated her experience to such an extent that she became resigned to the *doxa* of the field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and began to explore health-related content in the same way other people from her networks did. Most participants in our study were aware of how

algorithms functioned but valued this as a useful feature to ensure that posts were tailored. Nonetheless, they also recognized that the platform optimizes user participation, capturing their affect and attention for commercial ends (Carah & Angus, 2018).

Even though participants were aware of Instagram being potentially coercive, they felt it offered them freedom to engage in valuable learning opportunities. Contrastingly, they rarely talked about learning skills or acquiring knowledge in PE but bemoaned its repetitive nature: ‘That's what we've been doing since the first grade’ (Almu, focus group 5). Most participants expressed that they feel ‘obliged’ to do PE, largely because this learning is formally evaluated:

Alma: In PE it's like: "do this" and that's it, you know, like there's no more

Ali: it's an hour you exercise and that's it.

Lili: and it's for marks too.

Rosi: you feel a little more obliged.

Lili: sometimes I have fun and such but... the truth is that I prefer Instagram [...], while in school it is to do an activity and if you don't do it you can be failed and you have to do the activity out of obligation (focus group 3).

Participants also complained that in PE evaluations, teachers did not usually consider differences among students and paid little attention to personal effort. Participants felt they had to reach specific levels of performance that only ‘sporty’ students could achieve. Therefore, their compliance in PE is maintained through institutionalized symbolic violence, ‘due to the official, sanctioned status of curricular PE and its teacher’ (Beltran et al., 2012, p. 17). However, although PE did not meet all the participants’ needs, most could rationalize its compulsory status, referring to wider dominant discourses from other fields of cultural production (such as the ‘obesity epidemic’):

I think it's good that there's PE because it helps you be fit [...] because there are people who don't do sport and... it can take its toll on them... like obesity, which is a disease (Susi, Interview 7).

Notably absent in these conversations were references to learning experiences that were 'meaningful', with the potential to connect with and positively influence their own lifestyles. Rather, PE was predominantly viewed as a mechanism for physical activity as a break from 'academic' work. Given the dissonance between the practices of this masculine field and their gendered habitus, it is unsurprising that most of the participants were disengaged from PE. However, this dissonance seems to have created an opportunity for the young women to critically reflect on the gendered nature of PE. Interestingly, this gender reflexivity (Krais, 2006; Thorpe, 2009) seems to emerge from the tensions which occur when young women cross and enter a new field (Instagram) with a different gender order, which makes more visible the gendered dissonance in the habitus-field nexus – in this case in PE. The young women's awareness of their marginal status in PE helps us to understand why they value more those online contexts where they have the capacity to accrue valued capital, and where they have 'freedom' to engage in health learning that is meaningful for them. However, while they might experience feelings of choice, the postfeminist biopedagogies and algorithms limit their true agency, as they nurture the *doxa* of contemporary gender inequalities.

Engaging with Instagram 'like a fish in water'

The data indicate that Instagram was engaging for many participants to learn fitness routines that focused on 'problematic female areas', such as 'squats, abs, planks', and 'things to work the bottom' (Isis, focus group 1). Some girls described themselves as physically active, in part because they followed these fitness routines. Carma, for

example, exercised frequently at home and had learnt ‘a lot of exercises thanks to Instagram’ (Interview 7). These practices could be considered as ‘aesthetic labour’ (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017) where exercise is another project of the self to accrue physical capital. Although participants frequently critiqued social pressure to work for the perfect body on Instagram, they largely embraced exercise as a necessary disciplinary practice. Such body practices have become both intense and normative for women (Elias et al., 2017; Gill, 2007, 2017), but are reframed as individual choices ingrained in their postfeminist habitus.

These beliefs and practices are even more influential because fitness content is promoted in the name of health (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019) and are socially valued practices to be (or ‘appear to be’) the proper ‘healthy citizen’:

Because now people are posing as if they're doing sport, as if they're healthy and all that. Even if they're not [...]. it's just something we teenagers have to teach everything we do, and be cool, positive (Susi, Interview 6).

