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Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji's Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

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# Dedication

Dedicated to my father who taught me that wisdom and knowledge are real treasures, and who equipped this marginalised girl from Fiji's squatter settlements to dare and achieve BIG things in life...

# Abstract

Whilst other sporting stories of women from the Global North and Black vs. White binary are well known, the local (Fijian) context (privileged Brown native vs. marginalised Brown (Indo-Fijian) settlers), is not. In Fiji, physicality is highly racialised and gendered, and Indo-Fijian women are most invisible in Fiji's sporting arenas. Thus, the following research questions shape my dissertation: How do Indo-Fijian women perceive and make meaning about their physicality and gender in sport; How do local and global social constructs of gender impact young Indo-Fijian women's sports participation in Fiji; How the attitudes, barriers/challenges, pleasures, and histories of resistance and opportunities of Indo-Fijian girls/women, influence their sports participation in Fiji, and how equitable, inclusive/exclusive and in/effective are Fiji schools' Physical Education (PE) lessons in understanding, aiding and responding to Indo-Fijian girls' cultural needs and perceptions of physical activity and sports? I have collected empirical data using arts-based methods, and drawn upon critical, intersectional and poststructuralist theories to study the sporting experiences of young Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. These theories and methods illuminated the multifaceted nuances that impact their sporting participation. The main findings challenge the previous stereotypes of Indo-Fijian women – lacking physicality and interest and being difficult to engage in sports. The findings disclose that athletic Indo-Fijian women disrupt the Fijian gender, racial and class orders by consistently exercising their sporting agency, and also actively negotiating PE and physical activity opportunities by pushing for innovative (team) sports despite their requests failing to penetrate the racial, gendered and orthodox perceptions of (PE) teachers and rigid practices within the legitimised curriculum. The dissertation provides suggestions for policy makers and relevant Fijian stakeholders such as schools, tertiary institutions, PE teachers/sports coaches and parents in valuing and acting on the requests and passions of Indo-Fijian women. It also emphasises the urgent need for inclusive and innovative pathways for girls and women in Fiji's sporting arenas, thus fulfilling the country's

ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

# Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

.....

(Signature)

# Declarations

I am grateful for the Research Training Program funding by the Australian Government, which supported me to undertake my Doctoral research.

I am also thankful to accredited editor Karin Hosking for copyediting my dissertation.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Topic and Context

The Fiji government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 ([www.fwrm.org.fj/](http://www.fwrm.org.fj/)). Launched in 1979, the CEDAW is one of the most relevant documents to not only protect but also improve the lives and the rights of girls and women across all dimensions of their social, cultural and educational lives. The fact that the Fiji government took more than 15 years to ratify the CEDAW is an indication of how gender equity is seen in the country; despite that the CEDAW is now part of the country's legal structure, women in Fiji still struggle in several aspects of gender equality and discrimination (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Tora, Perera, & Koya, 2006). Moreover, some ethnic groups within Fijian women, such as Indo-Fijian women who are of a South Asian background, and were born and reside in Fiji in the South Pacific are minorities, and are marginalised to a triple degree in the country's sporting platforms. These girls/women are firstly marginalised in terms of gender, where they hail from a patriarchal society and face gender inferiority in their Indo-Fijian communities (Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016). Secondly, they are marginalised in terms of race and ethnicity – they face inequities in terms of sporting opportunities (especially in mixed-race team sports) due to dominant sports discourses (rugby) and racial stereotypes of them lacking physicality and sporting prowess (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, Kanemasu, Adair, 2020; Teaiwa, 2005). Finally, Indo-Fijian women are marginalised in terms of their geographical location (where they live) – these women live in the diaspora (host land), which is located in the peripheries of the Global South and has conservative cultures, lack of funding, inequitable policies and an unstable political climate (Kanemasu, 2018; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). This triple layer of marginalisation deprives Indo-Fijian women of real opportunities and rights in the sporting fields (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020) to play sports for better health and fitness as equal Fijian citizens. Thus, understanding these



layers of intersectionalities as ‘the multiple interconnected layers of existence and identity, offers a rich philosophical framework for being-in-the-world and being-with-others’ (Gines, 2011, p. 275).

Indo-Fijian women hail from different social, cultural (ancestors from different parts of India), geographical (spaces they have occupied in Fiji), religious (Hinduism, Christianity and Islam), and caste<sup>1</sup> (for Hindus) backgrounds, which interconnectedly influence their sporting trajectory and (non)participation. Therefore, intersectionality accounts for the social, cultural, political, and economic processes that affect Indo-Fijian women and their sporting experiences in Fiji (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Gines, 2011).

This triple level of discrimination occupied my mind greatly before starting my doctoral journey. Being a researcher and a sports person from the Global South and specifically an Indo-Fijian woman, I have not only witnessed but also endured some of these discriminations. My unique perspective allows me to have a nuanced understanding of my field, thus adding a non-white voice into the researchers’ community from the Global South in order to understand and promote more equitable practices in the Global South’s sporting fields. Accordingly, this thesis investigates how Indo-Fijian women deal with the obstacles that marginalise them on the sporting field.

To gain a comprehensive view of their realities, I employ gender lenses and look at an array of social factors (such as ethnicity, race, class, geographical location, religiosity, genealogy, schooling, generation gap and experiences in the host nation) to unveil the attitudes, barriers/challenges, pleasures, and histories of resistance and opportunities of Indo-Fijian girls/women in relation to sports participation in Fiji. In order to understand their current sports participation, it is first necessary to briefly look at the history of Indo-Fijians in Fiji. The following

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<sup>1</sup> An important system, which is a part of ancient Hindu tradition, which obligates the social status of a person to the caste that they were born into, thus limiting interaction and behaviour with people from another social status.

section gives a brief historical perspective of Indo-Fijians' (forced) migration from India, resettlement in Fiji and their positionality in relation to the *iTaukeis*<sup>2</sup> in Fiji.

## 1.2 A Brief Historical Account of Indo-Fijians in Fiji

V. S. Naipaul, referring to the Indians in the diaspora, said: '[We] were pretending – perhaps not pretending, perhaps only feeling, never formulating it as an idea – that we had brought a kind of India with us, which we could, as it were, unroll like a carpet on the flat land' (Naipaul, 2003, p. 187). Some 60,965 indentured labourers were brought to Fiji during the indenture period; the indentured labourers comprised Indians of different classes, geographical locations, castes, languages, occupations and an unequal gender balance (Lal, 2011; Lata, 2009). As Naipaul's (2003) quote suggests, the Indians who were brought to Fiji carried with them their cultures, religions, languages and nostalgia, hoping to make Fiji mimic their way of life in India. However, a multicultural identity in Fiji failed to transpire when the Indian labourers disembarked at the plantations as colonial powers alienated the Indians and the natives. The natives also feared that Indians who toiled on the land might claim ownership (Ali, 2004; Lal, 2000; Lal, 2011). The two ethnic groups had different experiences from the colonial rule and the rift was too great for the distinct groups to function in harmony after the colonialists left (Mishra, 2007). In the colonial and postcolonial political trajectory of Fiji, Indo-Fijians have been positioned as political and sociocultural subordinates by the colonisers and later the natives (Sugden et al., 2020), and are still perceived as *vulagis*<sup>3</sup> (Naidu, 2008).

Furthermore, many Indo-Fijians felt deep rooted fear and insecurity after the four military coups (in 1987 (2), 2000 and 2006) in Fiji, where some experienced physical violence and damage to properties and temples (Trnka, 2008). Also, upon expiry *iTaukei* landowners did not renew many farming land leases after the 2000 coup; consequently many Indo-Fijian farmers were evicted (Besnier, Guinness, Hann & Kovač, 2018). Some of these evicted farmers moved to low cost

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<sup>2</sup> Native Fijians/Indigenous people of Fiji.

<sup>3</sup> Visitors.

housing areas or squatter settlements in the country's capital city of Suva, looking for employment (Besnier et al., 2018).

Since the 1987 coup, Indo-Fijians have been the main emigrant ethnic group, accounting for 84 to 90 per cent of all emigrants between 1986 and 1997 (Gani, 2019) where the preferred destinations have been Australia followed by Canada, the United States and New Zealand (Gani, 2019). Prior to the 1987 coup that removed the multi-ethnic Labour Party from government, Indo-Fijians accounted for around 50 per cent of Fiji's population and since then this number has declined to 32 per cent (Wyeth, 2017).

Traditional practices, cultures, and beliefs such as the caste system of Hinduism (Deshpande, 2010) began to weaken at recruitment depots and on ships as people intermingled with each other during the indenture period between 1879 to 1916 (Lal, 2011). Indo-Fijians lived in barracks and physically worked long hours on sugarcane plantations, which ultimately produced sugar (Lal, 2011). After independence in 1970, sugar production became Fiji's main export, and most of these farmers were Indo-Fijians (Narayan & Prasad, 2006).

### **1.3 Gender and Race in Sports in Fiji**

British colonial agents introduced rugby to Fiji in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to help sidetrack *iTaukeis* from traditional, violent cultural practices (Presterudsteun, 2016). Rugby then played an important part in boys' formal education during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Guinness & Besnier, 2016). Despite all island nations going through colonialism, Fiji is the most militarised independent nation in the Pacific (Teaiwa, 2005) and in Fiji, physicality and hegemonic masculinity are measured/expressed via the national sport of rugby and the military – both sectors dominated by *iTaukeis* (men) (Besnier et al., 2018; Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005). Therefore, in Fiji the military constitutes political power and has instigated two coups (1987 and 2006) ousting the democratically elected government and has been implicated in terroristic acts against members of the Indo-Fijian

community (Teaiwa, 2005). This reflects the hegemonic power held by the military (mostly *iTaukei* men) and their national sport is rugby and, as many military groups in the world, they also ‘profess’ nation and nationalism. Moreover, with a predominance of *iTaukeis* (who are predominately Christians (Tomlinson, 2006)) in the military, the aura of Christianity heavily dominates (Teaiwa, 2005). Therefore, militarism is intertwined with Christianity, and indigenous identity is re-enforced by the expression of Christianity with Fijian culture – where other religions are minorities and marginalised (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013). Consequently, several layers intersect ‘military-rugby-nationalistic-powerful-Christianity-racial domination-hegemonic masculinity’; Indo-Fijian women do not fit in most (or any) of these categories (apart from a few being Christians), therefore have such a low status quo in the hegemonic Fijian gender/racial/physicality scale.

During colonial times prestigious all-boys’ schools such as Queen Victoria School (established in 1904), Rātū Kadavulevu School (established in 1924), and Marist Brothers High School (established in 1949) were designed to educate indigenous children of high rank and the offspring of the European and part-European elites who controlled commerce and plantations; Indo-Fijian boys were excluded from these schools, thus from rugby as well (Guinness & Besnier, 2016). British missionaries and sailors introduced rugby in the early 1920s in Samoa and Tonga (Lakisa, Sugden, & McDonald, 2020). The racial composition of Fiji (having Indo-Fijians) makes the role of rugby more complex in Fiji than in other major rugby playing Pacific Island nations where there are mostly native populations (Connell, 2018). The embodiment of nationalism through rugby defines Fiji as a nation belonging to the *iTaukeis*, which excludes the Indo-Fijians (Guinness & Besnier, 2016). Such exclusions impact the position of Indo-Fijian boys/men in the Fijian gender hierarchy (Sugden, 2020).

There has been active Indo-Fijian interest in rugby as five Indo-Fijian teams (men) were in existence by the early 1990s, which increased to 10 teams by 2000; most of these early players came from villages and settlements where they interacted with their indigenous neighbours on a daily

basis. These teams organised competitions amongst themselves, creating their own ‘Fiji Indo rugby’ (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013). However, due to rugby being associated with *iTaukeis* and nationalism (Teaiwa, 2005) racism is evident at micro (community) and macro level (Fiji Rugby Union) and such teams do not receive much attention and support (from macro level) to grow beyond their communities (Sugden, 2021). There is also a lack of awareness of the existence of minority groups and sports – especially Indo-Fijian (rugby) teams as they receive no media or live game coverage; also no effort is made to make such groups visible as they do not fit into the nation’s rugby identity (Sugden, 2021).

Moreover, often times, efforts of Indo-Fijians trying to play rugby are ridiculed off the field and they are provided no facilities or funding (Sugden, 2021) nor has there been any affirmative action policy to increase the numbers of non-indigenous Fijians in the sport (Sugden, 2021; Sugden et al., 2020). Soccer, on the other hand, has a multicultural player population (Prasad, 2013) where Indo-Fijian men comprise large numbers in club and national level soccer teams. Nonetheless, in Fiji hegemonic masculinity is fielded, reflected and reproduced in rugby, and soccer gets relegated to ‘softer men/kind of people’ (Sugden et al., 2020, p. 778). Thus, the national sport of rugby excludes Indo-Fijians (men and women) and non-able bodied and gender non-conforming men of all ethnicities (Besnier et al., 2018). As for soccer, the men’s national team and club level teams have about equal representation of Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* men (Sugden, 2021).

On the other hand, as for Indo-Fijian women – they are near invisible on all sporting platforms in Fiji, and in terms of physicality and sports, Indo-Fijian women are considered most inferior (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020; Teaiwa, 2005, 2008). For example, Indo-Fijian women are totally unrepresented in the national women’s rugby and netball (most popular sport for women in Fiji) teams – these are solely comprised of *iTaukei* women (Kanemasu, 2018). Moreover, Indo-Fijian girls are very rare sights in the country’s extremely popular school athletics competitions, where thousands of school children compete in track and field events (Kanemasu,

2018). In spite of this invisibility, athletic Indo-Fijian women enjoy their sports. At school level, in parks, within ovals or on streets, and also in gymnasiums, one can see their relevant presence, trying to make the best of their physical and sporting activities, bending rules and claiming a space in a territory that is often still hostile to them in the 21st century (Kanemasu, 2018).

This research, therefore, aspires to bring to the centre of the discussion and illuminate the often hidden sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, through their complex and frequently paradoxical stories of resilience to mainstream body norms but also compliance to some unwritten gender rules. This research intends to contribute to addressing this under-researched, neglected yet important area, in order to motivate future policy initiatives in Fiji and the diaspora towards a gender and racial equitable and inclusive school curriculum, thus PE lessons. These objectives are in line with the aforementioned CEDAW, which unequivocally confirms in its article 10, that State parties will take all appropriate measures to ensure women equal rights to men in the field of education, and in particular to ensure equality of men and women: item (g) specifies ‘the same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education’. Thus, this research may support the opening of pathways for Indo-Fijian marginalised girls and women to participate in sports so that they can exercise their rights as citizens of Fiji.

#### **1.4 Relevance of Research**

Historically, sports have been constructed as a ‘male preserve’ and privileged masculinity over femininity (Belore, 2011; Deshpande, 2016; Hasan, 2015; Kanemasu, 2018; Knijnik & Soares de Souza, 2011; Sugden, Kanemasu & Adair, 2020). Gender discrimination in the sports world in terms of power, strength, ability, body image, sexuality and women’s fertility has existed for as long as sport itself (Deshpande, 2016; Hasan, 2015; Knijnik & Soares de Souza, 2011; Lorber, 1993). Women in family situations have been less likely than their male counterparts to be able to negotiate the time and resources needed to maintain sports participation (Scaton, 1992; Shakti, 2005). Gender

equality in sports has come a long way and is reflected in the increasing number of female Olympians over the years (Deshpande, 2016; Knijnik & Soares de Souza 2011). However, despite improvements in women's sports participation, female athletes are still subjected to gender-specific standards of behaviour regarding their bodies and sexuality (Knijnik & Soares de Souza, 2011), where opportunity to participate and compete in sports depends to a large extent on women's race, class, geographical locations and cultural and religious backgrounds (Scraton, Caudwell & Holland 2005; Pelak, 2005; Pfister, 2010).

The theme of women and sports participation is important as improvements in this area will aid in developing/improving the status of women, in terms of leadership skills, self-esteem, academic performance, higher moral development, physical fitness and productivity, and better health. Women and girls who participate in sports and fitness programs are healthier, more academically successful and have better self-esteem (Deshpande, 2016; DeBate, Pettee, Zwald, Huberty & Zhang, 2009; Perry-Burney & Takyi, 2002).

Many studies have been carried out in the Global North in the field of gender and sports over the past 20 years (Hargreaves, 2004; Hedenborg, 2015; Pfister, 2010; Trolan, 2013), with numerous studies based on race, ethnicity and sports regarding (migrant) South Asians in the diaspora (Global North) – therefore, focusing on the brown migrant vs. white (sometimes black) citizen binary (Burdsey, 2004; Burdsey, 2006; Burdsey, Thangaraj & Dudrah, 2013; Scraton et al., 2005). There have also been emerging studies in relation to gender issues and sports participation in the Global South (peripheries) (Bidwai, 2013; Das, Bankar & Verma, 2018; Hasan, 2015; Kanemasu, 2018; Kanemasu, Johnson & Molnar, 2018; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Nanayakkara, 2012; Pang, 2018; Schuster & Schoeffel, 2018). However, apart from very few studies on Indo-Fijian women in the South Pacific Islands and sports (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2021; Sugden et al., 2020), little is known about the holistic relationship of Indo-Fijian women and sports which includes intersectionalities of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class (caste), religion, geographical space

(occupied by Indo-Fijian women in Fiji), type of school attended, PE curriculum and lessons, and connections to the homeland (India) and South Asians in the diaspora.

Furthermore, the aforementioned authors who have carried out some research on Indo-Fijian women and sports have different positions and relationships with Fiji. For example, Kanemasu has lived in Fiji for a considerably long time and considers Fiji her home, whereas Sugden (2017) completed his doctoral degree exploring Fijian issues in sport, thus has spent some time in Fiji. Therefore, despite having different ethnicities and not being born in Fiji, they have been embedded in the local context to different extents. However, these studies lack a local voice, which this dissertation adds to the existing relevant corpus of research, from a hybrid but local perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Pang, 2018) – I am an Indo-Fijian woman and have occupied the cultural, racial and sporting spaces in Fiji from my conception to adulthood (29 years of age). Thus, from that perspective, this dissertation adds deeper and richer layers to the existing knowledge in the literature on Indo-Fijian women and their relationship with sports.

## **1.5 Aims**

The main aim of this research is to understand the perceptions and meanings that Indo-Fijian (young) women make about their physicality and gender in sport in mainland Fiji. The secondary aim of this research is to unveil the attitudes, barriers/challenges, pleasures, and histories of resistance and opportunities of Indo-Fijian girls/women in relation to sports participation in Fiji.

This study illuminates the sporting experiences of young Indo-Fijian women and raises their voices. It attempts to ignite future conversations and planning amongst sports and PE policy makers, Ministry of Education and other stakeholders towards inclusive, and equitable sports programs/curriculums at school and tertiary level. Consequently, providing Indo-Fijian women with most, if not all, the benefits that sports have to empower women: further develop leadership skills, better self-esteem for body image and fitness and well-being.



## **1.6 Research Questions**

This study aims to respond to the following research question:

How do Indo-Fijian women perceive and make meaning about their physicality and gender in sport?

And three auxiliary questions:

1. How do local and global social constructs of gender impact young Indo-Fijian women's sports participation in Fiji?
2. How do the attitudes, barriers/challenges, pleasures, and histories of resistance and opportunities of Indo-Fijian girls/women, influence their sports participation in Fiji?
3. How (in)equitable, (non)inclusive and (in)effective are Fiji schools' Physical Education (PE) lessons in understanding, aiding and responding to Indo-Fijian girls' cultural needs and perceptions of physical activity and sports?

## **1.7 Researcher Positionality, Power, Identity and Interests in the Research Project**

Current thoughts of insider/outsider status reveal the complex characteristics in both these statuses, acknowledging that the boundaries separating these two positionalities are not that clearly defined (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, it is evident that there are fluid, nonstatic, permeable, and dialectic natures of insider and outsider identities in the field (MacRae, 2007).

Even for a so-called native ethnographer, becoming an insider is not straightforward (MacRae, 2007). Thus, my being born and raised in Fiji up till the age of 29 and many times occupying similar spaces and sometimes sharing similar experiences (for example, uncertainties arising for Indo-Fijians after the coups), makes me an insider (at least in the Indo-Fijian community). However, my migration to Australia – occupying another geographical space for the past 12 years, being an Australian citizen and doing my doctoral degree in an Australian university – positions me

somewhat as an outsider. As an insider, I had to let go of my presumptions, preconceived ideas and mindset about Indo-Fijian women, their experiences, and sports participation in order to learn something from them – being an outsider simultaneously enabled me to do that – thus my position in this research is hybrid (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Pang, 2018). Positionality, power, and representation are useful concepts for exploring insider/outsider dynamics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In having a hybrid (inclined towards neutral) position, I was appreciative and embraced the data that flowed. For example, being born and having previously lived in Fiji for about thirty years, I had never encountered or heard about any Indo-Fijian girl/woman playing rugby, and was quite surprised when one of my participants revealed her passion, which was distinct and not merely limited to Indo-Fijian rugby fandom – she actually (socially) played rugby with *iTaukei* boys and girls. I was pleasantly surprised! Therefore, there is a need for me to contextualise my ancestral, cultural and family background, the diaspora environments that I have been exposed to and call home(s), my schooling and working experiences and my sporting saga. The aforementioned has fashioned my feelings, emotions, thought patterns, inquiry and perceptions, thus cultivating my interests in the area of Indo-Fijian women and their near invisibility in the sporting platforms of Fiji.

I identify as an Indo-Fijian-Australian Christian female. I am the fourth generation of Indian indentured labourers and was born in Fiji, as the second child to a poverty-stricken Hindu family with four children in the 1980s. My father was quite strict about my two sisters' and my body image and safety; thus, many restrictions were imposed on us.

Despite my family's faith in Hinduism, my siblings and I were sent to a multi-ethnic Christian school, as my parents believed that Christian schools imparted better English language skills; this also impacted my religiosity later in life as I chose to convert to Christianity at the age of 24. I had a very athletic childhood (from 9 to 14 years of age) with my male cousins who preferred soccer over anything else; soccer, for me, was a spectacle from behind the boundaries of the goal line marked by a pair of slippers – watching the bootless feet and fearless bodies of my male cousins

dribbling, kicking, running and heading the ball, and eventually scoring goals. One lucky day, I was allowed to play on the field; I failed at dribbling the ball but somehow managed to kick the ball so hard that it went outside the playing field – no one apart from me was passionate enough to chase the ball at full speed. Despite me being 11 years old, everyone got to know how fast and far I could run, so I got promoted to play in field and not be the goalie. Running made me feel liberated and happy, however, these skills stayed in a confined space.

Being a shy kid in school did not help – trying to fit into Indo-Fijian girls' peer groups was difficult enough, let alone playing sports with *iTaukei* girls. I was not really accepted and I was scared to be judged on my size, skills and strength so I did my own running and secretly did *Tang soo do*<sup>4</sup> training after school without telling my parents.

After finishing my bachelor's degree in education in 2004, I became an English teacher in a multiracial/multicultural, Christian high school; I witnessed a similar trend where Indo-Fijian girls were near invisible in sports participation. At the age of 29, I migrated to Australia and started seriously lifting weights, running long distances, did a gym instruction course and started helping marginalised women with health and fitness.

Today, I am proud to be amongst a handful of athletic Indo-Fijian women in Fiji who participate in team sports or regular sporting activities, do not conform to the traditional Indo-Fijian gender constructs, and create a different kind of Indo-Fijian femininity/masculinity. My sporting experiences in Fiji have intrinsically motivated me to carry out this research, to unveil the sociocultural factors that influence the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women, and to raise their voice in relation to sporting experiences, so that they are given equal opportunities towards sports participation as a pathway of self-discovery, personal enjoyment and social inclusion.

My racial/ethnic/cultural/religious background, educational level, age, previously being an

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<sup>4</sup> Korean martial art based on Karate that may include fighting principles from Subak as well as northern Chinese martial arts.

English teacher in Fiji, sporting and personal experiences, and ability to speak Fiji-Hindi, positioned me as an insider, and may have influenced the questions that I posed and also my attitude towards the participants. In hindsight, having parallel ethnic and gender identities with the Indo-Fijian women helped build affinity and rapport, which was much needed in relaying information that can only be transmitted when the participant is comfortable with the researcher and longs to be understood (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Despite the participants and I sharing the same historical colonial background and similar racial oppression as the result of our hybrid identity (Indo-Fijian) and the political coups in Fiji (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009), our experiences and views could not be noted as homogenous. For example, some of the participants were from evicted farming backgrounds and displaced to urban areas with families to look for employment; I was born and bred in the capital city and had not experienced this. Therefore, on this occasion in the same (Indo-Fijian) community, based on different geographical and social spaces occupied in Fiji, I could be positioned as somewhat an outsider. Moreover, all of the participants spoke competent English, however, my vast vocabulary and partial Indo-Fijian Australian accent received some preferential treatment, like in the case of colourism among Blacks, where preferential treatment is given to those who have lighter skin shades, thin facial features and straight hair texture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Researchers' constant negotiation with informants is inevitably a never-ending process (MacRae, 2007). My position as a higher degree research student from Australia, being a creative writer and having occupied academic spaces in Fiji and Australia, made the participants further open to in-depth discussions. The reason for this is because young Indo-Fijian girls/women aspire to do well academically, have well paid skilled jobs and/or immigrate to a developed country (Narsey, 2002); seeing someone of their gender and ethnicity having achieved all of these, captivated their interest to participate fully and respond in ways in which they might not to a researcher from a totally foreign background.

My hybrid position (MacRae, 2007; Paechter, 2013) privileged me to investigate and unveil the factors that surround the near invisibility of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji's sporting scenes. In addition, my positionality as a researcher, my original research questions and holistic (arts-based) methodology, added new layers of understanding to this complex issue. Through my research, I hope to make some breakthroughs and contributions in addressing this under-researched, neglected yet important area, and facilitate pathways for Indo-Fijian women towards sports participation.

### **1.8 Methodology (Methods and Theory)**

In this study, to gain a comprehensive view of the sporting realities of Indo-Fijian women, I used arts-based methods to collect data, and represent the data collected from the Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, during six months of fieldwork. Poststructuralist and critical theories underpin my research in exploring gender, physicality, class and race issues that have not been thoroughly investigated in the sporting arena in Fiji. The several layers of discrimination that marginalise Indo-Fijian women ask for an intersectional investigation employing an understanding of gender as a social construct and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Intersectionality played a key role in my research; from the choice of topic, research questions, interview questions, methods used, data sampling techniques to coding strategies; it allowed me to gather rich and thick data by accounting for relevant markers of difference regarding my participants and their community.

This study has employed a non-binary view of gender using Butler's notion of gender fluidity and gender being socially constructed (1990; 2011) and Connell's (1985; 1995; 2009) and several other authors' concepts of masculinities and femininities to discuss this view in the sporting settings. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex, whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it (Butler, 1990). Traditional gender binary constructs are rooted in ultimate notions of male vs. female, and the traditional Indo-

Fijian society embraces such constructs, thus rejects epitomes that do not conform; labelling them as queer/abnormal (Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016).

During indenture times, despite the fragmentation of the caste system (Ali, 1979), the issue of gender inferiority/superiority was prevalent where Indian women were treated as the inferior gender; to some extent they still are today. This binary of inferiority/superiority can be traced back to ancient India and the religious texts/myths and legends of Hinduism. Not surprisingly, the issues of caste and gender inferiority/superiority have been central issues in numerous Bollywood<sup>5</sup> films (Lata, 2009).

Gender orders construct multiple forms of masculinities and femininities (Ferguson, 2001; Gutmann, 1996; Morrell, 1998; Morris & Evans, 2001; Pliassova, 2011; Teaiwa, 2005). For the purpose of my research, I employ Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity, marginalized masculinity, emphasized femininity, ambivalent femininity and protest femininity (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Connell, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to understand the different masculinities and femininities in the Fijian context. I further explore Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity to unveil the sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women in contrast to their *iTaukei* counterparts, who unlike Connell's description of the privileged are not white or necessarily of the middle class (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but privileged natives in contrast to the Indo-Fijian settlers in the diaspora (Fiji). It is a battle of ethnicities – brown vs. brown (Indo-Fijian vs. *iTaukei*) in the sporting arena rather than the typical black vs. white or white vs. brown.

In order to analyse the existence and causes of inequality in Fiji's sporting platforms, it is crucial to study local conditions unique to the country based on its history, geography, culture and economic status (Andrews, 2000). For example, in Fiji's context it is impossible to merely explore gender constructs of the Indo-Fijian society and not stumble into discourse on race, ethnicity and other social attributes. Therefore, a CRT framework is necessary, as CRT is very attuned to situation,

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<sup>5</sup> Refers to the Indian cinema, which produces Hindi-language movies and is based in Mumbai.

understands the diverse nature of oppression and the nuanced power dynamics of a given context, rejecting all minority essentialism and, in doing so, seeks especially to build understanding around the intersections of race, gender and patriarchy (Wing, 2000). Also, CRT prioritises local voices along with intersections of race, gender and other social attributes (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010).

Furthermore, the data represents a handful of athletic Indo-Fijian young women who hurdle gender, racial and sociocultural barriers in Fiji. They create a different or new kind of femininity; therefore, Butler's concept of subversive bodies and Puwar's (2004) notion of space invaders are used to analyse the positionality and role that these kind of women play in the continuum of Fijian masculinities and femininities.

## **1.9 Overview of Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation investigates the barriers and challenges that Indo-Fijian women face while trying to participate in sports in Fiji. Data was collected in Fiji over a 6-month period via ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviews, poetry workshops and participant written free verses, field observations and field notes.

Chapter 2 begins with a literature review, which informed the study and helped in identifying where the gaps were in the available literature, in relation to the research topic. Chapter 3 entails the methodology – discussing how (and why) the data was presented via non-fiction creative pieces and how a thematic analysis was carried out to derive significant themes and respond to the research questions. The results are presented in three chapters that address the perceptions and experiences of young Indo-Fijian women in sporting platforms in Fiji. Chapter 4 focuses on the impacts of gender constructs on the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women by reflecting on their stories of constraints and passions. Chapter 5 builds on Chapter 4 and looks beyond gender, and into sociocultural factors, such as the influence of schooling and race in the sporting lives of young Indo-Fijian women. Chapter 6 discusses the sporting quests of athletic Indo-Fijian women who rise

beyond conventions and norms to become subversive bodies and space invaders, and benefit from the positive aspects and pleasures of doing sports. The main findings from each chapter are then woven together in Chapter 7 into a discussion contributing to raise the voices of young Indo-Fijian women and their sporting experiences. The final chapter (Chapter 8) concludes by discussing the importance of the theoretical intersectional approach together with the arts-based methods that have been used in the research to holistically illuminate young Indo-Fijian women's sporting experiences in Fiji. The chapter then makes recommendations to stakeholders and policy makers towards providing equal opportunities and inclusion of Indo-Fijian women in sporting agencies, hence providing them with most, if not all, the benefits that sports have to empower (marginalised) women. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses considerations for future research.

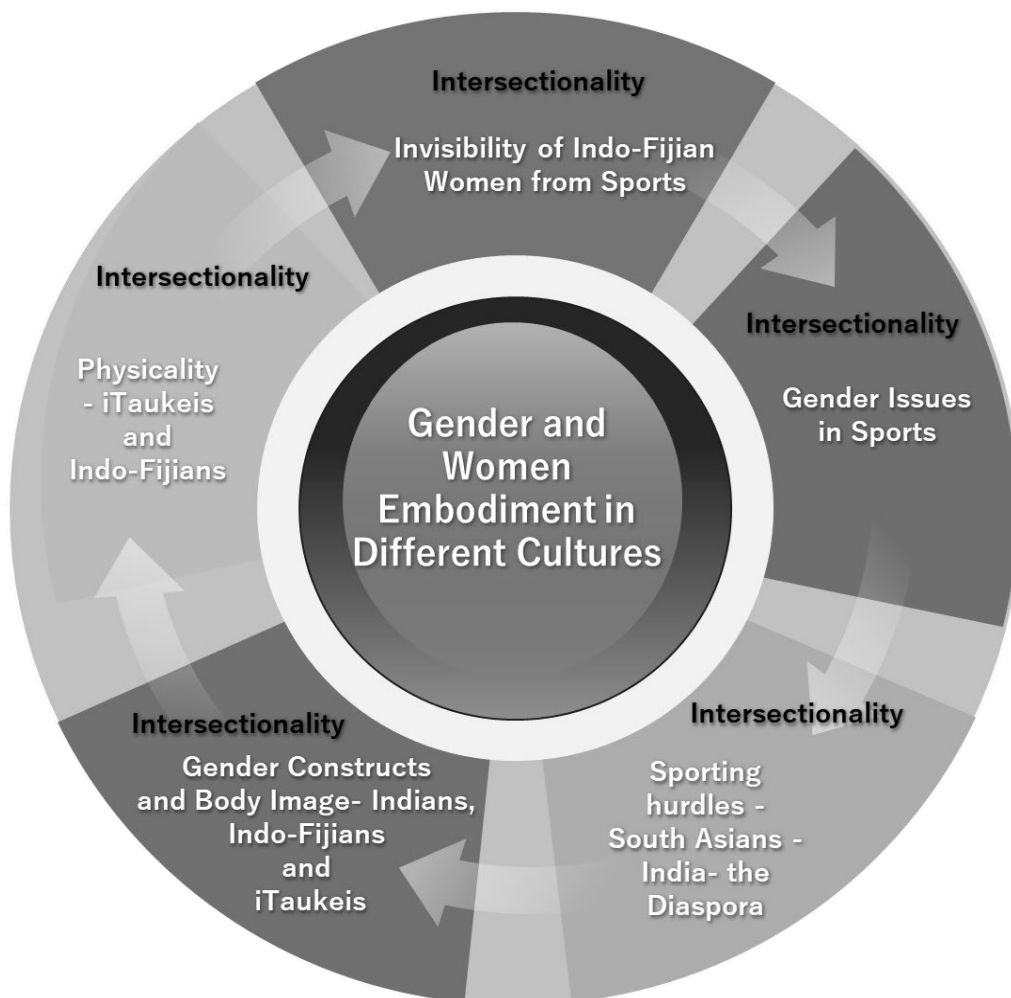


# Chapter 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This section explains the steps I took in carrying out a literature review for my dissertation. It then presents a critical discussion of the resources I reviewed relative to my research topic. The chapter also discusses the theoretical background that informed the study and identified gaps in the literature.

*Figure 1 Literature Review: From the broad to the specific – An intersectional perspective*



The literature review weaves the theoretical framework and begins with critical discussions on the broader literatures on women and their everyday gendered and intersectional experiences in the global sense. It moves on to discuss gender issues in sports that women face in the world, and then ventures on to narrower contexts of the Global South, South Asia (India) and Fiji. Moreover, the literature looks into gender constructs, body images and perceptions of physicality in the Indian, *iTaukei* and the Indo-Fijian contexts. Finally, there is a focus on specific literature (of most interest to the dissertation) on Indo-Fijian women's poor representation in sporting platforms in Fiji.

## **2.2 Literature Survey and Review**

I used five different search engines, that is: Western Sydney University (WSU) Library online, Google, Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC to initially proceed with a literature survey and then a literature review. This allowed me to identify the relevant material (peer reviewed articles, academic books, monographs, research-informed blogs and other scholarly sources) for my research.

The following key terms were used to carry out the literature survey: gender – femininity/masculinity, sports, athleticism, physicality, prowess, exercise, physical activities, sporting competitions, women/girls, Indo-Fijian women/girls, marginalised/minority groups of women, (female) indentured labourers, body image, team sports and individual sports. These particular terms emerged from the enquiries I had in my mind (later translated into research questions) in relation to my research. For example, 'How do Indo-Fijian women perceive and make meaning about their physicality and gender in sport?' – this question illuminated the following key terms, and relative terms for a literature search as reflected in Figure 2 below. Once a list of resources was collected, I began to critically read and review them – this formed the gist of Chapter 2.

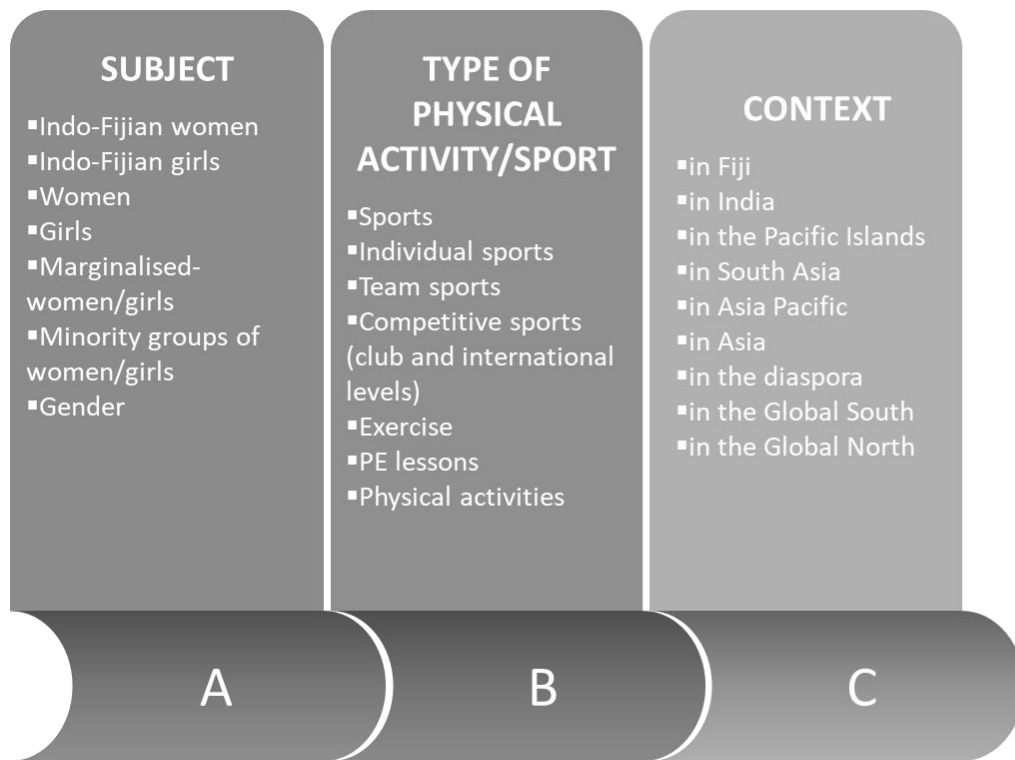
*Figure 2 Key terms arising from main research question*



The key terms were divided into three categories: ‘A – Subject’, ‘B – Type of physical activity’ and ‘C – Context’. Many different combinations from the three mentioned categories were applied to enhance the literature search (Figure 3). For example, I selected a ‘Subject’ from A – ‘Indo-Fijian women’ and combined it with the ‘Type of physical activity’ from B – ‘sport’ and then selected the ‘Context’ from C – ‘in Fiji’, thus resulting in a literature search on ‘Indo-Fijian women and sports in Fiji’ (Figure 3). This search on Google Scholar yielded over ten results, which illuminated key words in separate references – ‘Indo-Fijian (s)’ – eight times, ‘Indo-Fijian women’ – four times and ‘Indo-Fijian women and sports’ – three times. Upon careful reading of the abstracts of the three most relevant articles only two (the following) centred on Indo-Fijian women and sports.

- Kanemasu, Y. (2018). Going it alone and strong: Athletic Indo-Fijian women and everyday resistance. In *Women, Sport and Exercise in the Asia-Pacific Region* (pp. 92-110). Routledge.
- Sugden, J. T., Kanemasu, Y., & Adair, D. (2020). Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity: A critical race feminism approach. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(6), 767-787.

**Figure 3 Collaboration of key (relative) terms different contexts for literature search**



The literature survey helped in identifying the dearth of literature in regard to the sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. I then moved on to search at broader levels, combining key terms from Groups A and B and choosing a different context to search for literature on women/girls and sports in India, Pacific Islands, South Asia and so forth. Initial results and reading of abstracts led me to more key words to employ in my search – such as culture, religion, ethnicity,

race, school sports policy and other factors – these articles were reviewed for a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges that marginalised women (and those from minority groups) face in relation to sports participation.

The next section discusses the key concepts and the foundations of the background theories used in this dissertation. Once the theoretical background is established, it will be used in the rest of the sections to discuss issues arising from the literature review from the broad sense to the specific (refer to Figure 1). The chapter ends with a summary tying the relevance of the reviewed literature to the dissertation, and also summarising the theories that I will employ in the data analysis of my dissertation.