As participants explained, body transformation and the associated accumulation of valued physical capital is linked to an affective change (‘be cool, positive’). The young women highlighted that obtaining the ideal body is difficult but recognized that with sufficient ‘confidence’ it is possible. Through Instagram, the value of femininity as the ‘can-do’ women, who embody successful and happy femininities, was internalized in the participants’ habitus. However, not all the girls were successful in this path of being physically active through Instagram. Some recognized that the acquisition of physical capital required ‘a lot of willpower’ (Silvana) while others noted that it was not always achievable as sometimes ‘you get lazy’ (Isis). For these young women, feelings of enjoyment, pleasure or even functionality were absent when they talked about exercise using Instagram. Rather, pleasure was linked to the results obtained and the recognition

of being successful in this endeavour, a key aspect of body work within postfeminism (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019).

For our participants, the accumulation of physical capital can be recognized as having important symbolic value that is vital to position them within their online and offline worlds. Through the endless labour of ‘curating a visible self on and offline’ (Dobson, 2015, p. 38), their physical capital has an exchange value in their social life (online and offline). For example, it was noted that if you are ‘fit’ on Instagram you can ‘gain followers and be liked by people’ (Ziri, Interview 1), though it was also recognised that this process was not exempt from risk, Instagram being acknowledged as a hyper-critical social space for females (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019; MacIsaac, Kelly, & Gray, 2018). Our participants also explained how physical capital could be converted to economic capital: ‘It can also be turned into a job...a lot of people take advantage of the fact that you can become famous and the brands hire you...’ (Eva, Group 4). However, it was acknowledged that the opportunities for young women to convert symbolic capital into social and economic capital depended on having a ‘good body’ as a key marker for a ‘successful’ feminine habitus – in other words, the ‘right’ body to ‘play the game’.

‘Expert’ social agents in PE and Instagram fields

The relative position of agents within a specific field is determined by the accumulation of different forms of valued capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Our participants viewed both PE teachers and Instagram influencers as ‘experts’ in relation to teaching health (thereby possessing cultural capital). However, these ‘experts’ were seen to have achieved their status in different ways and exerted varied levels of influence over the young women’s subjectivities.

Our participants explained that they learnt from Instagram ‘experts’, who are those with an ideal feminine body and with the embodied capacity to use it (Wright & Burrows,

2006). Thus, the young women ascribed value to influencers who possess feminine physical capital and perform exercises in posts. They trusted videos more since they are more difficult to edit than photos, and also because they could obtain detailed explanations about how to perform exercises – somewhat in contrast to their PE experiences:

Almu: Not only it is said: ‘do this’ or ‘do these repetitions’, and that’s it. But he/she explains to you ‘doing this you’re going to get so strong... Be careful not to bend...’

Alena: And they do it with you too [...] in PE the teacher doesn’t do this (focus group 5).

However, while most participants valued Instagram because of the detail provided, some were critical that, unlike in PE, it was not possible to receive feedback about how to do exercises.

The data also suggested that influencers were perceived as being able to reach out to the young women as followers through producing feelings of relatability (Kanai, 2019), by cultivating perceived authenticity and intimacy. The young women valued how this made them feel, explaining that they felt positive when learning from these influencers and felt comfortable in digital communities being with ‘people like us’ (Bourdieu, 1990). The privileging of these positive feelings (strong, confident, empowered) are characteristic of the postfeminism shift (e.g., Favaro & Gill, 2019), and are particularly problematic because here they are attached to a visual platform which reinforces ideal normative bodies (Camacho & Gray, in press; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2020). Therefore, toned and thin female bodies are those tied to positive affects, reinforcing the women’s efforts towards a ‘better’ body within ‘neoliberalizing agendas of bodily self-regulation’ (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2020, p. 14). Importantly, these positive affects were barely present when the young women described their PE experiences. Instead, they described

experiences that were ‘hard’, ‘for all students the same’ and ‘unfair’. They also made suggestions about what PE teachers could do to make PE a more positive experience for them, demanding personalization and highlighting the value of affect within the subject:

They [PE teachers] should focus more on each student and see what they can do and what they can't do. And also worry about...how they feel about doing physical activity because maybe they don't feel good and they're forcing themselves to get a grade and pass (Ali, focus group 6).

Here, it seems like the knowledge gained from practising, observing and critically evaluating the practice of fitness influencers on Instagram has had some impact on how these young women understand their PE experiences, perhaps supporting their gendered reflexivity in PE (Krais, 2006; Thorpe, 2009). It may also influence how they position their PE teachers as ‘expert’ and the expectations about ‘appropriate’ forms of practice. This indicates the subtle way in which these two seemingly different fields intersect, creating tension and conflict, especially in the field of PE.

While knowledge, ability, and encouragement were important to the young women, the number of followers an influencer had was the main sign of ‘expertise’ they looked for to trust fitness content:

You can have an account and be a specialist in sport and know perfectly how the muscles are but maybe you have 50 followers and maybe I do not take it seriously [...] And maybe I see one that has millions of followers and they may be lying to me and maybe I'm hurting my muscles and everything and... I do believe it (Nuri, focus group 5).

Although the participants were aware of the flaws of using ‘number of followers’ as an indicator of expertise, this social capital is clearly ‘co-implicated in the production of valued body pedagogies’ (Rich et al., 2020, p 186). Therefore, in health-related knowledges, likes and comments function as symbolic capital on Instagram. The more

likes, visits and positive comments the messages receive, the more the content and the people who produce this content is legitimised:

The truth is, I believe everything. I don't know if you're doing it right or wrong. But more or less I try to see the position, for example, the squats, yes, more or less I know how they are done because they tell us in class and all that. But... if there's a new exercise, I don't know if he's doing it right or wrong, but I trust him/her. I trust it, I trust it... blindly[...] If it has many followers and many visits, and the comments are positive, then I trust it more (Susi, Interview 6).

In a context where lifestyle advice is available everywhere, it is very difficult for young people to disentangle themselves from the intent of these 'expert' pedagogues (Rich et al., 2020). However, as Susi explained, the knowledge individuals acquire in PE can be used to understand and evaluate some fitness activities on Instagram.

In general, these data reveal that the 'expert' social agents in PE and Instagram fields are quite distinct as they possess different forms of capital. While fitness influencers accrue symbolic capital in the form of positive affects as well as physical and social capital, PE teachers appear to possess knowledge that could enable their students to understand the work of the influencers and online social practices in a more critical way. Here we see, perhaps, the potential that PE has to support young people's engagement with social media as a pedagogical tool for health.

Conclusions and Implications

This study has explored young women's subjectivities as they negotiated the 'rules of the game' in the gendered fields of PE and Instagram, which here have been identified as competing social spaces for health-related learning. This paper demonstrates the utility of Bourdieu's concept of habitus as an analytical lens to explore how the postfeminist gender order has become entrenched in the gendered habitus of

young women, and the implications of this for both learning spaces. Our data reveal how the gendered habitus of the participants was somewhat at odds with the traditionally masculine learning space of PE, resulting (for many) in feelings of being a ‘fish out of water’. By contrast, Instagram was valued as a useful learning space to be successful in their ‘aesthetic labour’ projects (Elias et al., 2017). This informal and online field thus supports the postfeminist habitus of young women which, through a language of choice and empowerment, is revealed in their desires to achieve symbolic capital through the transformation of their bodies toward the normative ideal. We argue that this aspiration is a form of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2000) which subdues women within the patriarchy. Moreover, it is especially powerful as it is masked through the promotion of positive affect and the perception of choice that encourages young women to embrace ‘empowered’ femininities while, in fact, being complicit with the ‘undoing’ of feminism (McRobbie, 2009).