### **2.3 Background Theories and Key Concepts**

This section provides the foundations of the contextual theories and key concepts that have been used along my research. Indo-Fijian women are diverse and come from various sociocultural backgrounds, and have various identity markers such as social class, education level, religion, (sub)race, geographical location (in Fiji), employment and, in particular, different gender identities that have been influenced by (Indo) Fijian patriarchal (and matriarchal) structures, and their everyday agencies (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016). Accordingly, this research is underpinned by poststructuralist and critical theories to explore gender, which is intertwined with race/ethnicity, physicality and other sociocultural issues that influence the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, from grassroots everyday sporting and physical activity to high performers. The use of an intersectional perspective offers a rich conceptual framework for this work, and has been used accordingly to make visible and understand the different social and cultural layers of the researched population (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Gines, 2011; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

#### **2.3.1 Spelling Out the Relevance of Intersectionality in My Dissertation**

From the early twenty first century, intersectionality has been used as an analytical tool in interdisciplinary fields/studies. It allows for the understanding of complexities in the world, which comprises people and their experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2020). According to the authors, ‘intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life’ (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 1). Intersectionality views the different socio-economic and political categories/features that shape and make people and their experiences; for example – gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, nationality, religion, geographical location, political and social histories, caste (Hinduism), language and others.

As early as the 1970s, Black women social leaders and academics – such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro’s work – had focused on intersectionality (gender, race and social class) to form a methodology to theorise and analyse social problems, such as the oppression suffered by Black women (Gonzalez, 1979). Later, other categories such as sexuality (Harris & Bartlow, 2015), health (Schulz & Mullings, 2006), disability (Roberts & Jesudason, 2013; Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012), ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion and so forth (Walby et al., 2012) added to intersectionality as a field of enquiry.

The intersectionality matrix has been employed in this research, from research tool design, to conceptual framework, to participant recruitment, to data collection and analysis. Employing intersectionality was necessary to analyse the role of gender, class, race (and racism) and physicality in Indo-Fijian women’s lives along with capitalism, religion, education, geography, age and patriarchy. The aforementioned was essential for a multilayered analysis as the research project is not merely about gender or race, or ‘gender, race and class’ – it is beyond that, as other categories such as age, religion, cultural and political histories, being a descendant of indentured labourers who were from India, and so forth, interact in order to create a complicated system of embodied oppression. Therefore, intersectionality in my dissertation has made visible the several layers of

inequalities in sporting platforms that (athletic) Indo-Fijian girls/women face in a complex system of oppression (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Teawa, 2005). Moreover, intersectionality also then illuminates, how (some) athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women (as subversive bodies, protest femininities and space invaders) go beyond the aforementioned intersectional oppressions.

Therefore, intersectionality has been represented in all the themes that are part of my theoretical background. For example, in the stories of the participants – religion, the Hindu caste system, age (generation gap), gender and age/order of siblings and class (educational background and occupation of (grand) parents), inevitably intersect with gender to determine the gendered expectations from the different families, illuminating the different (at times similar) dynamics influencing the maintenance of the Indo-Fijian traditional gender (social) order.

The participants in this research project are not a homogeneous group, despite fulfilling the (research) recruitment requirements of being descendants of Indo-Fijian labourers, being born and living in Fiji, identifying as women and being 15 to 24 years old. Indo-Fijian women hail from and/or have different experiences – social, cultural (ancestors from different parts of India), historical (different ancestral indentured experiences), geographical (spaces they have occupied in Fiji), religious (Hinduism, Christianity and Islam) and casteism (for Hindus). Moreover, participants have had different schooling experiences (Government managed, Indo-Fijian managed, Christian managed, rural, urban), therefore, different PE lessons (depending on school type, location and PE teachers); also, the connections that Indo-Fijian women have with the homeland (India), and with South Asians in the diaspora (Lata, 2009) are not homogenous. All these markers of differences and/or similarities interconnect to help understand the various social, cultural, political, and economic layers at play, as opposed to gender and race alone, when illuminating the sporting agency of the young Indo-Fijian women in this dissertation. Therefore, I have illuminated the various intersectionalities (markers of difference and similarities in the same community but different families and individuals) whilst crafting non-fiction creative pieces out of the participants' data. The

aforementioned not only reflects the dialogical nature of social relations of young Indo-Fijian women in their own community and in Fiji, the centrality of power and social hierarchy, and the importance of locating these within spatial and temporal contexts but also makes visible for rich analysis, all (possible) nuances in the participants' (sporting) lives (Anthias, 2013).

Moreover, intersectionality accounts for the history of indenture experience in Fiji, the challenges faced with agricultural land lease renewal by *iTaukei* landowners, and ultimately the displacement of Indo-Fijian farmers. In hindsight, Indo-Fijian parents encourage their children towards education for better jobs and migration, and discourage sports, which is an *iTaukei* zone, and an almost impossible arena for Indo-Fijians to penetrate. The aforementioned intersects historical tensions from the indenture period and colonisation into the current political climate in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Lal, 1988).

Furthermore, rugby and the military are markers of physicality in Fiji, and are associated with *iTaukei* men, who are all Christians (Tomlinson, 2006). The aforementioned markers translate as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) in the Fijian culture, where other religions, races and genders become minorities and marginalised. Therefore, several layers intersect: *iTaukei*, men, military, rugby, Christianity and hegemonic masculinity, and Indo-Fijian women do not fit into most (or any) of these categories (apart from a few being Christians); accordingly, they have such a low status quo in the Fijian gender/racial/physicality scale. Therefore, intersectionality has enabled me to employ a multi-focus lens and flexibility in addressing all the aforementioned complexities (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) associated with Indo-Fijian women and their sports experiences/participation.

### **2.3.2 Gender Fluidity and Gender Being 'Performative'**

This dissertation maintains a non-binary view of gender, and employs Butler's conceptualisation of gender being socially constructed (1990; 2011). The aforementioned view clashes with orthodox mindsets (which believe that gender is a biological construct – where



masculinity merely occupies a male body and femininity a female body) regarding newly emergent (different kinds of) femininities and masculinities, for example women surfers are perceived as rhizomatic bodies as gendered waves bring about transitional femininities in the Brazilian surf (Knijnik, Horton & Cruz, 2010). Butler (1990) challenges this presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retaining the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by human biology.

Furthermore, I have also employed Butler's notion of gender fluidity and as a consequence of this complexity, masculinity might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and femininity signify a male body as easily as a female one (Butler, 1990). This fluidity gives rise to a gender continuum, implying that there is not one but many ways to be a 'man', as well as a 'woman', thus, man (or men) can assume feminine features and vice versa. Gender fluidity means gender changes and therefore women can be masculine, and big muscled men like *iTaukei* rugby players, who are deemed to be tough, can openly shed tears of joy after winning gold at the Olympics (Hutchinson, 2021); whereas men crying, let alone publicly, has been considered (very) 'feminine' or being a 'sissy' in the recent past (Coyle, Fulcher & Trübutschek, 2016).

Judith Butler is concerned with reaching greater equality between men and women. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) challenges traditional notions of gender identities. She proposes that new ways of thinking about gender might result in moving towards a new equality where people are not restricted by masculine or feminine gender roles. Butler suggests that we should think of gender as free-floating and fluid rather than fixed (Butler, 1990). Therefore, if conventional roles for either gender cease to exist, it would not be uncommon for a woman to be the breadwinner, and her husband a 'stay-home' dad. Butler's fresh approach of looking at gender identity is in many ways liberating and positive and has great relevance to this research, as she questions patriarchal gender ideologies and aims to gradually change the existing patriarchal society to a more equal one (Butler, 1990).

Moreover, Butler's (2009) notion of gender being performative – that is, gender is a certain kind of enactment where it is clearly embodied but also goes beyond the body, is of interest to this research. Relatedly, Connell (1995), talks about gender being a body performance, and bodies and performances can be diverse and change even in the same person. One can be very 'feminine' in a situation (e.g., dealing with young children, and caring for them) and the same person can be hypermasculine on the rugby ground. However, Indian and Indo-Fijian traditional communities understand gender as a binary construct (Shandil, 2016; Spivak, 1996), which is rooted in ultimate notions of male vs. female. Consequently, these traditional views reject non-conforming gender identities, labelling them as abnormal and subversive. In traditional societies, as Butler (1990) suggests, the forefront gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; people are prompted by obligatory social norms to be one gender or the other. Therefore, athletic Indo-Fijian women with muscular bodies do not fit the desired and imposed social norms of the (Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity) 'female' gender (Kanemasu, 2018).

### **2.3.3 Masculinities and Femininities**

Furthermore, to decipher the contemporary Fijian gender ordering and understand the multiple masculinities and femininities at play within this social context, I employ Connell's conceptualisation of gender; Connell perceives gender as a practice that is underpinned by situation and hegemony (Connell, 1995). Furthermore, Connell and Messerschmitt's (2005) notion(s) of 'masculinities' and 'femininities' (with emphasis on hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995)) will be used as a lateral concept where masculinities (and as such also femininities) are not perceived as being a fixed or ascribed status; these characteristics are rather what is performed in social settings – be it in everyday life or sporting arenas.

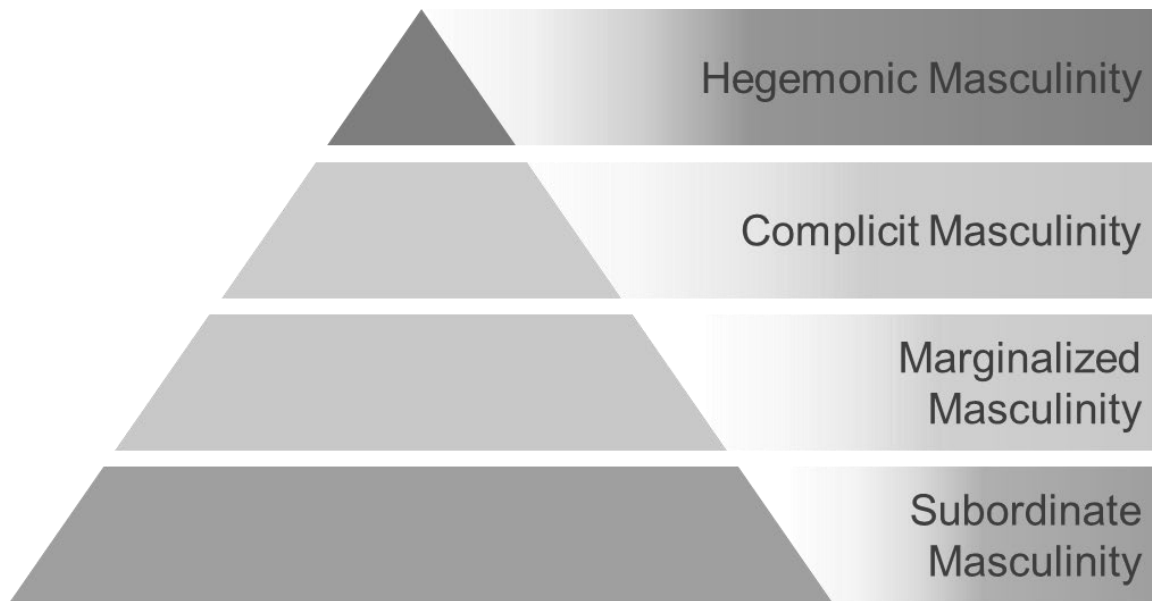
'The positioning within "The masculinities schema" of hegemonic masculinity as the ascendant and dominant form of masculinity obviates the presence of its subaltern other; the primary

forms of which are “subordinate” and “marginalized” masculinities’ (Connell 1995, p. 80) (Figure 4). Further to this, it is crucial to illuminate that hegemony only exists in relationship with other forms of masculine and feminine enactments (Messerschmidt, 2019). Therefore, this research perceives the importance of studying the different gender relations within the Indo-Fijian community, gender relations within the *iTaukei* community and then gender relations within the Fijian context (both Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*) to determine the power relations and gender (in)equity in Fiji (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

The term ‘traditional masculinity’ has been employed in the dissertation and is perceived as a masculinity that is socially constructed and that there are multiple ‘traditional masculinities’ (different in each culture). Furthermore, traditional masculinity does not straightforwardly equate with hegemonic masculinity (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015). A ‘traditional masculinity’ can also be subservient vis-à-vis to others, for example, in Fiji, an Indo-Fijian man from a low socio-economic background can display traditional masculine values, like being the breadwinner and looking after his old parents, wife and children, and at the same time be lower in the (Fijian) gender hierarchy in relation to an *iTaukei* (physically) powerful man.

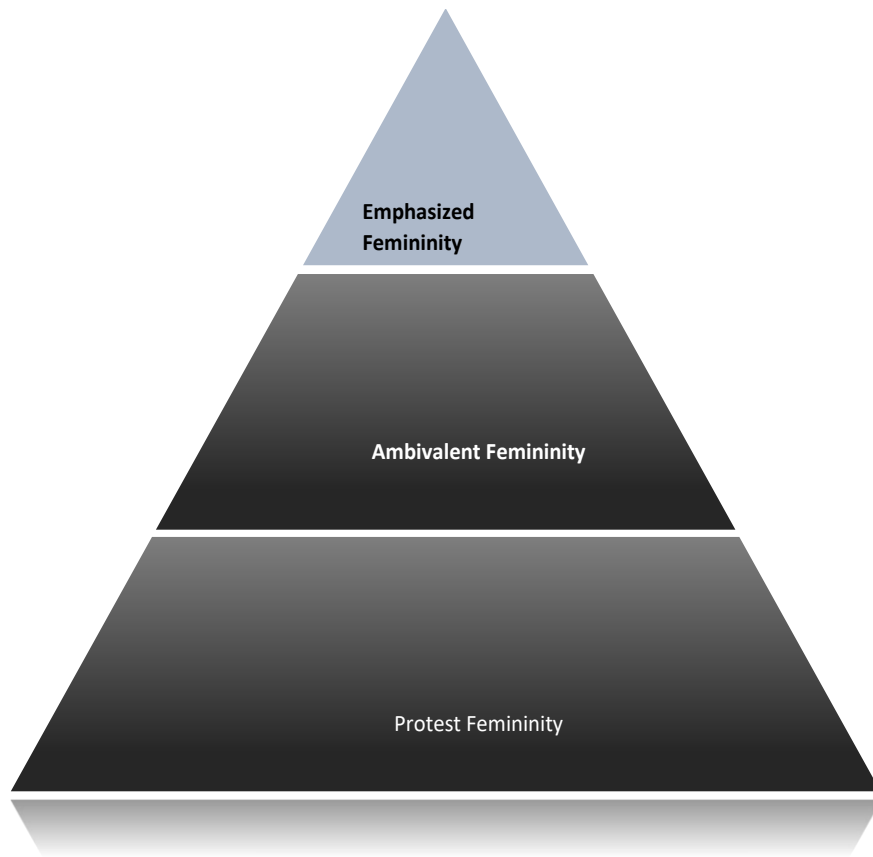
The concept of hegemonic masculinity for Indo-Fijians has been rooted/constructed from historical events/practices, the caste system (Cox, 1948), religion, and culture and/or re-emphasised by current religious practices, gender representations in Bollywood films (Lata, 2009) and other relevant cultural constructs. Patriarchy can be seen as a form of hegemonic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) but also traditional masculinity (does not necessarily relate to violence and physical force) and is prevalent in many families within the Indo-Fijian community (Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016).

***Figure 4 Connell’s (1995) Hierarchy of Masculinities***



Therefore, perceptions of hegemonic masculinity differ for Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis* – in Fiji the rugby and military are markers of physicality and robustness, consequently hegemonic masculinity is associated with *iTaukeis* (men) (Kanemasu, 2018; Teawai, 2005). Hence when Indo-Fijian masculinities are placed in the Fijian masculinities hierarchy, they occupy subaltern positions where ‘the delineation of these subaltern forms (Indo-Fijian masculinities) from hegemonic masculinity within masculinities theory is based on their relation with other culturally formed structures such as sexuality, race, ethnicity and class’ (Connell 1995, p. 80). Based on the rugby social representations, ideologies of what a powerful man’s body should be like are epitomised, therefore certifying hegemony of this particular type of masculinity over other types of male and female gender performances (Connell, 1995) in Fijian sporting platforms. Therefore, my research looks into the different kinds of masculinities in the Fijian context and explores how they influence emphasized and other kinds of emerging femininities in everyday life (Connell, 1995) and the sporting arena in relation to social justice of Indo-Fijian women’s participation in sports.

**Figure 5 Connell’s (1995) Hierarchy of Femininities**



Moreover, Connell's (1987) notions of emphasized, ambivalent and protest femininity (Figure 5) are of great interest to my discussion of the everyday (and sporting) agency of Indo-Fijian women. 'Emphasized femininity, like hegemonic masculinity, is a cultural construction with a very public face, even though its content is specifically grounded in the private realms of the house and the bedroom' (Connell, 1987, p. 187). In the Indo-Fijian context, traditionally women are expected to adhere to the many aspects of Connell's (1995) description of emphasized femininity. Ambivalent femininity 'is representative of those women who incorporate complex and strategic combinations of compliance; resistance and cooperation' (Connell, 1987, p. 80), consequently producing a range of different gender performances. Moreover, if emphasized femininity was about normalising the subordination of femininities to masculinities, it also created a hierarchy within different femininities; then the project around which ambivalent femininities are gathered gives more emphasis to questioning this normalcy and the hierarchy that it brings to the gender order. The notion of protest femininities sits in contradistinction to both emphasized femininity and ambivalent

femininities – protest femininity represents gender knowledge and practice concerned with social justice in gender (Connell, 1987; Howson, 2006). These understandings are key, as I try to illuminate the everyday and the sporting trajectories of young Indo-Fijian women who can neither accept nor reject holistically the current (Indo-Fijian) gender hegemonic principles.

Nevertheless, it is central that gender, as both a changing body performance and a category of analysis within the Indo-Fijian social landscape, is examined as it intersects with other important social markers such as race and class.

### **2.3.4 Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming relationships among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Despite CRT originating in the 1970s as a movement in the law, today it has extended into several different fields, such as education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) and social justice (Asch, 2001; Yomantas, 2021). It has also translated into studies of sports and sports leadership (Brooks, Knudtson & Smith, 2017; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017) and in amplifying Pacific islanders' voices in HDR studies (Mayeda, Keil, Dutton & Ofamo'Oni, 2014). Furthermore, critical race feminism framework has been employed to raise the voices and emphasise the sporting experiences of females of colour (Indo-Fijian women) in Fiji (Sugden et al., 2020).

In discussing the gendered identities of Indo-Fijian women, race is a crucial component; racial tensions exist between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians in political fronts (Naidu, 2008), sporting realms (Sugden, 2021), educational arenas (Naidu, 2008) and as early as in kindergarten (Brisson, 2011). Therefore, in this research, I have extended the CRT theory to understand the race relations (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010), the diverse nature of (political, institutional and structural) oppression of Indo-Fijians (Naidu, 2008; Ratuva, 2003) and the nuanced power dynamics in the Fijian context (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001); factors that continue to shape the (sporting) lives of Indo-Fijian women

in Fiji. CRT is apt in reflecting on the layers of gendered and ethnic identities of marginalised women, in order to open critical thinking spaces to meet their multiple and diverse needs in sports and PE (Stride, 2014). Furthermore, CRT can be particularly helpful to understand inclusion issues, as it is a theory developed by non-Whites to give voice to their own experiences and, therefore, marks the importance of representing themselves in the process, making visible/amplifying their knowledge to white eyes and ears. For my research, CRT can also help depict how schools and society, in maintaining native Fijian privilege (akin to White privilege) might play an active role in blocking Indo-Fijian women from having a fair go in sporting realms and PE.

#### **2.3.4.1 The Five Tenets of CRT**

The first principle of CRT recognises that racism in society is an invisible norm, which is permanent, and Whiteness (culture) is the norm by which other races are measured. Furthermore, the complexity of racism includes understanding how interactions between dynamics such as gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent and sexuality operate and influence each other in the process of subordination (Hylton, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The second tenet of CRT posits an ‘understanding that racism is systemic, and that many current policies and laws are: (1) neither ahistorical nor apolitical; and (2) are situated to privilege Whites and marginalise minority groups’ (Khalifa, Dunbar & Douglas, 2013, p. 491). Therefore, traditional notions of White ideologies act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007).

The third element of CRT supports the understanding that racism is socially constructed and expanded, and is an inclusive worldview and is required for true social justice. Therefore, CRT is committed to social justice, offering elements of liberation and transformation in response to racial, gender and class subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The fourth principle of CRT is counter-storytelling (the notion of a unique voice of colour). That is, acknowledging that the unique perspectives, experiences and voices of the marginalised ‘other’ are legitimate, apt and critical to understanding, analysing and improving racial subordination (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). These counter-narratives create disorder, disrupt voices of dominant groups, and raise the voices of the ‘others’ that have been silenced and marginalised (Milner, 2007).