Our findings also reflect how navigating both learning fields creates dissonance and raises young women’s awareness of the ‘objective’ gendered relations in PE, generating resistance and negotiation. However, this gender reflexivity does not undermine the institutionalised symbolic violence in PE due to the official and compulsory status of the curriculum, the way in which ability is evaluated and the teacher habitus (Beltrán-Carrillo et al., 2012). Our study highlights that endeavours to achieve a more equitable and meaningful form of PE should consider the challenges that young women face growing up within digital cultures. The habitus-field nexus creatively explored in this study reveals some of the ways in which this might be accomplished. For example, it would be useful for PE teachers to explore the ‘hybridity’ of these online and offline fields, recognising the blurring of boundaries between the real and the virtual (Chambers & Sandford, 2019; Rich et al., 2020) and then examining the extent to which

this might help girls to critically navigate online spaces. This would also help PE teachers to consider young women's affective experiences, to ensure that learning both online and offline is meaningful and takes into account (genuine) choice and personalization, as well as feelings of relatability and connection. For PE teachers to do this effectively, they should purposely work toward the interruption of the postfeminist habitus, to make possible the achievement of true empowerment for young girls through their physicality. Thus, PE should explicitly critique the postfeminist biopedagogies that circulate on social media, while concurrently explore the ways in which PE works to restrict the participation of those who do not embody the required physical capital in this space. Alternative constructions of embodiment are necessary in both fields that allow hybrid subjectivities (non-gendered) (Azzarito, 2010) to emerge. It will be important for future research, therefore, to involve collaborations between teachers, students and researchers, and the co-creation of knowledge to make these critical, digital pedagogical scenarios possible.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research work was conducted as part of the project 'RESPECT-Young people's produsage on social media: constructing sexual identities and managing gender inequalities' supported by by the 'Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, convocatoria de Proyectos de I+D (Excelencia-Generación de Conocimiento)' [grant number FEM2017-83302-C3-3-P].

References

Andrejevic, M. (2002). The work of being watched: interactive media and the exploitation of self-disclosure. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19(2), 230-248.

- Azzarito, L. (2010). Future Girls, transcendent femininities and new pedagogies: toward girls' hybrid bodies? *Sport, Education and Society*, 15(3), 261-275.
- Beltrán-Carrillo, V. J., Devís-Devís, J., Peiró-Velert, C., & Brown, D. H. K. (2012). When physical activity participation promotes inactivity: Negative experiences of Spanish adolescents in Physical Education and sport. *Youth & Society*, 44(1), 3-27.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *El sentido práctico*. Madrid: Taurus.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *La dominación masculina*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. XX-XX). Routledge: Taylor & Francis.
- Brown, D. (2005). An economy of gendered practices? Learning to teach physical education from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's embodied sociology. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10(1), 3-23.
- Camacho-Miñano, M.J. & Gray, S. (In press). Pedagogies of perfection in the postfeminist digital age: Young women's negotiations of health and fitness on social media. *Journal of Gender Studies*.
- Camacho-Miñano, M. J., MacIsaac, S., & Rich, E. (2019). Postfeminist biopedagogies of Instagram: young women learning about bodies, health and fitness. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(6), 651-664.
- Carah, N., & Angus, D. (2018). Algorithmic brand culture: participatory labour, machine learning and branding on social media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(2), 178-194.

- Chambers, F., & Sandford, R. (2019). Learning to be human in a digital world: a model of values fluency education for physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(9), 925-938.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Crawford, R. (1980). Healthism and the medicalization of everyday life. *International Journal of Health Services*, 10(3), 365-388.
- Dobson, A. S. (2015). *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Elias, A. S., Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (2017). *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. London.
- Favaro, L., & Gill, R. (2019). 'Pump up the positivity'. In M. J. Gámez Fuentes, S. Núñez Puente, & E. Gómez Nicolau (Eds.), *Re-writing Women as Victims: From Theory to Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Gill, R. (2017). The affective, cultural and psychic life of postfeminism: A postfeminist sensibility 10 years on. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), 606-626.
- Goodyear, V. A., Armour, K. M., & Wood, H. (2019). Young people and their engagement with health-related social media: new perspectives. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(7), 673-688.
- Hill, J. (2015). Girls' active identities: navigating othering discourses of femininity, bodies and physical education. *Gender and Education*, 27(6), 666-684.
- hunter, I. (2004). Bourdieu and the social space of the PE class: reproduction of Doxa through practice. *Sport, Education and Society*, 9(2), 175-192.
- Kanai, A. (2019). *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture Managing Affect, Intimacy and Value*: Springer International Publishing.
- Krais, B. (2006). Gender, Sociological Theory and Bourdieu's Sociology of Practice. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 119-134.
- Lamb, C. A., Oliver, K. L., & Kirk, D. (2018). 'Go for it Girl' adolescent girls' responses to the implementation of an activist approach in a core physical education programme. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(8), 799-811.
- Levina, N., & Arriaga, M. (2014). Distinction and Status Production on User-Generated Content Platforms: Using Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Production to Understand Social Dynamics in Online Fields. *Information Systems Research*, 25(3), 468-488.

- lisahunter, Smith, W., & emerald, e. (2015). Pierre Bourdieu and his conceptual tools. In lisahunter, W. Smith, & e. emerald (Eds.), *Pierre Bourdieu and Physical Culture* (pp. 3-23). London: Routledge.
- MacIsaac, S., Kelly, J., & Gray, S. (2018). 'She has like 4000 followers!': the celebrification of self within school social networks. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(6), 816-835.
- McLeod, J. (2005). Feminists re-reading Bourdieu: Old debates and new questions about gender habitus and gender change. *Theory and Research in Education*, 3(1), 11-30.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: Sage.
- Metcalfe, S. (2018). Adolescent constructions of gendered identities: the role of sport and (physical) education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(7), 681-693.
- OECD. (2017). PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being. In Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Reay, D. (1995). 'They Employ Cleaners to Do that': habitus in the primary classroom. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16(3), 353-371.
- Rich, E. (2018). Gender, health and physical activity in the digital age: between postfeminism and pedagogical possibilities. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23(8), 736-747.
- Rich, E., Lewis, S., & Miah, A. (2020). Digital health technologies, body pedagogies and material-discursive relations of young people's learning about health. In D. Leahy, K. Fitzpatrick, & J. Wright (Eds.), *Social Theory and Health Education* (pp. 182-185). London: Routledge.
- Rich, E., & Miah, A. (2014). Understanding Digital Health as Public Pedagogy: A Critical Framework. *Societies*, 4(2), 296-315.
- Roberts, J. S., Gray, S., & Camacho-Miñano, M. J. (2020). Exploring the PE contexts and experiences of girls who challenge gender norms in a progressive secondary school. *Curriculum Studies in Health and Physical Education*, 11(1), 3-17.
- Sandford, R., & Quarmby, T. (2019). Space, place and identity. New pressures in the lives of young people. In V. Goodyear & K. Armour (Eds.), *Young people, social media and health* (pp. 117-131): Routledge.
- Scraton, S. (2018). Feminism(s) and PE: 25 years of Shaping Up to Womanhood. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1-14.

- Shilling, C. (1993). *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage.
- Thorpe, H. (2009). Bourdieu, Feminism and Female Physical Culture: Gender Reflexivity and the Habitus-Field Complex. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 26(4), 491-516.
- Toffoletti, K., & Thorpe, H. (2020). Bodies, gender, and digital affect in fitspiration media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-18. doi:10.1080/14680777.2020.1713841
- O'Connor J, Penney D. (2021). Informal sport and curriculum futures: An investigation of the knowledge, skills and understandings for participation and the possibilities for physical education. *European Physical Education Review*, 27(1):3-26. doi:10.1177/1356336X20915937
- Wright, J., & Burrows, L. (2006). Re-conceiving ability in physical education: A social analysis. *Sport, Education and Society*, 11(3), 275-291.