The fifth tenet of CRT is its ability to engage in interdisciplinary (in areas such as legal, social science, humanities and educational scholarship) dialogue and discourse, to analyse race relationships (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Different tenets of CRT have been used to discuss the different situations (everyday and sporting) that Indo-Fijian women experience. Furthermore, CRT’s notion of ‘other’ voices being silenced within a framework of Whiteness (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) has been adapted and applied in the Fijian context where the dominance of *iTaukeis* in sports (at different levels) silences other minority sporting bodies/voices. Consequently, CRT’s concept of counter-storytelling (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006) has been used to narrate the sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women who are considered least athletic/physical (and are near invisible) in Fijian sporting scenes. By illuminating their stories, this dissertation aims to raise their unique voice of colour and marginalised experiences, which is otherwise ignored because they do not socially fit into the notions of the Fijian dominant sports culture (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018).



### **2.3.5 Subversive Bodies, Abject Bodies and Space Invaders**

The tenets of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity produce an abject (and sometimes inflexible) script for athletic Indo-Fijian women, where these women are expected to perform traditional gender normative behaviours (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). The aforementioned threatens to turn abject beings into bodies susceptible to exclusion and into bodies that do not matter (Ferreira, 2018). Abject beings are not yet ‘subjects,’ but they erect a constitutive outside of the sphere of the subject; thus, without the abject outside, the subject cannot establish itself (Butler, 2011). Recent studies of athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women reveal societal perceptions of these girls/women as disrupting traditional gender normative behaviour and appearing culturally subversive (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). However, Butler (1990) perceives that resignification of norms is not necessarily subversive and can take conservative forms. Therefore, I have used Butler’s notion of subversive bodies as a theoretical lens to examine and understand how, against the odds, the gender order gets questioned and subverted whilst athletic Indo-Fijian women perform their daily and sporting agencies.

Furthermore, it is important to look in to the study of sports and space, allowing for further nuanced inquiries into the intersections of gender, ethnicity, class, race, religion, caste and so forth in this dissertation. The concept of sporting space in the Fijian context is not straightforward, it comprises both a literal and imaginary place, and also experiences of individuals (even of the same race and gender) need not be homogenous – neither is a particular space different from another in a straight and limited way (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). The sporting space in the Fijian context is where racial, gendered and class-based politics are reproduced and also ‘re-hegemonised’. Therefore, the everyday and sporting space(s) occupied by Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, are sites of gender, racial and class-based challenge and struggle, but also have ‘potentials for liberation, freedom and transformation’ (Pavlidis, 2018, p. 345). Moreover, Lefebvre (1991) argues that power is expressed in the production and control of space and as a result those with less power in society are often

consigned to less desirable environments – such as Indo-Fijians (women) being (television) sports spectators or being placed on the sidelines. Therefore, in negotiating many social, cultural and spatial hurdles and entering the Fijian sporting platforms that are exclusive to *iTaukeis*, athletic Indo-Fijian women transform into what Puwar (2004) terms ‘space invaders’.

I have employed Puwar’s (2004) concept of space invaders to explore the sporting agency and experiences of athletic Indo-Fijian women who disrupt the Fijian sporting spaces from which they have previously been excluded. Relatedly, Pavlidis (2018) states that it is important to include geographical spaces, which comprise physical, cultural and affective atmospheres and textures, as these would allow for more nuanced understanding of the relationship of girls/women and sports. Moreover, Pavlidis (2018) stresses that these geographical invasions in sports are beneficial – they go beyond the individual to communal benefits – including but not limited to physical and mental well-being, better self-esteem, employment opportunities and better coping mechanisms with contemporary life. Therefore, working towards a socially just and inclusive society (Pavlidis, 2018). Relatedly Van Ingen (2003) notes that spatial inquiry ‘goes beyond a focus on ‘place’ in order to more clearly link the relation between identity and the spaces through which identity is produced and expressed (Van Ingen, 2003, p. 1). This notion is particularly helpful in understanding how relations of gender, class/caste, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and race are produced, negotiated and contested in social spaces where which athletic Indo-Fijian women invade.

Easy access and flow in these exclusive (sporting) spaces is different for different groups and is subject to constant negotiation and contestation, and is embedded in relations of power (Aitchison 2003, Scraton & Watson 1998 and Skeggs’ 1999). Therefore the aforementioned notion will help strengthen the discussion on young athletic Indo-Fijian women’s double struggle in order to establish their spatial positioning in comparison to the privileged *iTaukei* women in sporting spaces. Moreover, whilst invading Fijian sporting spaces, athletic Indo-Fijian women constantly reposition

themselves within these spaces through embodied rituals, such as mimicking the language and behaviour of the dominant culture in the space in order to survive (Puwar, 2004).

However, Fiji's case becomes more complex and quite unique as the *iTaukei* men (unlike the White men in Puwar's (2004) case studies) do not dominate all institutional spaces – they dominate spaces in government departments (employment), ownership of agricultural land, the military and the sporting platforms. Apart from the military and ownership of farming lands, *iTaukei* women also dominate government jobs and women's sporting spaces. Indo-Fijians are not totally marginalised in all aspects as they dominate the business/commercial sectors (Narsey, 2002; Prasad, 2013) and have success in the academic realm (Dakuidreketi, 2014; Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995; Otsuka, 2006).

Indo-Fijians are subordinate in terms of social class (Presterudstuen, 2010), Fijian identities, and opportunities (in various sectors like ownership of farming lands, government scholarships and government jobs). For example, despite the end of slavery of Indo-Fijians, a century later they still lack rights to (farming) land and property ownership (Lally, 2017). In response to the aforementioned, Indo-Fijian families have prioritised academic pursuits and achievements, for better employability and migration to developed countries for prosperity and a fair go (Narsey, 2002; Balram, 2019). Relatedly, children of Indian indentured labourers also grasped the teachings of the colonisers eagerly (due to their long-established history of literacy and schooling) in comparison to their *iTaukei* counterparts (Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995). Furthermore, Hinduism places great emphasis on education and knowledge, where the goddess Saraswati<sup>6</sup> is worshipped for blessings (Yasa, Yadnyawati & Utama, 2019).

Nonetheless, the squatter settlements in Fiji are mostly populated by Indo-Fijians living in impoverished conditions, largely due to the non-renewal of their agricultural land leases (Thornton, 2009). The young women in my research come from different social classes, with five dwelling in squatter settlements, five from middle class working families and two from the upper rich class,

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<sup>6</sup> Hindu goddess of learning, intelligence, arts and both worldly and spiritual knowledge.

whose parents run small businesses. The subversiveness of the five athletic Indo-Fijian women who live on the poverty line is threefold – they have to negotiate gendered (in the Fijian context), racial (with *iTaukeis*) and class (with *iTaukeis* and economically privileged Indo-Fijian women) hurdles to invade Fijian sporting spaces. These athletic Indo-Fijian women have found (some) liberation and freedom and have experienced (some) transformation (Pavlidis, 2018) in Fijian sporting arenas. Therefore, all these social, cultural and economic markers – gender, race (and racism), social class, together with politics, religiosity, indentured history, education, age, and geographical locations (urban/rural), become relevant in my work, thus an intersectional analysis is necessary to illuminate the social, cultural and spatial hurdles that these space invaders hurdle upon entering the Fijian sporting platforms that are exclusive to *iTaukeis* (Kanemasu, 2018).

Together with the concept of space invaders, I have infused Pavlidis' (2018) argument in the affirmative that sports are fundamentally spatial and political; that sports happens in some physical space – be it change rooms, gymnasium, sporting fields, sidelines or board rooms. In addition to Pavlidis' (2018) take on spatiality (which relates mostly to gender-based discrimination), I have expanded the notion of 'spatiality' (as race, class and other social markers are not only central to my research, but also conform the Fijian sporting spaces) to illuminate the local and more nuanced insights of the unique and complex sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women. Therefore, in my discussions in order to account for the different kinds of spaces that Indo-Fijian women occupy and invade with their subversive sporting agencies, 'space' will be perceived as beyond merely the geographical (and physical) (Pavlidis, 2018) and 'beyond a focus on 'place' in order to more clearly link the relation between identity and the spaces through which identity is produced and expressed' (Van Ingen, 2003, p. 1). Moreover, 'space' will be perceived as beyond the literal and imaginary (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992) – it will also accommodate the mindsets of (Fijian) society, the unwritten gendered and racialised stereotypes and rules. In this research, space intersects with gender, race (and class) and other social/cultural factors, giving more nuanced understandings of the relationship

of sports and marginalised (Indo-Fijian) women. In this regard, CRT is interwoven to accentuate the silenced voices and experiences of Indo-Fijian women in the (different) sporting spaces of Fiji.

#### **2.4 Perception of Gender and Women's Embodiment in Different Cultures**

Gendering of the body begins even before birth, and from birth onwards, gendered differences in terms of parent and infant communication take shape (Fausto-Sterling, 2012). Gendering of the body and body image awareness continue into childhood (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015), where girls and boys are disciplined to behave, dress (Harris & Penney, 2002) and identify in certain gendered ways, which are connected to the different specification of gender stereotypes between cultures (Steinmetz, Bosak, Sczesny & Eagly, 2014). Furthermore, maintenance of this strict gender binary (male vs. female) is reproduced via a negotiation with power, and ultimately no other gender outside this binary is acceptable (Butler, 1990).

Relatedly, Fijian urban kindergartens/schools (Brison, 2009), as in some other parts of the world (George, 2002; Knez, Macdonald & Abbott, 2012; Paechter, 2006; Thorne, 1986), fail to treat children according to their actual needs and interests, and instead treat them according to their attributed sex, thus separating boys from girls, as if each were a homogeneous group (Paechter, 2006). This restricts children from undoing or redoing gender in new and different ways and/or disrupting the reproduction of traditional gender norms (Butler, 1990; 2009). Therefore, boys are pushed to play sports deemed more physical, such as football and rugby, which will add strength to the male body, and girls are nudged towards less dangerous and more 'feminine' physical activities like dance, yoga and netball (Harris & Penney, 2002; Klomsten, Marsh & Skaalvik, 2005). Butler (1990) challenges such presumptions of a binary gender system, which deems masculinity to merely occupy a male body and femininity to occupy a female body. Moreover, when children violate gender norms in terms of hairstyles, clothing or choice of play that are against their gender prescription, they are negatively looked upon by their peers (Blackmore, 2003), thus are restricted from practising their gender fluidly from a very young age. There is historical evidence of how

gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990; 2011), and that the (social) gendering of the body occurs throughout one's life (Butler, 2011; Martin, 1998).

Furthermore, some male teachers see themselves as 'one of the boys' in the classroom and situate girls as 'other' within school settings dominated by particular forms of masculinity (Skelton, 2002). Such dominant masculinity performances, in hindsight, impress the display of emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2005) by the girls. Therefore, both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are cultural constructions (Connell, 1987).

Women have been deemed the inferior gender in traditional societies; in the past 20 to 30 years, there have been changes and improvements in this view, however, many stereotypes still exist on how a woman should conform to the canon (Agarwal, 1997; Das, Banker & Verma, 2018; Deshpande, 2016; Hasan, 2015; Knijnik & Soares de Souza, 2011; Mitra, 2009; Scraton, 1992; Siraj, 2012). Women of traditional societies are nudged to perform ascribed gender norms on a daily basis (Kanemasu, 2018; Martin, 1998), such as in Bangladesh where highly specialised gender roles seclude women from areas where men are present, and women are accustomed to maintaining the tradition of *purdah*<sup>7</sup> (Bulk, 1997). These practices validate Butler's (2009) notion of gender being a social construct, where obligatory gender norms are performed on a daily basis and these repetitive performances concrete the appearance of gender, and are often mistaken as signs of its internal truth.

It is apparent that women in various countries have suffered some sort of oppression, experienced inequalities and faced power struggles in relation to their male counterparts. These aforementioned oppressions frequently intersect with race, class, sexual orientation, political affiliations, ethnicity, religion and geographical location, but many times have a more omnipresent gendered face (Kitchen, 2006; Nanayakkara, 2012; Pande, Johnson & Dodge, 2016; Pelak, 2005; Siraj, 2012; Sugden, 2021). Traditional beliefs have pushed women towards their reproductive roles

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<sup>7</sup> The practice by some Muslims and Hindus of using a screen, curtain, or veil to seclude women from the sight of men or strangers.

as mothers and wives, thus constraining women's participation in the workforce (Leckie, 2000), and sports and leisure activities (Brown, Brown, Miller & Hansen, 2001; Leberman & Palmer, 2009; McGinnis & Gentry, 2006). Furthermore, in countries like Saudi Arabia women lack freedom in making important decisions for themselves, in terms of marriage, travel and medical treatment – they need permission of a male guardian (McKernan, 2017). In Fiji's case, despite achieving gender balance in education and enhancements in the number of women in the workforce, women (both Indo-Fijians and *iTaukei*) are not empowered towards involvement in the formal sector and high-level decision-making (Harrington, 2004). This highlights the preference of emphasized femininity by *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian communities, which is subservient to the Fijian way of shaping hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995); thus, leadership roles are deemed (most) apt for (*iTaukei*) men.

#### **2.4.1 Cultural Epitomes of the 'Proper' Woman**

The epitome of the 'proper' woman differs from culture to culture (Banerjee, 2020; Ducille, 1994; Field, 2013; Kérchy, 2005; Nagar, 2018; Weber, 2017), and cultural ideals of beauty and conventional body image are also defined by geography (region) (Harley, Odoms-Young, Beard, Katz & Heaney, 2009; Weber, 2017). In terms of women's embodiment, there is no universal consensus across cultures/societies; what is acceptable in one culture might be despised in another. For instance, the Samoan prime minister warned Samoan women to stay away from international beauty contests, which favour 'skinny' looking women (Field, 2013). In Pacific Island nations (such as the traditional indigenous Fijian society), eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia are seen as preposterous (Becker, 1995). Furthermore, native Fijian adolescent girls value body muscle in terms of strength, which reflects traditional *iTaukei* values that place emphasis on the physical attributes of a female body (Williams et al., 2006). The aforementioned reveals that *iTaukei*

adolescent girls skew towards gender fluidity and do not perceive muscles and strength as attributes of a male body – these attributes can also be present in a female body (Butler, 1990).

Relatedly, in the African nation of Mauritania, fat women are ideally beautiful since the body mass of females in a male's care is a criterion of social standing and wealth (Weber, 2017). Thus, it is evident from the aforementioned that emphasized femininity in Samoa (Field, 2013), Fiji (Williams et al., 2006) and Mauritania (Weber, 2017) favours a bigger body and physical strength which is not in line with Western 'thin ideals' of women (Boothroyd, Jucker, Thronborrow, Barton, Burt, Evans & Tovée, 2020).

In contrast, recent studies show that many Indian adolescent girls are dissatisfied with their body image and would prefer slimmer bodies (Dixit, Agarwal, Singh, Kant & Singh, 2011; Ganesan, Ravishankar & Ramalingam, 2018), influenced by the Bollywood cinema and mass media that promote Western beauty ideals (Banerjee, 2020; Boothroyd et al., 2020; Lata, 2009). Therefore, emphasized femininity (like hegemonic masculinity) depends on culture, geographical locations and era. And despite its cultural conventions, emphasized femininity can be fluid, change according to the environment, and present multiple meanings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The following section extends the discussion on gender and looks into the issues that women in different parts of the Global South experience in sports.

## **2.5 Gender Issues in Sports in the Global South**

For the purpose of my research the Global South/North dichotomy has been employed as reference to non-geographical regions, thus accounting for those people who are dominated within the borders of wealthier countries (Mahler, 2017). The term 'Global South' will be used numerous times in my dissertation – referring to regions/countries in the world that are not only socially and economically disadvantaged but also including countries that are politically and culturally ostracised (Dados & Connell, 2012).



Gender segregation is evident universally in most competitive sports; consequently, as a rule, separate competitions are held for men and women (Pfister, 2010) where they are confined to ‘doing gender’ based on biology or the body that they occupy (Butler, 1990; 2009; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Ann Travers (sports scholar) (2008) takes a nuanced perspective, arguing that sex segregation in sport is significant in normalising and legitimising the philosophy of the two-sex framework. Sport exposes athletes to qualities that are normally connected with traditional masculine traits such as individualism, competitiveness, aggressiveness and power (Coleman, 2003; Steinfeldt, Zakrajsek, Carter & Steinfeldt, 2011). This becomes more problematic for women in combat sports (Channon & Matthews, 2015; Godoy-Pressland, 2015; Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015) who empower themselves to practise the exact opposite qualities to the tenets of cultural emphasized femininity.

Similarly, Pelak (2009) notes that South African families are reluctant in accepting and supporting their daughters’ involvement in soccer, because traditionally soccer is seen as a male domain. Akin to soccer, female boxing coaches face many obstacles such as not being taken seriously as coaches in a male-dominated sport. Also, women boxers face unequal power relations with older male coaches (Tjønndal, 2019). The ‘threat’ arises in (traditional) societies as these women start performing their gender differently to the ideals of cultural emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995). By performing acts culturally deemed as masculine, these women create (some) disorder in the traditional gender hierarchy, therefore shifts in gender relations of power (Butler, 1990; Hargreaves, 2003).

Furthermore, poor media attention to women’s sport marginalises their sporting growth and women athletes face huge pay gaps (apart from tennis<sup>8</sup>) throughout professional sports (Puri, 2016). There have been recent changes in countries like Fiji (Cama, 2019), with sporting bodies investing in women’s football and practising gender equality in allowances/pay. However, in Fiji, female players still struggle towards an equal playing field that goes beyond resources and budgets. This is akin to

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<sup>8</sup> Since 2007 equal prize money at all four Grand Slam tournaments has been awarded for male and female divisions.

their South African counterparts, who negotiate both financial and traditional constraints to participate in football, which is considered a masculine sport (Pelak, 2005). Women are more visible in sports today than at any previous point in history (Puri, 2016), nonetheless, many female athletes have to negotiate principles of conventional male physicality yet simultaneously perform cultural norms apt for maintaining emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995; Steinfeldt et al., 2011).

Women from the Global South – India (Mitra, 2009; Nanayakkara, 2012), Pakistan (Gul, Jahangig & Nadeemullah, 2019), Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020) and Africa (Mudekunye, 2018), have to hurdle challenges of poverty, gender bias, racial attitudes, social norms, culture and traditions, myths, religion and family responsibilities. These women are hindered more than their male and Global North counterparts from sports participation (Hasan, 2015; Nanayakkara, 2012). Women of the Global South are marginalised at multiple and sometimes unimaginable levels (Hasan, 2015; Nanayakkara, 2012). For example, Asian Championship gold medallist, Marimuthu's (Indian) father had to eat cow food to save money for his daughter's training (Pandey, 2019) – an unthinkable struggle in economically sound regions and for individuals of upper socio-economic classes. Moreover, the Fijian women's Rugby Sevens team (Fijianas) won a bronze medal in the 2020 Olympics (Turaga, 2021), despite the disparity in funding and resources in comparison to their male counterparts and female counterparts of the Global North (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Singh, 2020). The gender status quo, the existence of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005) and the (forced) production of abject bodies (Butler, 2011; Ferreira, 2018), contribute to the marginalisation and thus low status of women, making sporting experiences challenging and thus resulting in these women's poor representation in sporting platforms. This violates their basic human rights for a fair go to experience the benefits and pleasures of sports and physical activity participation.

Relatedly, women in Samoa (Schuster & Schoeffel, 2018), Zimbabwe (Manyonganise, 2010) and Indo-Fijian women in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016) are discouraged from sports

participation as it is perceived to violate cultural principles of emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995), and potentially lead to loss of virginity and out of wedlock pregnancy (Johar, 2017; Manyonganise, 2010). Therefore, performing one's gender that does not concur with cultural emphasized femininities (Connell, 1995) risks women being labelled as subversive (Butler, 1990; 2011; Ferreira, 2018) and even as prostitutes (Mudekunye, 2018). These marginalised women of colour are compelled to either lose their sporting agency, be stigmatised as bodies that do not fit – bodies that do not matter – or in Butler's (2011) words, 'abject bodies' (Butler, 2011); or they can try and find external support and internal boldness to defy traditionally heteronormative behaviour and emphasized femininity, and become subversive bodies (Butler, 1990; Ferreira, 2018).

Therefore, the principle of counter-narratives of CRT for women (of colour) from marginalised backgrounds is needed to interrupt and disrupt voices of the dominant groups (Milner, 2007), so that oppressed bodies and silenced voices are seen and heard in the Global North. For example, the success of Indian (woman) boxer, M. C. Marykom (three-time World Champion), who despite the wretched condition of women boxers in India (Mitra, 2009) has risen above gender, social, cultural, religious and political hurdles, and become subversive – a step ahead of her ambivalent women counterparts and two steps ahead of abject beings (women) (Butler, 2011).

Having discussed the gender issues women face in sports in the Global South, the next section moves on to looking at the sporting hurdles faced by South Asians (women) in the diaspora.

## **2.6 Sporting Hurdles Faced by South Asians in the Diaspora**

There have been numerous studies in the past two decades on race, ethnicity and sports regarding (migrant) South Asians in the diaspora (Global North) (Burdsey, 2004; Burdsey, 2006; Burdsey, 2015; Burdsey, 2019; Dudrah, 2013; Scraton et al, 2005). There are widespread stereotypical rumours, myths and assumptions that South Asians are academic and non-sporting; that they underperform in PE and sport, but excel in the classroom (Burdsey, 2019; Crozier, 2009; Fleming, 1994;

Kanemasu, 2018). Such stereotypes limit (South) Asian athleticism in the white perception, and sometimes, like in the case of some Muslim South Asian women (and Indo-Fijian women), these stereotypes are internalised (Kanemasu, 2018; Stride, 2014) and somewhat channel South Asian youths away from sporting activities (Burdsey, 2019; Fleming, 1994). There is a scarcity of South Asian players within British men's professional football, which denotes strong patterns of racial stereotyping of South Asians (Carrington, 2012) – as for the women, they encounter greater struggle in gaining access to sporting cultures (Ratna, 2011; Sawrikar & Muir 2010).

Furthermore, there is also a global trend of Indians in the diaspora not finding sporting role models (Burdsey, 2015; Ratna, 2011; Thangaraj, 2015). South Asian women in many western nations have been found to not perform the recommended level of physical activity for health benefits compared with South Asian men and white European populations (Babakus & Thompson, 2012). In many instances, when these women make attempts, they face cultural hurdles – for example, traditional South Asian British Muslim women must prioritise concealing their bodies from male view, thus sports participation is considered inappropriate without gender segregation (Kay, 2006). Moreover, in women's bodybuilding in Fiji, Indo-Fijian women participants get (morally) judged by their own kindred based on the competition clothing and for developing muscles (Raj, 2019). Women body builders practise gender fluidly (Butler, 1990), therefore are perceived to disrupt conventional gender orders by having a body image (Kanemasu, 2018) which is traditionally associated with men – thus masculinity present in a woman's body is rejected by the Indo-Fijian society.

Despite no scientific evidence, some societies/cultures believe that sports participation has potential to damage females' reproductive organs, cause loss of virginity and result in sterility in later life (Daimon, 2010; Johar, 2017; Manyonganise, 2010). In the Indian and Indo-Fijian cultures, at marriage, a girl is expected to be a virgin and fertile – the same is not expected from boys; she also must be subservient (Johar, 2017; Shandil, 2016). Nonetheless, despite the odds, many Indian

women (and a few Indo-Fijian women) have questioned and subverted traditional gender orders and have had great sporting achievements. For example, Saina Nehwal being world number one in badminton (2015) and P V Sindhu being placed in the top 10 (Rai, 2019); rally racer Aishwarya Pissa being the first Indian to win a world title in motorsports (Ann, 2019) and Bhavna Tokekar, a 47-year-old mother of two teens, winning four gold medals in powerlifting at the Open Asian championships in Russia (Singh, 2019).

However, in many cases when marginalised women take one step forward in an attempt to hurdle gender barriers, traditions and culture drag them two steps backwards (Chattier, 2013, Hasan, 2015; Raj, 2019). Therefore, athletic women become ambivalent (Connell, 1987) and incorporate complex and strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and cooperation, and produce a range of different gender performances (Butler, 1990). Nonetheless, despite marginalisation, Indo-Fijian and Indian women have excelled in individual sports, such as Komal Raj (bodybuilding), Saina Nehwal (badminton), Sania Mirza (tennis), Gomathi Marimuthu (athletics), Mary Kom (boxing) and Dola Banerjee (former world champion – archery) (Garg, 2010). These athletic women's agencies reflect that gender is fluid and that strength, aggressiveness and competitiveness are not exclusive to a male body but can occupy a female body as well (Butler, 1990).

The following section explores the similarities and differences between traditional gender constructs and body image norms in the Indian, Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* cultures.

## **2.7 Gender Constructs and Body Image in the Indian, Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* Societies**

There are conflicting expectations of women's body image in modern contemporary societies, with confusing messages such as that women should be 'firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin' (Markula, 1995, p. 424). Body image and beauty are culturally determined (Weber, 2017; Weitz, 2001) where society impresses the notion of cultural emphasized femininity through (extended) body image – emphasising feminine images such as the way a woman should dress and maintain her hair in order to fit into the defined gender norms of society (Connell, 1995).

Consequently, having short hair and playing soccer might qualify one as masculine/tomboy (Kanemasu, 2018; Kolnes, 1995; Wedgwood, 2004) as these are signs of gender bending (Tagg, 2008).

The traditional Indian society is a patriarchal one (Balram, 2019; Beedy, 2015; Hasan, 2015; Lata, 2009), despite the emphasis on Hinduism's mother worship, where mothers are worshipped and any disrepute against them is avenged and dignity is restored at any cost (Joshi & Adhikari 2019; Lata, 2009; Chapple & Tucker, 2000; Uma & Alladi, 1989). In India, there is still a preference for sons (Beedy, 2015), and comparisons between sons and daughters result in girls having restrictions (Shandil, 2016). Akin to India, a large population of Indo-Fijians in Fiji are Hindus, therefore the patriarchal ideologies that are impressed through the *dharmik*<sup>9</sup> principles of Hinduism (Balram, 2019; Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016) are still prevalent in many aspects of Indo-Fijian society. Many Hindu literatures are quiet on the subject of alternative genders (Doniger, 2009) thus, practising anything unusual from prescribed gender norms creates the fear of difference where one would potentially encounter societal stigma and prejudice (Hall, Ibragimov, Luu & Wong, 2020).

Furthermore, elders of the family play a huge role in inculcating gender stereotyping in Indian (Hasan, 2015) and Indo-Fijian (Balram, 2019) cultures. Butler (1990) questions patriarchal gender ideologies and aims to gradually change the existing patriarchal society to a more equal one, which is difficult to achieve when older women (and women who contribute to providing for their families) within these traditional communities themselves hold cultural power and maintain the traditional gender order (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016; Lee & Beatty, 2002; Shandil, 2016).

Moreover, Indo-Fijians, like Indians, associate prettiness and softness with femininity and strength and toughness with masculinity (Bidwai, 2013; Sugden et al., 2020). In terms of body image, contemporary Indo-Fijians prefer dainty, fair-skinned women who conform to images of Indian heroines portrayed via the Bollywood cinema (Banerjee, 2018; Lata, 2009; Raj, 2019) – these

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<sup>9</sup> Hindu religious principles.

images adhere to cultural emphasized femininity (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020) and get reproduced by the Bollywood cinema (Lata, 2009). Paradoxically, an athletically slim Indo-Fijian woman, like in the case of Indo-Fijian body builder Komal Raj, is not equally accepted in terms of body image in comparison to their Bollywood counterparts, by the Indo-Fijian society (Lata, 2009; Raj, 2019). Despite the breakdown of the caste system, many aspects of religion, culture and patriarchy continue to be prevalent amongst Indo-Fijians in Fiji (Ali, 2004); thus, a woman parading her muscles in a two-piece on stage is not gender normative and does not fit into the norms of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity (Shandil, 2016). Indo-Fijian women who acquire muscles and strength stimulate negative reactions (Heasley & Crane, 2016; Raj, 2019), and there is hardly any acknowledgement of the production of a physically powerful woman with athletic prowess (Raj, 2019; Sugden et al., 2020). Both the Indian and Indo-Fijian cultures conform to the norms of compulsory heterosexuality (Bidwai, 2013; Kanemasu, 2018), which naturalises the superior position of men and places women inferior in the binary (Butler, 1990). Athletic Indo-Fijian women disrupt traditional gender normative body images, thus risk being labelled as tomboys (Kanemasu, 2018), as masculinity occupying a female body (Butler, 1990) is incomprehensible and unacceptable.

India is home to the world's largest film entity – the Bollywood Cinema – which produces thousands of films annually, and these films are watched all over the world (Ghosh, 2013). Bollywood movies shape many Indian diaspora members' imagination of India (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2004; Takhar, Maclaran & Stevens, 2012). Indo-Fijians also find a great sense of connection to India/Indian culture via the images, songs, and plots of films produced by the Bollywood cinema (Kao & Do Rozario, 2008; Lata, 2009). Therefore, the Bollywood cinema has great importance in the construction of the Indian diaspora's identity (Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Lata, 2009; Takhar et al., 2012). Most Bollywood films produced are structured around Hinduism and Hindu characters, with some Islam based films and rare cases of films based on Christianity (Mishra, 2002; Mishra, 2006). Through the plots and images of films of the Bollywood Cinema, the Indian

culture resonates in the diaspora (Lata, 2009; Mishra, 2002; 2006) (further) influencing Indo-Fijians to conform to the traditional gender binary constructs, patriarchy and cultural emphasized femininity (Lata, 2009).

The Bollywood cinema sometimes also produces sports-based films; on rare occasions there is a film on women and sports. However, 2007 saw the super hit movie *Chak De! India* based on the Indian women's hockey team (which is in the top five in the world (<https://www.icc-cricket.com>)) jumping hurdles and winning the national championships. Some Indo-Fijian women relate to such films in the diaspora, such as Divyanka Kumar – a proud sole Indo-Fijian woman representative in the Fijian national hockey team ([thedragflick.com](http://thedragflick.com)).

In contrast, the Indo-Fijian society is more culturally diverse than the *iTaukei* society, which is predominately (99%) Christians (Tomlinson, 2015). Indo-Fijians originate from many different parts of the Indian subcontinent, where most are Hindus with a minority of Muslims and Christians. Indo-Fijian gender relations are influenced by various traditional and cultural values originating from South Asia, where patriarchal ideology emphasises formal male authority in decision-making and over property ownership (Chattier, 2008; 2013). As for the *iTaukeis*, culture and gender relations are influenced by religion (Meo, 2003) and by traditional values that emphasise the authority of chiefs (who are males) and the precedence of men before women (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017), giving Fiji a masculine (patriarchal) gender culture (Tora et al., 2006; White, 2005).

Furthermore, the *iTaukei* culture allocates roles/tasks based on gender where men are associated with more physical, adventurous and risk-taking work and females are associated with domestic work (Meo-Sewabu, 2016). The *iTaukei* men are considered the most dominant in terms of physicality and might (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005), but they also skew towards a preference for powerful and physically bigger women like their Samoan counterparts (Field, 2013; Kanemasu, 2018). Moreover, being a man does not qualify one to occupy a higher position in the Fijian gendered continuum; for example, sometimes, *iTaukei* women are considered to be even more



powerful, fierce and athletic than Indo-Fijian men (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005). As a result, Indo-Fijian men fear being verbally abused or even beaten up by *iTaukei* women and dare not to catcall them, like they do to Indo-Fijian women (Kanemasu, 2018). This gives rise to a different gendered power hierarchy and makes the Fijian gender continuum/hierarchy more complex (Connell, 2009), as the *iTaukei* women also embody forms of traditional masculinity, which surpass the marginalized masculinity (Connell, 2009) of Indo-Fijian men.

Indo-Fijians (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020), like Indians (Bidwai, 2013; Hasan, 2015), fail to acknowledge that people are not born with gender traits, which mirror their biological sex (Butler, 2010) and therefore a female (athletic) body can have masculine traits which are not in line with cultural emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009). Powerful, physical and athletic women are more appreciated in the *iTaukei* society (Kanemasu, 2018). As for adolescent *iTaukei* girls, they are exposed to both traditional sociocultural pressures that promote a larger body size, and western pressures and television (Becker, 2004) that promote slimness (Williams et al., 2006).

However, despite, the *iTaukei* community's better acceptance of athletic *iTaukei* women (Kanemasu, 2018), gender relations in both the Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* ethnic communities remain bound by patriarchal norms (Kanemasu, 2018; Mishra, 2012). In Fiji, women rugby players (*iTaukei* women) face patriarchal, sociocultural and heteronormative obstacles – where players are widely associated with homosexuality (Kanemasu, Molnar & Johnson, 2018). As for Indo-Fijian women, they have to negotiate more barriers in terms of gender (and race) relations where they are judged against the patriarchal ideologies of the Indo-Fijian culture, and the presumptions of lack of physicality by *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians themselves, who internalise such ethnic stereotypes (Kanemasu, 2018).

After looking closely at the gender constructs and acceptable body image in the Indian, Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* cultures, the next section moves on to discuss what physicality means to the two major ethnic groups in Fiji: the Indo-Fijians and the *iTaukeis*.

## 2.8 Racial and Gendered Physicality in Fiji

A diverse group of Indians (61,000), belonging to different castes, were brought from the Northern and Southern parts of India to work on the white settler-owned plantations in Fiji from 1879 to 1920 (Lal, 1983; 1988). Indian labourers were needed, as colonial policy explicitly aimed to protect the native population from the ravages of modernisation and the corrupting influences of a waged system of labour (Lal, 1988). After the abolishment of the indenture system (in 1917), many Indian labourers chose to remain in Fiji (Sugden et al., 2020) in the hope of making Fiji mimic their way of life in India (Naipaul, 2003). However, since Indians and natives were alienated from each other by colonial powers, there was a racial rift (Durutalo, 1986), which laid the foundation of the postcolonial political (dis)order (Kanemasu, 2018; Naidu, 2008).

Racism has been embedded in Fiji since colonial times, where the Indian labourers were subordinated and controlled by colonial power and rules. Indians still faced racism when the colonisers left – and power and authority in terms of land ownership (Munasinghe, 2001) and political leadership (Naidu, 2008) was dominated by *iTaukeis*. In line with CRT, there were power imbalances and unequal resource distribution (Hylton, 2005) between Indo-Fijians and the natives, therefore the Indian settlers were doubly subordinated – and this reflects the lack of social justice to protect Indo-Fijians' human rights towards the land that they toiled.

Furthermore, when government schools were established, not only were boys and girls separated, but the *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians were segregated as well (Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995). Indo-Fijian males were also near invisible in the country's military forces during the world wars – deemed (by native Fijians, Europeans and other Pacific Islanders) to lack physical suitability for soldiering (Teaiwa, 2008). The following generations of Indo-Fijians have never been fully accepted as Fijians, and the overarching post-coups trajectory has seen Indo-Fijian academics, politicians and businessmen become targets of military surveillance and violence (Teaiwa, 2008). The aforementioned is in line with CRT's tenet that racism is a normal feature of society and is

embedded within systems and institutions, such as in the case of Fiji, from policies of land ownership, to legal and educational systems that replicate racial inequality (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). Fuelled by a sense of insecurity about their socio-political vulnerability (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009), Indo-Fijian parents encourage their children to perform well academically, have well paid skilled jobs and/or immigrate to a developed country (Balram, 2019; Narsey, 2002).

For Indo-Fijians (like Indians), physicality is not the only positive aspect of hegemonic masculinity – equal emphasis is given to education, good employment, and ability to feed and look after the extended family (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016; Verma, Pulerwitz, Mahendra, Khandekar, Barker, Fulpagare & Singh, 2006). The perception in Fiji of Indo-Fijians' physical frames lacking robustness, which is perceived to occupy indigenous and other Pacific islanders' bodies (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2008), is clearly racist for two apparent reasons. Firstly, India has a rich military history, having served with distinction in World War I and World War II (Teaiwa, 2008). Secondly, the Indian labourers physically laboured on farms under poor living and working conditions (Lal, 1988). The aforementioned facts have been purposely ignored in order for *iTaukeis* to keep hegemony over Indo-Fijians and other minority racial groups. Instead, a purposeful weakness was built, and stereotypes reproduced which have led to discrimination in education, social class and sports – hence keeping the privileges to the *iTaukei* group. Race clearly intersects with hegemonic masculinity and social class when weighing physicality in the Fijian context (Tora et al., 2006). For example, at the end of the day the Indo-Fijian farmers who toiled the land did not own the land and were considered as slaves (Lal, 1980; Naidu, 2008).

Furthermore, many Indo-Fijian farmers who were tenants to *iTaukei* landowners were evicted from farming lands after their leases were not renewed by the landowners (Karan & Sharma, 2021; Kurer, 2001; Munasinghe, 2001). The aforementioned developed a racial discourse – one that undermined the Indo-Fijian farmers and farmers of the following generations as weak, therefore increasing discrimination against them. The Indo-Fijian farmers were lower in class in comparison to

the privileged natives who kept their (social and economic) privileges (Munasinghe, 2001; Kanemasu, 2018). Consequently, the *iTaukei* cultural traditions are officially championed over those of Indo-Fijians and other communities (Lal, 2002).

Racial stereotypes of Indo-Fijians lacking physicality (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020; Teaiwa, 2005) and not being proper Fijians (Munasinghe, 2001), becomes a paradox when most Indo-Fijians (and their ancestors) toiled the land and contributed greatly towards the sugar industry which became Fiji's economic backbone before farming land lease renewal issues (Munasinghe, 2001; Narsey, 2002). The aforementioned ideological machinery involves race and gender, to undermine the marginalised ethnic group (Indo-Fijians). Therefore, the dominant group (*iTaukeis*) in (political) power remains in power and retains their privileges. For example, this is reflected in their positions in the national teams of the most prestigious sport (rugby), and representation in armed forces (military). This clearly reflects Butler's (1990) notion of gender and bodies being a social construct, as despite the Indo-Fijian farmers having strong bodies (or at least being capable of physical work), they are considered less physical, thus less masculine on the Fijian gender spectrum, therefore, lower in the gender hierarchy in the Fijian context. The lack of presumed physicality can be further questioned when the Indian women's (same phenotype as Indo-Fijian women) hockey team hammered the Fiji team (solely made up of *iTaukei* women), 10-0 in the 2013 Hockey World League ([www.sportskeeda.com](http://www.sportskeeda.com)). Therefore, stereotypes about Indo-Fijian women's lack of physicality based on biological traits (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005) are seriously questionable and make it evident that gender is a social construct (Butler, 1990) and is based on racial/social class/religious tenets.

The following segment looks into the sporting accounts of Indo-Fijian women and their near invisibility in Fiji's sporting scenes.

## **2.9 The (In)visibility of Indo-Fijian Women from Sporting Platforms in Fiji**

Parents/elders and Indo-Fijian girls/women are subject to, and apply, the (cultural) disciplinary mechanism of surveillance (Lang, 2010) – consequently creating embodied conformity to Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009) and subservience (Shandil, 2016). Marriage and family are emphasised for Indo-Fijian women (Shandil, 2016) and married women get prominence over unmarried women (Lateef, 1990), leading parents to coach daughters from an early age towards prayers, doing domestic chores, cooking and maintaining good relationships (Balram, 2019; Muir, 2010).

Moreover, the older Indian generation also impedes girls' transition into womanhood by passing misconceptions and practices regarding menstruation (Dudeja, Sindhu & Shankar, 2016). There are also cultural myths that a woman playing sports, can lead to the loss of her virginity, where virginity is measured via the tearing of the hymen layer, which is not a reliable marker of virginity as for many girls, it is torn or destroyed during active sports (abcnews.go.com). Therefore, sports is seen to be more suitable for boys, and girls who play sports are perceived as violating cultural norms of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020), and are restricted or discouraged. Furthermore, virginity of daughters and sisters in the Indo-Fijian context is a marker of the integrity of men and this becomes the rationale for controlling women's movement and behaviour by patriarchal authority, represented by fathers, brothers and husbands (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016).

Fiji has a cultural prominence of sport, as well as underlying divisions between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians (Kanemasu, 2018 & Sugden et al., 2020). Indo-Fijian women are the most invisible athletic women in Fiji, primarily because they are very few as most Indo-Fijian women only exercise or walk mainly for the purpose of weight loss (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). When the goal of being physically active is cosmetic fitness, rather than physical competence, there is a tendency to drop out of sport programs when weight loss goals are achieved and appearance meets gendered expectations (Shakti, 2005).

In Fiji's extremely popular school athletics competitions, it is highly uncommon for Indo-Fijian girls to compete among thousands of school children, putting them on the very margin of Fiji's sporting and athletic scenes (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Netball is the most popular sport played by girls from different ethnic backgrounds during PE lessons in Fijian primary and high schools (Dorovolomo, 2005). However, Indo-Fijian women are rarely involved in netball at club or district level despite them playing competitive or organised netball in their own circles (Kanemasu, 2018) such as the annual TIV Sangam Conventions/tournaments (exclusive to South Indians), which also involves (South) Indo-Fijian teams from overseas (Raj, 2015; Singh, 2021).

Soccer is also popular in Fiji, despite being considered an Indo-Fijian/migrants' sport (Hay, 2006; Prasad, 2013; Sugden, 2021). It is played by indigenous and Indo-Fijian men, and some women, who are mostly *iTaukeis* (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020). An individualist approach to inclusion in schools that creates a sense of belonging based upon valuing and respecting different ethnic backgrounds and supporting the process of social integration is necessary (Frearson, 2013). However, Fijian schools lack equity in PE lessons (and curriculum) in terms of inclusiveness of the needs of minority/marginalised groups (Sugden, 2021), and popular team sports such as rugby, soccer and netball are emphasised with no room for individual sports (Dorovoloma, 2005).

Moreover, dance is a form of sports (Raiola, 2015); Indian classical dance forms and performing arts such as folklore have made their mark in international figure skating and artistic swimming events (Sharma, 2019). Relatedly, Indo-Fijian young women are known to keenly participate in Indian classical dancing (Cattermole, 2008) and Bollywood (contemporary) styles (Lata, 2009). Traditional gender roles and maintenance of emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009) in the Indo-Fijian society have resulted in a gendered discourse in sports such as bodybuilding, which is a male-dominated sport in Fiji. Cultural barriers, mental mindset, lack of confidence and having to wear a bikini on stage (based on societal judgements), are major drawbacks for many Indo-Fijian women's participation in the sport of bodybuilding (Raj, 2019). Furthermore, assumptions of

indigenous sporting superiority have resulted in a racialised discourse about ‘Indo-Fijian women being either culturally or physically “unfit” for sportive activities’ (Sugden et al., 2020, p. 783).

Moreover, rugby (Sevens) is said to be a ‘religion’ in Fiji (Kearney, 2018) and even more so, with the men’s team winning Gold and the women winning Bronze at the Tokyo (2020) Olympics (Hutchinson, 2021). The national women’s rugby teams are comprised entirely of *iTaukei* women; not a single Indo-Fijian woman is represented in the 36 players who make the national rugby sevens and union teams ([www.fijirugby.com](http://www.fijirugby.com); Kanemasu, 2018). Indo-Fijian women are so excluded from rugby – this platform appears ‘mission impossible’ for them even to try playing at grassroots level, let alone playing at high level and considering having a sports career in rugby (Sugden, 2021).

Furthermore, Indo-Fijian men have reached international level success in sports, such as: Vijay Singh (golfer) (Prasad, 2009), Nilesh Chand (body builder) (Cama, 2019), Joy Ali (boxer) (Singh, 2015), Yeshnil Karan (athlete) (Lagonilakeba, 2019) and Roy Krishna playing in the top league internationally (soccer) (Cama, 2020). The women have also made some mark in individual sports, where the 2019 South Pacific Games featured Shayal Prasad (youngest player on the field) representing Fiji in pistol shooting (Doviverata, 2019) and Komal Raj winning bodybuilding titles in 2018 and 2019, but still being judged as weak and skinny (Raj, 2019). On rare occasions a few Indo-Fijian girls have risen in mixed racial team sports – such as Divyanka Kumar being the only Indo-Fijian girl in the Fiji women’s national hockey team ([www.sportskeeda.com](http://www.sportskeeda.com)) and Aliza Husein the lone Indo-Fijian woman representing Fiji in soccer, at the Pacific Games in 2019 (Rakautoga, 2019).

## **2.10 Chapter Summary**

Literature reviewed in this chapter has presented historical and contemporary issues surrounding gender, ethnicity, social class, body image, and experiences and challenges in relation to sports participation by women in the Global South, South Asia, Pacific islands and particularly in

Fiji. The literature survey and review show that there is scarce research/literature in the field of sports and Indo-Fijian women; also, the few research studies that have been carried out have not been done from a local perspective/positionality and have not applied the lens of intersectionality to tap into all possible nuances in illuminating the near invisibility of Indo-Fijian women in the sporting arenas of Fiji. Moreover, this dissertation for the first time has drawn on a range of innovative arts-based methods (photo elicitation and poetry ethnographics), using them throughout the data collection, presentation, analysis and discussion process, and generating new information about the topic of Indo-Fijian women and their relationship with sports. Furthermore, as far as I understand, this is the first time that women sports issues in Fiji have been connected to human rights of the Fijian population, making the claims in this dissertation even stronger.

I here summarise the theories, which I will employ in my dissertation to critically analyse my data in order to gain a comprehensive view of the sporting realities of Indo-Fijian women.

- I have employed Butler's notion of gender fluidity, gender being socially constructed (1990; 2011) and gender being performative (Butler, 2011). Furthermore, I employ Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity, marginalized masculinity, emphasized femininity, ambivalent femininity and protest femininity (Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Connell, 2009) to understand the different masculinities and femininities in the everyday and sporting agencies/platforms in Fiji.
- Intersectionality has played a crucial role in discussing the local conditions (based on history, geography, race, culture and economic/social status), which are unique to and surround Indo-Fijian women and their sporting quests (Andrews, 2000), in order to analyse the existence and causes of inequality.
- Moreover, a Critical Race Theoretical (CRT) framework has been used to discuss the situation of Indo-Fijians in Fiji and to understand the diverse nature of oppression and



the nuanced power dynamics of Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*. CRT prioritises local voices along with intersections of race, gender and other social attributes (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010).

- Furthermore, Butler's concepts of subversive bodies and Puwar's (2004) notion of space invaders together with Pavlidis' (2018) view that sports is fundamentally spatial and political are used to illuminate the social, cultural and spatial based challenges and struggles that athletic Indo-Fijian women hurdle in order to invade Fijian sporting platforms that are exclusive to *iTaukeis* (Kanemasu, 2018). Therefore, these conceptual lenses support the analysis of the positionality and role that athletic Indo-Fijian women play in the continuum of Fijian masculinities and femininities.

# Chapter 3 Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction and Overview: An Ethnographical Research Design

This chapter aims to examine methods and principles that were used to respond to the research questions. Crotty's (1998) work provided a structure to underpin the conceptualisation of this research project and build its theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). This research is grounded in the epistemology of subjectivism, where participants (young Indo-Fijian women) use oral, visual and written means to narrate, make sense and produce new meanings of their own lived sporting experiences in Fiji. These narratives provide a deeper understanding of the Indo-Fijian culture, gender and racial constructs, the circumstances of Indo-Fijian women in sports, the reasons for their near invisibility in Fiji's sporting scenes, and the persistence of the few athletic Indo-Fijian women.

The theoretical perspective that lies behind the methodology in question provides a context for the process and grounds its logic and criteria (Crotty, 1998). This research is underpinned by poststructuralist theories (thoughts), which focus on difference and diversity (Ford, 2016); it employs gender theories that understand masculinities and femininities as plural and fluid social constructs (Butler, 1990; Connell 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). I also use Critical Race Theory (CRT) which generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalised, silenced, and disempowered, and considers racism to be a form of structural discrimination that permeates all aspects of society (Chadderton, 2013; Solorzano, 2001).

This thesis is concerned with searching for ongoing meanings and lived experiences of gender in sports in the Fijian context. Therefore, qualitative methods were used in producing comprehensive and detailed discussions (Rahman, 2016) on the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. Qualitative methods aim to understand the human experience in specific settings (Rahman, 2016) and are suitable for understanding points of view of local voices of minority groups and/or whose voices have been overlooked and are challenging to access via traditional survey

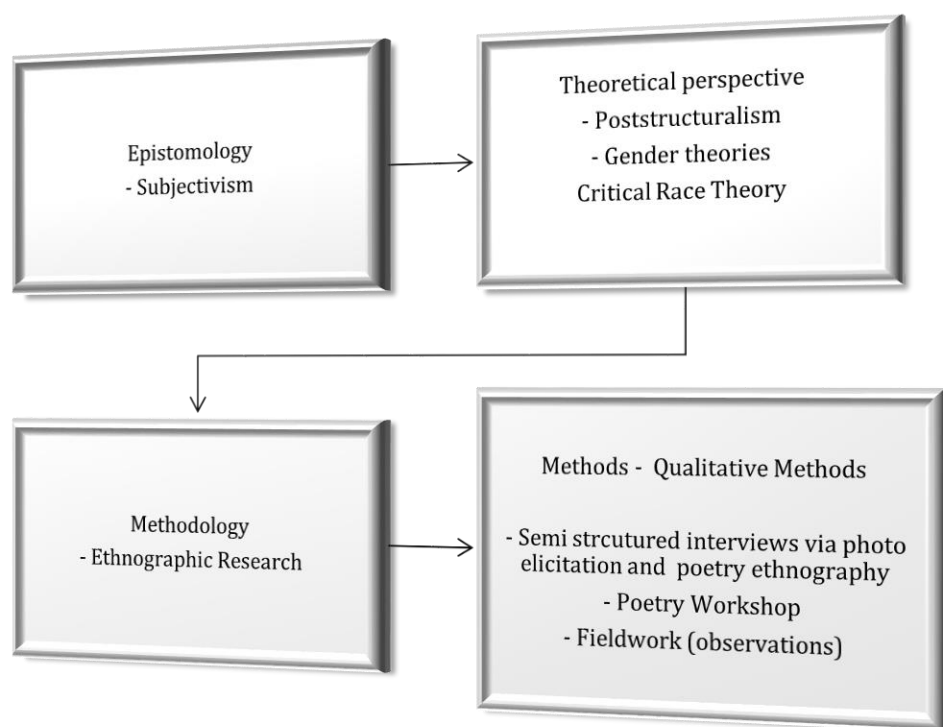
methods (Pang, 2018). Qualitative research methods are not statistical and they can incorporate multiple realities (Berg, 2012; Whitehead, 2005). Qualitative methods provoke deeper insights into designing, administering, and interpreting assessment and testing, permitting the exploration of participants' behaviour, perceptions, feelings, and understandings; some weaknesses of these methods are allowance for smaller sample sizes and they can be time consuming (Whitehead, 2005; Rahman, 2016). Quantitative methods, on the other hand, risk the issue/phenomenon not being looked into in depth, in the context of marginalised groups, and may overlook participants' experiences and their intended meanings (Rahman, 2016).

This research looks into the relationship between young Indo-Fijian women and sports in Fiji. It is an ethnographic inquiry, where I became the research instrument that observed the participants during the interviews, poetry workshops and whilst they actually participated in sports. Using these research methods, my fieldwork allowed me to immerse myself in the participants' lives and to gain a deeper understanding of their lived (sporting) experiences. Moreover, my observations and methodologies helped me to uncover the participants' actions, thoughts, behaviours and culture, unveiling social factors such as gender relationships, and race and class issues (O'Byrne, 2007; Williams, 2007) which contributed substantially to the analysis and comprehension of the complex phenomenon of Indo-Fijian girls/women and their relationship with sports (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Knijnik, 2013).

This ethnographic research employed data collection methods of photo elicitation, poetry workshops, semi-structured interviews (based on photographs taken by participants and participant written free verses), and fieldwork (observations of participants). These different methods enabled me to portray a holistic image of the sociocultural factors that influence Indo-Fijian girls and women in their sporting quests. The variety of data collection methods used also helped in maintaining participant interest; the young Indo-Fijian women showed lots of interest and enjoyed taking photos and writing free verses as this was something new and exciting in the Fijian context in terms of

research. Not only do arts-methods help in tapping into experiences of young people on issues that are not easily conveyed or captured verbally, they also (if used sensitively and reflexively) encourage more collaborative research by reducing power imbalances (Brown et al., 2020; Leonard & McKnight, 2015).

**Figure 6 The Four Elements of my Research Project (Crotty, 1998)**



The sections that follow discuss all the research procedures undertaken during this study in detail. They look into how I recruited and worked with my research participants, and then move on to deliberate on the data collection methods and data analysis methods employed in the research.

### 3.2 The Research Participants

It was apt to invite Indo-Fijian girls/young women aged from 15 to 25 years for this project as this age bracket signifies various transitional stages in (Indo-Fijian) girls/young women’s lives. During

adolescent years, girls experience many physical and emotional transitions and become aware of discrimination and their body image (Lorber & Martin, 2013). Typically, young girls transition to adolescence and begin high school around the age of 15. The mid-to-late teens period is regularly a challenging moment in adolescent lives (Holland, 2007). Schooling is paramount for Indo-Fijians and in late secondary school and tertiary institutions; Indo-Fijian students often perform better than their *iTaukei* counterparts due to cultural differences in their values, beliefs and practices (Otsuka, 2006). Typically, Indo-Fijian girls' lived experiences are structured by their school experiences, from the age of 14 to about 19 and later followed by tertiary studies and/or work (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Raj, 2019). There are a handful of young women who choose to get married after high school as dating for young single Indo-Fijian women (especially when still in school) is culturally not appropriate (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016).

The 12 participants comprised five high school students, two tertiary students (one worked part time), two stay-home women, and three full time working women. The major attributes (ethnicity/race and self-identified gender as female) of these participants were homogenous. Nonetheless, the participants were of different religions (Hinduism, Christianity and Islam), socio-economic backgrounds, castes (if known), educational levels (ranged from high school to tertiary qualifications), marital status (single, married, separated and divorced), and so forth. These factors were important and influenced the data, making it rich and multifaceted (refer to Appendix 2). For example, a participant who attended primary and high school in a rural area might have different sporting experiences to those who attended school in the city. Similarly, participants having attended Christian, Muslim or Hindu managed schools could have diverse experiences as well due to the different religions and philosophies practised.

### **3.2.1 The Recruitment Process**

The young Indo-Fijian women were recruited from around the Eastern division (Suva, Nakasi and Duvuilevu) of Viti Levu in Fiji, which is the largest island in Fiji and home to a large majority of Fiji's population. The recruitment process started off with a purposive sampling technique, where the participants were deliberately chosen as their qualities were aligned with what I needed to know in order to respond to the research questions (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Following the purposive sampling technique, a convenience sampling technique was used to recruit additional participants to meet certain practical criteria, such as suitability of accessibility and proximity (Elfil & Negida, 2017). For this research, the selected areas were within a 5 to 20 km radius from my parents' home in Suva (where I stayed), therefore access to the participants was convenient and effective in studying in detail their sporting experiences and perceptions, and responding to the research questions.

During the ethics process the relevancy of the recruiters' work and the ethical considerations put in place to minimise the power imbalance and/or possible coercion were thoroughly explained to the committee and approved by the Western Sydney University HREC committee (refer to Appendix 1a). Two local recruiters (gatekeepers), whom I had previously assisted on separate occasions during social and community events associated with health and well-being and sports, were important mediators in allowing for sensitive and meaningful access of participants from this minority group (young Indo-Fijian women) for my research (Eide & Allen, 2005). Despite staying close by to these participants, I did not know them and being away in Australia for more than 10 years made it difficult for me to personally approach parents and/or participants. In the field, the potential ethical decisions that a researcher encounters during the development of a recruitment strategy include evaluating gatekeepers' motives, how routes of access affect research participation, and how the relationship between a gatekeeper and researcher is established and maintained (McAreavey & Das, 2013).

The gatekeepers were initially contacted via email for assistance as I was in Sydney and they were in Suva (Fiji). The first recruiter was a social committee president of a housing settlement (15 kilometres away from Suva) and the second recruiter was an academic at a local university in Suva. The recruiters were Indo-Fijian women, 40 to 45 years old, and were trustworthy people in their communities, making it easier for them to communicate with the parents and/or the participants and gain access.

To avoid participants feeling obliged to participate merely because someone of greater authority was recruiting (Powney & Watts, 2018), the gatekeepers relayed the research to the prospective participants (Heath, Charles, Crow & Wiles, 2007) in large groups. For instance, by putting up posters at the social community hall, and around the university campus. This meant that prospective participants could contact the recruiter(s) or researcher without any pressure. Furthermore, no persuasive words were used in the poster; only information about the project and what the participants would be required to do were included in simple everyday English. By mid-March, 2019, 12 Indo-Fijian young women were recruited. The recruiters explained the research project to the participants and handed them (or emailed) a copy of participant consent (refer to Appendix 1c), parents' consent for the 15 and 16 year olds (refer to Appendix 1d), and interview one and two guides (refer to Appendices 1g and 1h). Dates and convenient times for interview one were decided after the participants were contacted via email, phone call or text message. The signed consent forms were collected before the first interview commenced.

### **3.2.2 The Interview Process**

Out of the 12 participants, nine interviews were conducted at the homes of the participants as both the participants and their parents preferred the interview(s) to be done at their homes because of safety concerns. There was enough privacy as the interviews took place in an area of the house where there were no disruptions, thus the participants spoke freely. The first out of the three

participants who were interviewed in a public space was a tertiary student; she was interviewed at a coffee shop at her university campus. The second participant was interviewed at her work, in the office kitchen area. This participant had a full-time job, played hockey at club level and had training scheduled for almost every day after work, so her lunch break worked best for her. I was allowed into the office complex with a visitor's pass and no one's safety was compromised. The third participant, who was working, had an interview with me at a local university – in an area where students have group discussions and/or social meets. Since it was the weekend, the ambience was quiet as the campus was fairly empty. The participant and I were both alumni of this university and members of the university's Fitness Centre so we had access to the university's campus and the Fitness Centre.

I tried my best to ensure that participants did not feel obligated to participate in the research project – therefore before these young women had agreed to participate in the project it was imperative for me to explain to them the gist and purpose of the project, that is – why was I doing this research, what was I seeking to achieve and what was in it for the young Indo-Fijian women (Sinclair, 2004). Therefore, if/when the participant felt connected to the project and wanted their voice to be raised in terms of their sporting (and daily) experiences (which is the aim of the research), they agreed to participate. However, even if the participants had given (written) informed consent before the commencement of an interview, poetry workshop or observation, participants were asked again if they were willing to participate in the activity and were reminded that they were free to not answer a question, not participate in an activity, or stop the interview if they wanted to – without worrying about any consequences (Woodgate, Zurba & Tennent, 2017). I was serious about the rights of these young women to opt in and out of the research and respected the agency and choices of the research participants (Heath, Charles, Crow & Wiles, 2007).

The next section discusses in detail the ethnographic data collection methods that were used for this qualitative study.



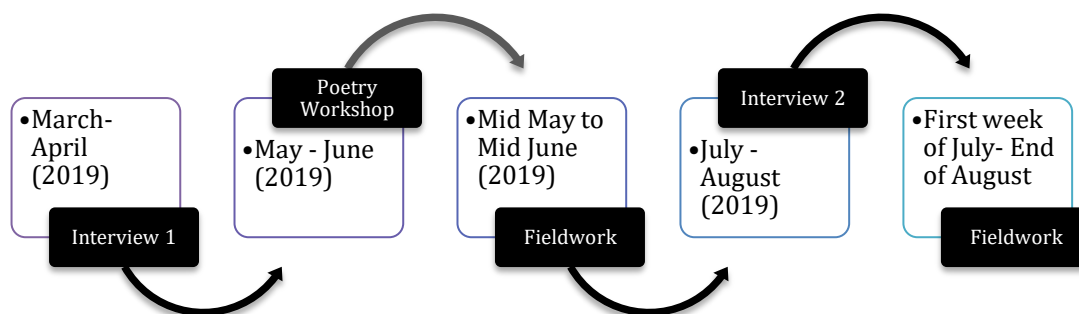
### **3.3 Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

This research employed ethnographic methods of data collection over a six-month period with a goal of not generalising beyond the selected participants to the population (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). The sampling techniques used (purposeful and convenient), and the sample size (12), played an important role in determining the adequacy of this time span to build rapport with the research participants, carry out the research activities (interviews, workshop and observations), and reach data and theoretical saturation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Furthermore, in regard to the number and length of observations and interviews, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations of persistent observation and prolonged engagement were followed. Collecting data for more than this period and with a larger group of participants living in similar geographical areas (in and around Suva) would have potentially risked informational redundancy (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

A qualitative study was apt to build a better understanding of the social and cultural contexts (Pink, 2009) of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. Data collection methods comprised semi-structured interviews via photo elicitation, poetry workshops and a second phase of semi-structured interviews, which were based on the free verses that participants wrote after the poetry workshop. All the interviews were narrative enquiries (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) where participants told their sporting stories from childhood to schooling days into adulthood. All interviews were audio recorded and conducted in English; all the participants spoke fluent English, as the medium of instruction in Fiji schools is English. Furthermore, there was a fieldwork component; the three participants who indicated that they played sports regularly were observed three times each (ranging from one to three hours – depending on the physical activity type). Therefore, in total nine observations were made. Fieldwork enabled the observation of participants in their own social context. When the field observations of participants were used alongside the other approaches, they provided various realities of participants' lived experiences and allowed the collection of holistic data (Williams, 2007).

**Figure 7 Timeline of Data Collection**



The methods used in the research project for data collection are discussed in detail in the following sections.

### **3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews via Photo Elicitation**

Interviewing is an essential tool in qualitative research and there are several methods and forms of interviews, which are structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, informal interviews, focus groups (Longhurst, 2003; Williams, 2007), and cultural and topical interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Semi-structured interviews sit in between structured interviews, which are more closed in nature, as the interviewer does not deviate from the prepared interview questions, and unstructured interviews where conversations are freer flowing and emergent, responding to general topics (Brown & Danaher, 2019). In a semi-structured interview setting, the researcher prepares a list of topics/themes that they want to explore in the conversation but is open to go off-topic (Longhurst, 2003). This mode of interviewing ensures that the questions provoke open responses from the participants, permitting the development of conversations in such ways that could not have been predictable when the interview schedule was being planned (Brown & Danaher, 2019).

Carrying out semi-structured interviews with my participants allowed stories of sporting experiences to unfold in a conversational manner from the photographs that the participants took, therefore offering participants the chance to explore issues that they felt were important. In this way

the participants told their stories and felt in control, shattering potential power imbalances (Longhurst, 2003; Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). Structured interviews would have been ‘too formal’ and uncomfortable, and risked the chance of the researcher appearing dominant and holding power (Powney & Watts, 2018). I had prepared a list of topics relevant to the research questions, which I wanted to explore during the interview. I subtly articulated some of the topics from my list alongside the participant’s narrative. I did not push for everything on the list, as I did not want to disrupt the flow of the conversation elicited by the photos. In hindsight, most of these topics from the list flowed in the conversations as the situation was such that once the participant displayed a photograph, she waited for me to ask some questions – this allowed me to nudge the participants towards some of the important themes/topics from my list. Furthermore, asking questions also meant that I was interested in their stories – this made the participants share even more.

McGowan (2018) notes that semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation interviews are helpful in research studies exploring sensitive topics, requiring participants to discuss sensitive information about their identities and interpersonal relationships. According to Silverman (2013) and McGowan (2018), successful semi-structured interviews help build crucial rapport while ensuring that topics of discussion do not go in all directions (Williams, 2007). Once initial rapport was built with the participants via casual conversations about my research project, sporting trajectory and experiences of growing up in Fiji, they opened up to me and spoke freely about their own sporting and life experiences during the interviews, consequently yielding comprehensive and meaningful data (Brown & Danaher, 2019; Williams, 2007). Furthermore, the open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews presented the possibility for participants to generate, challenge, clarify and elaborate on their understandings of their sporting experiences (Powney & Watts, 2018; Williams, 2007).

The first round of interviews was via photo elicitation (PEI); a methodological tool in the social sciences that is concurrent with documentary film, photo-essays, and video ethnography

(Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007; 2009; Torre & Murphy, 2015). In the age of digital media, PEIs have become cost efficient as participants can take photos on their own camera-enabled cellular phones, as opposed to purchasing cameras or having to develop physical prints (Torre & Murphy, 2015). For the PEIs, ethical considerations need to be well thought out (Meo, 2010) – therefore, I used the images only for elicitation purposes – participants’ privacy and rights were respected as the photos were merely showed to me during the interview and remained in their devices. PEIs help the researcher to explore the phenomenon under study deeply but can be more time consuming and demanding than traditional interviews as the researcher must allow adequate time for the participants to take pictures without them feeling pressured (Meo, 2010). For my research project, I had allowed two weeks for the participants to take photographs, and was flexible in case particular participants needed more time; thus, it was the participants who contacted me for an interview to be scheduled when they were ready with their photographs. The 6-month period of data collection was sufficient to conduct PEIs with the 12 participants.

Prior to interview one, all signed participant consent forms were collected (including parents’ consent for the 15 and 16-year-old participants); in addition, verbal consent for audio recording was taken prior to recording – and anonymity, confidentiality and the right of participants to withdraw at any time was guaranteed (Meo, 2010). Before moving on to the photos for discussion, a series of demographic questions was asked about the participant’s background to help me to learn more about their geographical and family background in Fiji, religion, type of school attended, caste, languages spoken, hobbies, work/tertiary background, and so forth (refer to Appendix 2). This data was tabulated and the abovementioned social markers were plotted against the narratives of the sporting experiences of the participants – highlighting the disparities and similarities among the participants. These markers of difference were important as they helped in understanding the various layers of intersectionalities at play as opposed to ‘gender’ alone, and provided a multi-focus lens and

flexibility in addressing the complexities (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) associated with Indo-Fijian women and sports experiences/participation in Fiji.

Upon recruitment, the participants were given Interview Guides and Information Sheets (refer to Appendices 1e to 1h), where parameters for taking pictures were set (Torre & Murphy, 2015). Participants were asked to take six to eight photographs on their mobile phone or other electronic devices, which related to their experiences/perceptions of sports/exercises/athleticism/physicality – previously and currently in their lives. The amount of instruction researchers give to participants depends on the participants and the breadth of data that the researchers desire (Torre & Murphy, 2015). Participants were advised that they could bring along and talk about pictures that had been taken in their childhood or at school, as these were important subjects for the research. The purpose of the photos in this research was mainly to help generate and facilitate discussions on gender, racial issues and sociocultural factors surrounding Indo-Fijian women's sporting agency and quests.

Sports is not a common topic amongst Indo-Fijian women (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, et al., 2020), and photo elicitation conjured information, feelings, and memories that were possible due to the photograph's particular form of representation (Harper, 2002). Had I used a structured schedule and steered the discussion, it would have prompted power imbalances potentially resulting in non-expanded responses (Brown et al., 2020; Leonard & McKnight, 2015). For example, if I had asked a participant a direct question like – 'what were some of your sporting experiences in primary school?' and if she responded with – 'I did not play much sports', my next question would be rather predictable, asking her why. Using photographs to reveal such discussions did not make me appear assertive. On the same note, if a participant brought a picture of an *iTaukei* male playing rugby (which most did), it not only opened doors to discussions on gender and race, but also about dominant sports discourse in Fiji. Out of the six to eight photographs taken, the participants had the

power/freedom to choose five that they wanted to talk about; consequently they drove the interview, and I only prompted subtle questions if the discussions went way off track from my research aims/questions.

The participants were given at least two weeks to take the photos, independently (Orellana, 1999; Prosser, 2007). Suggesting the number of photos ensured that the study was feasible within the proposed time frame (Torre & Murphy, 2015); it took four weeks to interview the 12 participants. Each interview lasted from 40 to 60 minutes depending on how vocal the participant was, the number of pictures they chose to speak about, responses when nudged with further questions, interest in the topic/subject (sports), and their personal experiences. During the PEIs, more open-ended questions were asked, seeking to explore what the world of sports/athleticism meant through the eyes of the participant, which was somewhat different to my own understanding and perceptions of the sporting stories associated with the photographs (Torre & Murray, 2015). During the interview, when participants picked a photo to show and discuss, the first thing that I asked was for them to explain what was happening in the photo and what it was about; this was asked despite the picture being visible to me. Not only did this allow me to record a physical description of the picture but also to hear/see the participants' perception(s).

The PEIs allowed participants' dimensions of experiences and meanings of sports, athleticism and physicality (that could have been ignored or taken for granted) to be discussed. It can be challenging to explain lived experiences, so photographs can be used to sustain thoughts, memories, feelings on past, present, and future (Pink, 2009; Woodgate, et al., 2017). The presence of the visual image provided a concrete focal point (Frith & Harcourt, 2007) from which the young Indo-Fijian women could expand on aspects of their experience that might otherwise have been inaccessible; this was useful in researching identity positions of these participants that are usually silent (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter & Phoenix, 2008).

Most participants took photographs of what was familiar to them (Leonard & McKnight, 2015) or socially desirable (Meo, 2010). The majority of the participants did not play rugby but most brought rugby related pictures and were rugby fans. In order to avoid the potential masking of participants' own sporting experiences, I had questions in the interview schedule to nudge them to open up about their feelings and experiences in relation to the pictures that they took, even if they were merely spectators. Furthermore, using PEIs also helped build good rapport (Harper 2002; Pang, 2018) with the 12 young Indo-Fijian girls – I could relate to some of the pictures they brought as I had occupied a similar space and/or experience. For example, a photograph of a netball team in a mixed racial school in Fiji featuring mostly *iTaukei* girls, or a picture of a group of young *iTaukei* boys playing rugby in a local park/ground. This highlighted common lived spaces and experiences between the participants and I, and the conversations could go deeper thus assisting in generating rich data (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Schwartz, 1989). Through the PEIs, the participants' sporting narratives materialised recurring subjects such as gender and racial associated stereotypes, body image, rugby sevens fandom, playing netball in primary school, patriarchal family, school PE lessons, male gaze, and religion.

### **3.3.3 Poetry Workshops**

The poetry workshops were carried out to equip the participants with basic free verse writing skills, which was necessary for the second phase of interviews. Ethnographers have used poetry workshops in English in Chinese universities, to explore bilingual creativity where students produced 'contact poetry' (Sui, 2015). Other qualitative research has used poetry workshops successfully with women with early-stage dementia, showing potential for enhancing their quality of life via writing poems (Petrescu, MacFarlane, & Ranzijn, 2014) and with cancer patients, encouraging expression of emotion to improve their emotional resilience and psychological welfare (Tegnér, Fox, Philipp & Thorne, 2009).

Free verses were employed for a few reasons; firstly, to obtain narratives of participants' lived experiences, which might be sensitive in nature. Secondly, the free verses would allow participants to portray feelings and emotions that might have been difficult to discuss/recall under pressure during the interview (Furman, 2004b; Furman, 2006a; Tegnér et al., 2009). Furthermore, introducing more structured forms of poetry might have killed the joy of writing and participants would have lost interest if the task became too challenging.

Ten of the participants were Hindus – these young women hail from a Vedic oral tradition, which comprises layers of hymns and other ritual utterances (Emeneau, 1958; Gerety, 2017; Sadarangani, 2004). Rich hymns and poetry form the two Sanskrit literary epics: the Mahabharata and the Ramayana have undoubtedly been orally transmitted from generation to generation via memorisation (Emeneau, 1958). Moreover, the Bollywood cinema is an integral part of Indians in the diaspora and is bedecked with songs, poetry, romantic lyrics, melodies and musicals (Lata, 2009; Mishra, 2002). Poetry is also a major component in the English curriculum in Fiji schools and being a high school English teacher for seven years in Fiji, I had observed the appreciation for literature/poetry lessons by Indo-Fijian girls.

Participant transcripts from interview one were handed out so that they could use them to write free verses out of topics discussed and this also became an innovative approach to member checking (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). The poetry workshop was also a great platform to observe participants interacting with each other (Pretzlik, 1994); this informal jovial environment helped build further rapport and encouraged the girls to make acquaintances, share their stories and ask questions.

Once the PEIs were transcribed, the first poetry workshop commenced in mid-May at a multi-purpose court, which I had hired, and which was located 15 kilometres outside of Suva. The court had a roof and was very spacious; seven participants attended the first workshop. All these participants lived in the same area so getting there was merely walking distance and quite convenient



– all the participants walked to the venue. The composition of the participants in this workshop was diverse with four high school students, one single working mother, one pregnant young woman (separated from her husband), and one married woman with two children. The atmosphere was positive and filled with laughter; the emotional energy and commitment of participants within the group was a measure of success (Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, & Bourgue, 2010). This session had three 15- to 16-year-olds, therefore their mothers came with them and hung around until the end of the session and lunch. Two of the participants brought their children with them. This was a great opportunity to observe the participants in their own social context with parents, children and other participants. In order to maintain this environment, I provided the participants with refreshments and lunch; these made the participants feel acknowledged for their contribution and connectedness to the research project, thus further solidifying the relationship between the participants and I. Providing lunch at such an event is culturally appropriate and somewhat expected in the Indo-Fijian community.

The five participants who were not part of the first workshop were accommodated later in another workshop. This group comprised two working women, two tertiary students and one high school student (who was dropped off and picked up by her father in a car). The workshop was held in an open space with tables and benches at the local university campus to which I had access. The workshop commenced at 10 am and was wrapped up before 12; coffee, cakes and savouries were provided and participants could eat as the discussions progressed, thus creating a relaxed atmosphere with no hierarchy (Johnson et al., 2010).

The duration of each workshop was approximately 60 minutes and all the writing and reading resources were provided (refer to Appendix 3a). The workshop entailed introductory ice breaking activities, followed by group and individual activities. In the workshop, I explained the four basic poetic devices (simile, metaphor, personification and alliteration). Participants then worked on writing their feelings in regard to a case study, which focused on challenging stereotypes about

soccer and marginalised women. For the extended lesson, participants were to write free verse(s), either based on transcripts from interview one (Reilly, 2013) or any other sporting experience. These written free verses were to be brought to interview two. Participant-voiced free verses (refer to Appendix 3) added emotional depth to the traditional qualitative data (Reilly, 2013). The produced free verses were complex, open to multiple interpretations and based on real sporting encounters of these young Indo-Fijian women.

### **3.3.4 Semi-structured Interview via Poetry Ethnography**

Arts-based research methods have been conducted with different fields of research (Biehl-Missal, 2015; Brady & Brown, 2013; Pink, 2009), including the social sciences (Blaisdell, Arnott, Wall & Robinson, 2019), health (Brady & Brown, 2013), elderly care (Huhtinen-Hildén, 2014), business (Homayoun, & Henriksen, 2018), refugee research (Lenette, 2019) and organisational research (Biehl-Missal, 2015). However, as far as my research went, there is no literature indicating these methods had previously been used with young girls in a Fijian (or South Pacific) context. Therefore, the uniqueness of these arts-based methods within this social context adds another layer of originality to this dissertation, and is essential to extend current understanding of the lived (sporting) experiences of young Indo-Fijian women and their relationship with sports in the Fijian context.

Previous research has noted that the advantages of using arts-based methods for data collection with marginalised groups, women and young people in need have outweighed the disadvantages (Blodgett, Coholic, Schinke, McGannon, Peltier & Pheasant, 2013; Coholic, 2011; De Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette & Boydell, 2017) and embrace emotional, sensory, embodied and imaginative ways of knowing, which leads to richer data collection and communication processes (Blodgett et al., 2013). Arts-based methods combine the researcher and participants' input (Prendergast, 2009) and generate and represent research findings in ways that differ from typical

academic writing (Biehl-Missal, 2015) where music, painting, drawing, poetry (in particular) and dance and movement have become valuable tools in qualitative research (Biehl-Missal, 2015; Pink, 2009).

Ethnographic poetics is a tool that allows participants to reflect concisely and accurately what they see, hear, think, and feel (Furman, Lietz & Langer, 2006). In the past two decades, poetry as a means of data collection (Furman, 2004) and re/presentation (Stenhouse, 2014) has been used in diverse fields. Some examples are Edwards and Weller (2012) producing I-poems from qualitative longitudinal interview data to explore change and continuity in a case study of young people's sense of self over time; Stenhouse (2014) via poetry understands the experience of being a patient on an acute psychiatric inpatient ward; Furman, Lietz and Langer (2006) employ the research poem and present powerful insights about the lived experience of social work clients. Using the research poem as a tool of data representation, Furman and Shukraft (2007) present an analysis of letters sent to President John F. Kennedy regarding the formulation of mental health policy during the early 1960s. Some research using poetry has also been done on the impact of cancer (Furman, 2004b), the experience of HIV care providers (Poindexter, 2002) and oppression and discrimination (Langer & Furman, 2004). Prendergast (2009) discusses different types of poetry, that is: researcher-voiced poetry, participant-voiced poetry, literature-voiced poetry and interpretive poetry. Different types of poetry have been used for data reduction and fresh insights by researchers (Furman & Shukraft, 2007; Langar & Furman, 2004; Unst, 2002).

Interview two was based on the free verses, which the young Indo-Fijian women wrote after the poetry workshop. The use of participant-voiced free verses has potential to invite readers, policy makers and other stakeholders to engage with the participants' experiences in a way that differs from presentation in the usual academic reporting style (Biehl- Missal, 2015; Stenhouse, 2014).

Expressing via free verses was apt for the participants as all of them were associated with Hinduism,

Christianity or Islam and had some familiarity with poetic religious prayers and songs/hymns passed on orally or learnt in school.

The participants wrote free verses on sporting experiences that focused on a particular sport, gender issues, racial disparity, body image, cat calling, school PE lessons, PE teachers, patriarchy and other sociocultural barricades/encouraging factors that they encountered. The length and style of the free verses each differed in some way; for example, some had rhyme schemes, rhetorical questions, figures of speech, and so forth. These free verses were the participants' stories and did not have conclusive endings, and were open to multiple interpretations (Denzin, 2014). The free verses were the gist of the discussion, with great focus on the subject, voices, emerging themes, emotions and rationale.

During interview two the participants were asked to read their free verses; 11 participants read their pieces aloud with much pride, however, one participant asked me to read instead, which I did. Participants were also asked to describe their participation experiences and views on the methods used in the research project. The 14 free verses written by the participants (one participant wrote three free verses and the rest wrote one each) (refer to Appendix 3c) had been de-identified then combined with the data from the PEIs, from which narratives were constructed and analysed in the Results and Findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

After interview two, all the interviews were transcribed and transcripts were emailed to each participant for member checking (Reilly, 2013). I was open to make changes if the participants felt that their views were misinterpreted or ambiguous; none of the participants requested any changes.

### **3.3.5 Fieldwork (Observation, Note taking and Recording)**

There is a lot that can be known outside the narrative, that is, in spending time with others who were just being there (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). In order to have a holistic view of the data collected via the poetry workshops, semi-structured interviews, and the written free verses, it was beneficial to observe the three participants who mentioned during interview one that they took part in

sporting/athletic activities, consistently. Participants were observed three times each from May to August 2019.

There are two types of researchers, the first who observes as an objective neutral observer, and the second who is a morally involved observer (De Laine, 2000; Guenther & Falk, 2007). The first participant played hockey at a club level and invited me to observe her hockey practices and a club level match. The second participant, who played netball for her school team, also played soccer and rugby with *iTaukei* neighbours in the weekend – she invited me to observe her weekend sports activities. In these two cases, I was researcher as observer (De Laine, 2000; Guenther & Falk, 2007) and was not an engaged participant (Guenther & Falk, 2007) for safety and practical reasons. My joining in to play would have disrupted the natural flow of their game and potentially have created some rift with the inclusion of a stranger. However, I was not detached and merely an objective neutral observer (De Laine, 2000; Guenther & Falk, 2007) as I was the main instrument of data collection (O’reilly, 2012); I engaged in chats with the team coaches and managers (hockey), participant(s) and other players when possible. The participants and I had already built a rapport and it was impossible for me to be aloof and detached; my emotions were attached. I had developed multiple roles in the field observations, that is – learner, friend and collaborator; I had created a friendship bond with the participants (De Laine, 2000). In the case of the third participant, who did bodybuilding and powerlifting, I was involved as researcher/learner/observer/gym buddy (friend) (De Laine, 2000). I was invited to observe her gym sessions and since I do weightlifting as well, and we were both attached to the same gym, I joined to train alongside her whilst observing her and got new insights on form and technique with body weight training.

Field notes were taken during observations, but I used my mobile phone for voice recording to capture dynamic conversations in the field by all participants including myself. There were no photographs or videos taken; this was in line with my ethics approval. The recordings (in English) were revisited and where necessary were transcribed later at the end of each day. Observations began

as openly as possible and then the focus shifted to gendered, racial and other sociocultural factors in the sporting arena. An ethnographical reflective diary was maintained and I wrote in it each time I had a field observation; it was worthwhile to note the patterns of behaviour of participants during my fieldwork. At the end of each week, I word-processed the handwritten diary entry on to my laptop.

The fieldwork component enabled me to observe the participants, relate my observations and make connections to the data gathered via the interviews, adding richness and depth to the data (Flick, 2002). For example, one of the participants whom I had observed playing hockey had stated in her first interview that she was oblivious to objectifying gazes and her body movement/image, and when she was on the hockey turf, she merely focused on her game. During a semi-final match, I witnessed this participant casually lift her top to wipe her face, which exposed her abdomen and undergarments. She was indifferent to the males, females and different races around her.

The next section gives an in-depth account of how the data collected via the four different means was analysed.

### **3.4 Analysis**

For this research project, I have employed thematic analysis, which is used across a range of epistemologies; this allowed for the identification, analysis and noting/reporting of visible patterns/themes from within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is commonly used as it allows for a wide variety of research questions and topics to be addressed (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Once relations between similar codes were found, they were combined to make categories from which emerging patterns were identified which led to the building of themes. Data analysis involves interpretation, and this affected my choice of representation of participant stories (Kim, 2016). Therefore, I weaved the participants' sporting experiences into wholesome non-fiction creative pieces with the aim of helping the reader develop an understanding of the meanings that the

participants gave to themselves, their surroundings, their lives, and their lived experiences (Kim, 2016).

Participants' data (stories) have been presented (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) in a way that is appropriate to the aim of this thesis – to raise the voices of Indo-Fijian women who are at the margins of sports and athletic participation in Fiji. Therefore, their voices (data) have been presented via non-fiction creative pieces (short stories, poems, song, one-act play and screen play) where their colloquial words and artistic writings have been employed throughout the data analysis chapters (4, 5 and 6), trying to create a space where the reader can literally hear these voices and experience what the participants have experienced too. This approach aims to create new spaces of power and new linguistic communities in the language that (young) Indo-Fijian women use to articulate their capacity to live in Fiji as social beings. Moreover, the non-fiction creative pieces are powerful as they give the readers a visual experience, like short films playing in their minds – as they read the scenes and activities described in the pieces, they also live and experience what the participants experience.

### **3.4.1 Data Coding**

I progressively transcribed the two sets of interviews after each interview was completed – this totalled approximately 20 hours of recordings. It took me two to three days for each interview, as I took this phase to absorb and immerse myself in the data as much as possible. Not only did this allow me to have fresh memories of the interviews but it also avoided the recordings piling up to become a tedious task later. All participants were assigned pseudo names; real names were not kept, noted or mentioned thenceforth. Fieldwork conversations were transcribed on a daily basis, for example, conversations happening around me (coaches, managers and other hockey players) whilst I observed my participant who played hockey. Moreover, some conversations took place around the rugby field, where one of my participants played rugby socially. Transcribing field conversations on a regular basis enabled better analysis as the expressions, tone and demeanour of the

participants/conversationalists were fresh in my mind and I was able to portray the close observation that transcribing entails, which led to noticing unanticipated phenomena (Bailey, 2008). For example, one coach who was a mixed-race male and could speak the *iTaukei* language only spoke in English, even to *iTaukei* players.

Welsh (2002) describes coding as a qualitative data analysis process which comprises time and creativity. A code in qualitative inquiry is a word, phrase, or sentence that lessens the information without losing the significance of the first transcript and recognised themes (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Welsh, 2002). I printed out and bound transcripts of both interviews one and two (24 transcripts), the free verses written by the participants, and the field notes. I initially spent two weeks just reading through the data without making any notes or attempting to interpret the data (Liamputtong, 2009); my mind was already connecting what I was reading on the printouts to the actual interviews and ethnographic observations. Upon carefully reading and reviewing the data before starting the formal coding, I could not help but notice a few themes or trends and patterns already shaping up in my mind and establishing an initial conversation with my theoretical background (Saldaña, 2021).

Following this, I spent another week re-reading the data and allowed stories to form and be created, followed by classifying the data into codes (Welsh, 2002) using coloured highlighters (Liamputtong, 2009). When I began the actual coding I had some codes already in mind and was looking for other subjects and themes that were unexpected and arose out of the data. ‘Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act’ (Saldaña, 2021, p. 4), consequently the bound printout of transcripts and six different coloured highlighters (yellow, turquoise, pink, blue, green and red) became my companions to coffee shops, beaches, parks, and other tranquil environments where the mind could indulge, soak and communicate with the data. At this stage, I was doing a combination of open (descriptive) and axial coding (with more focus on the latter), that is, moving beyond the descriptive to analytically labelling the sentences and/or phrases line by line (Scott &



Medaugh, 2017). This was time consuming but I enjoyed the process and it helped to build a detailed structured conceptual data model (Khandkar, 2009).

The different coloured highlighters were used to categorise the data into subjects and themes related to the research questions (Webb, 1999; Welsh, 2002; Basit, 2003; Stuckey, 2015). Once I marinated myself fully in the data, I summarised the highlighted subjects/topics and descriptions, which nuanced emerging themes – these themes, I then translated onto an Excel sheet (Charmaz, 2006), where data coded in a particular colour was grouped into a particular theme (please refer to Appendix 3b). The greater focus on axial coding offered a framework, which allowed me to amalgamate and organise data into sensible categories and sub-categories (for chapter headings and sub-headings) once the themes were identified (please refer to Table 1) (Scott & Medaugh, 2017).

***Table 1 Data Analysis – Results and Findings chapter themes***

<b>Chapter Title</b>	<b>Chapter Themes and Sub-Themes</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Chapter 4</b></p> <p>Gender Constructions in Indo-Fijian Women’s Sport</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A triple layer analysis of the stories – Doing/undoing gender</li> <li>2. The body in the Indo-Fijian culture: from abject bodies to bodies that matter</li> <li>3. Gender power tensions and class</li> <li>4. ‘Tomboys/masculinities/emphasized femininity’</li> <li>5. Body image and the extended body</li> <li>6. Participants’ lived experiences of gendered and racialised segregation in sports</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Chapter 5</b></p> <p>Sociocultural Influences of Indo-Fijian</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A math of geography – access to sporting resources and individuals</li> </ol>

<p>Women's Sport Participation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Ethno-culturally inclusive and equitable PE lessons and de-motivating (PE) teachers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Lack of role models</li> <li>2.2 Participation vs. competition in Fiji schools</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Cultural and gendered appropriateness of sports for Indo-Fijian women <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 The married and divorced women – birds with clipped wings</li> <li>3.2 The spinsters – free birds but not yet an eagle</li> <li>3.3 The mother – birds with parental wings</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Racial disparities and identity crises in the diaspora</li> <li>5. Segregation of Indo-Fijian girls/women from team sports <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5.1 The 'tomboy', the 'temptress' and the 'butter fingers' epitomes; the never-ending paradox</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>Chapter 6</b></p> <p>Pleasures and Benefits of a Sporting Life: Indo-Fijian Women's Experiences</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Athletic Indo-Fijian women and gendered and racial subversiveness in the Fijian context</li> <li>2. Athletic Indo-Fijian women – Space invaders</li> <li>3. The benefits and pleasures of doing sports: Indo-Fijian women's positive experiences in invading Fijian sports spaces <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Motivations towards sports participation</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Sports as a tool for and physical and mental health &amp; fitness and building racial gaps</li> </ol>

The printed version of my data with highlights in different colours worked well for me as I grasp best when materials are visual and tangible (Liamputtong, 2009). The participant demographics were saved alongside their other data on the same Excel sheet; this allowed me to constantly see which participant was sharing what story as I read and made sense of the data.

### 3.4.2 Analysing the Data

When conducting data analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis and interprets codes and themes by de/controlling the data (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). A thematic analysis was used which enabled me to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report (patterns of meaning) themes found within my qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identified themes related to the literature where in some aspects it agreed, and other aspects disagreed. Furthermore, in arenas where there was a dearth of literature, the themes helped fill in some of the existing gaps whilst responding to the research questions, which are discussed in the ‘Data Analysis – Results and Findings’ chapters (4, 5 and 6).

In the second step, I took the role of storyteller. I amalgamated the participants’ data and created seven non-fiction creative pieces, which were based on the themes derived from the thematic analysis. Story telling is done on a daily basis in the process of making sense of who we are and what we experience (Dowling, Fitzgerald & Flintoff, 2012). In order to create the non-fiction creative pieces, I pasted the printed out coloured Excel sheets (Appendix 3b) all around the walls of my workstation; I then immersed myself with each theme/subject (colour) and participants’ personal narratives (McIlroy & Storbeck, 2011) and began playing the storyteller by weaving the different personal narratives of a number of participants into seven potential creative pieces that reflected the combined different voices of these young women (Quarmby, Sandford, Hooper, & Duncombe, 2021). Events were selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful into seven non-fiction creative pieces (Riessman, 1993) and presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Chapters 4 and 5 each have two non-fiction creative pieces, and Chapter 6 has three. Particular participants were chosen for each chapter and theme depending on their demographics and how their personal narratives intertwined with the themes discussed in that chapter. For example, the first narrative (*Unpermitted Passion*) in Chapter 4 used three participants’ data (Ashriya, Meena, Anshu) because they attended the same high school and their personal narratives (semi-structured interviews) revealed their

different experiences with netball, soccer and rugby during PE lessons and in school competitions. The poem (*Only Female in the Room*) crafted in Chapter 4, used Sapna's data as her experiences revealed a unique (sporting) trajectory from school to adulthood; from being a shy and clumsy kid and never participating in sports to studying technical subjects, becoming a network engineer, doing weight lifting and living with her Muslim boyfriend despite hailing from the highest Hindu caste. The similarities and contrasts allowed me to explore several layers within the themes in this chapter.

Similarly, in Chapter 5, the four participants that were chosen for the one-act play (*Tomboy with Butter Fingers*) had all finished high school; they were a mix of full-time working women who were either married, divorced or single, (one) stay at home mum, (two) women who had kids and (two) young women doing tertiary level studies. Therefore, their data was rich in terms of the sociocultural factors and other barricades they faced in their everyday and sporting agencies. Fanny was selected for the poem (*Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*) in Chapter 5 as her data brought a different gendered perspective with her pregnancy, separation from her husband and being a victim of domestic violence. Furthermore, the different influences of the males in her (sporting) life and body image as a dancer and soccer/rugby player (in primary school) were essential for this chapter. The final chapter focuses on the theme of athletic Indo-Fijian women who are subversive (Butler, 2009) and invade Fijian sporting spaces (Puwar, 2004), which are exclusive to *iTaukeis*. These athletic women rise beyond societal (gender and racial) norms and play sports, experiencing the positive benefits and pleasures that sports have to offer. Therefore, in Chapter 6, I have employed the data of four girls (Dipika, Meena, Sania and Ariel), who participate in sports and physical activities consistently, and their data revealed them rising beyond hurdles of gender, race, class and challenging the dominant Fijian sports discourse and stereotypes associated with Indo-Fijian girls/women and sports in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020). I used Dipika's data to create a short story (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*), Meena's data to weave a screenplay (*The Serevi MaGiC*), and Sania and Ariel's data to craft a song (*Big Sister – small sister*).

The interlaced non-fiction creative pieces allowed me to make visible to the reader the range of gendered, racial and sociocultural sporting experiences of young Indo-Fijian women in Fiji and how some of them manage to rise beyond such marginalisation. Furthermore, the direct speeches in the non-fiction creative pieces are polished up direct quotes from participants' transcripts and/or free verses. Such 'narratives recognise the role emotions play in how we come to understand our worlds, in addition to cognitive ways of knowing' (Dowling et al., 2012, p. 3). Collaboratively presenting the participants' thematically analysed data into non-fiction creative pieces enabled me to plot similar and different perspectives of the participants. The themes were analysed using the reviewed literature and poststructuralist theories – gender theories (Butler, 1990; Connell 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), Puwar's (2004) concept of space invaders collaborated with Pavlidis' (2018) notion of the importance of including geographical spaces (which comprise physical, cultural and affective atmospheres and textures), Butler's (2011) concept of 'subversive bodies', and Critical Race Theory (Chadderton, 2013; Solorzano, 2001).

### **3.5 Methodological Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research tradition continues to gain popularity, and it is fundamental that it be done in a thorough and orderly way to create critical and helpful results (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). In qualitative research, terms such as validity and reliability are deemed inappropriate, with preference for terms such as 'trustworthiness', 'rigorousness', or 'quality' of the data. Therefore, it is important that qualitative research and data analysis are carried out in a thorough and transparent manner to be considered worthy by readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2019). For my research project to be accepted as trustworthy, I demonstrate in this section the precise, consistent and exhaustive manner in which the data was handled – by discussing in detail the

recording, storing, coding and analysing of data; therefore providing enough details and enabling the reader to determine whether the process was credible (Nowell et al., 2017).

For my research project, I carried out prolonged engagements and observations with the participants over a 6-month period, using arts-based methods to collect data where each participant was interviewed twice, adding to the richness and thickness of my data. All participants were observed during the poetry workshop and the three identified athletic participants were observed three times each for one to three hours whilst performing their sporting agencies. The latter provided the opportunity to converse with coaches and managers, other team members, friends, and supporters. Both interview transcripts were given to the participants for member checking (Reilly, 2013); I was open to making any changes if the participants felt there was a need. Before the second interview, I had revisited transcripts from interview one, and asked participants some repeated questions from interview one in order to eliminate ambiguity and ensure that I had understood the participants' perspective properly before making any analysis. In terms of ethical considerations in analysing participants' narratives, the moral responsibility of the researcher is paramount as s/he ventures to pen the social realities of the participants, which is interpreted with the help of theory (Dowling et al., 2012).

During data collection, I recorded detailed accounts of dates, times and venues for the interviews and poetry workshops. I also updated my journal after each interview, workshop and field observation on the same day when occurrences were still fresh in my mind, ensuring that journal entries and results were not a fabrication of my imagination. I have indicated the rationale for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study (Koch, 1994), so the readers can comprehend how the narratives were constructed and thematically analysed.

Using participants' stories to create holistic narratives, I had to show that the data/stories collected were logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Tobin & Begley, 2004). To achieve this, I used MS Word, MS Excel and hard copies of the interviews to code the data into themes/subjects

before constructing non-fiction creative pieces on the sporting perceptions and experiences of the young Indo-Fijian women. Being present in person on site for all the interviews, being the main tool in listening to and reporting/representing the young Indo-Fijian women's narratives/voices, by keeping records of the raw data, field notes, transcripts, participant free verses, activities at the poetry workshops, and keeping a reflexive journal, collaboratively helped me to weave participants' personal narratives into rounded authentic creative non-fiction pieces (Dowling et al., 2012). I recognise that the participants' storytelling and my creating of non-fiction creative pieces from that and the analysis of their stories involved choices by them and by me – choices about what aspects of stories to tell or omit and which pieces to emphasise or to downplay (Carson, Chabot, Greyson, Shannon, Duff & Shoveller, 2017).

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has shed light on the methodological and theoretical roots of this research project. The selected research paradigm within the 6-month time frame was feasible and culturally appropriate in understanding the sporting pursuits of the 12 young Indo-Fijian women in Fiji.

The chapter began with an overview of an ethnographical research design followed by a detailed account of who the research participants were and how they were chosen and recruited. Subsequently, there was a comprehensive discussion on the data collection methods employed with a sub-section devoted to each method followed by a section detailing how the collected data was used to produce authentic non-fiction creative pieces. Succeeding this section, was an explanation on how the narratives (non-fiction creative pieces) were analysed. Finally, measures taken in regard to the methodological trustworthiness of this research and the moral responsibilities of the researcher as a storyteller were discussed in depth.

The next three chapters present the analysis of the data (results and findings) of this research project. They focus on the non-fiction creative pieces, which were created from the participants' narratives; these have been categorised into themes and presented via three different chapters.

# Chapter 4 Gender Constructions in Indo-Fijian Women's Sport

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter employs CRT and a non-binary view of gender (Butler, 1990; 2011) to explore gender constructs, which are intertwined with social issues (race/ethnicity and physicality) that impact Indo-Fijian women in Fiji's sporting scenes, from grassroots everyday sporting and physical activity to school team sporting agencies. It also investigates how Indo-Fijian women make meaning of their physicality and gender in sport. The chapter responds to the two research questions:

1. How do Indo-Fijian women perceive and make meaning about their physicality and gender in sport?
2. How do local and global social constructs of gender impact young Indo-Fijian women's sports participation in Fiji?

Indo-Fijians are descendants of indentured labourers and have a sense of belonging with land, in Fiji (Ali, 2004). However, Indo-Fijians are still perceived as *vulagis* (Naidu, 2008) and this is reflected via the four Fijian coups (in the past 40 years) which were stirred by racism (Teaiwa, 2008). In the colonial and postcolonial political trajectory of Fiji, Indo-Fijians have been positioned as political and sociocultural subordinates by the colonisers and later the natives (Sugden et al., 2020). In terms of physicality and sports, Indo-Fijian women are considered most inferior (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020; Teaiwa, 2005, 2008). The national sport in Fiji is rugby, and for the women, netball; all the players in the women's national rugby and netball teams are *iTaukeis*, in spite of Indo-Fijian women making up approximately 34% of the country's female population (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2017).



This research has elicited me to weave the participants' data (direct words) into non-fiction creative expressions in order to potentially present the stories of the participants from a different gendered, historical and racialised angle. This chapter begins with a short story, which is based on the data of three participants – Ashriya, Meena, and Anshu – who were 15 to 18 years old (in 2019) and attended the same high school. Following this, the sporting and gender experiences of Sapna (24-year-old network engineer and a keen weightlifter/gym goer), is presented via a poem. As detailed in Chapter 3, these two non-fiction creative pieces are weaved to evoke, and make visible to the reader, the range of gendered and racial sporting experiences of young Indo-Fijian women in Fiji.

There are similarities and differences between the four participants in this chapter. All participants are Indo-Fijian young women (15 to 25 years old), born and living in Fiji, and are Hindus. The participants' mother tongue is Fiji-Hindi – a minority language that derives from Hindi and is seen by the outside world as a coined language – one that is not proper (Balram, 2019). The girls speak fluent English (the medium of instruction in Fiji schools is English) and they understand standard Hindi due to the influence of Bollywood films and participation in religious activities/events. Ashriya and Meena come from poor families whereas Anshu and Sapna (whose parents run small businesses) come from richer families. Moreover, the caste system of Hinduism provides for the ordering of groups in society (Cox, 1948). Accordingly, Ashriya belongs to the Kshatriya<sup>10</sup> caste, Sapna is Brahmin<sup>11</sup>, and Meena and Anshu were not aware of their castes. Not knowing one's caste, especially amongst the younger generation, is not peculiar in the Indo-Fijian society as the caste system started fragmenting when indentured labourers started intermingling with each other when brought to Fiji (Lal, 1983). Moreover, Sapna comes from a small town from Vanua Levu<sup>12</sup> and had only moved to Suva for tertiary studies and lived with her boyfriend. The other three

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<sup>10</sup> The warriors – the second highest in the Hindu caste/social class.

<sup>11</sup> The priests – the highest in the Hindu caste/social class.

<sup>12</sup> The second largest island of Fiji. Located 64 kilometres to the north of the larger Viti Levu.

young women had merely occupied geographical spaces on the outskirts of Suva, where Ashriya and Anshu lived with their nuclear families and Meena lived with her paternal aunt. Given the above similarities and differences it is evident that each participant makes visible by her story a unique gendered and racial experience in the sporting platforms of Fiji. Furthermore, their (sporting) experiences would be different to women in other societal contexts such as women living in the Global North or their privileged *iTaukei* counterparts.

The evidence for the two non-fiction creative pieces was derived from the data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, participant written free verses and poetry workshops and field observations) described in detail in Chapter 3. The photographs, participant written free verses, interview data and ethnographic notes were read and re-read for a few weeks, enabling me to immerse in the data, scrutinise it and empathise with the lived experiences of my participants. In this process, I was affected by their experiences in relation to gender and racial issues in sports, and thus weaved the two non-fiction creative pieces. In order to understand the oppressive aspects of Indo-Fijians in Fiji (Fay, 1987; Teaiwa, 2008), and how this has impacted Indo-Fijian women's sports participation, I further explored the themes relating to the research questions. Then, I analysed the non-fiction creative pieces using poststructuralist gender theories (Butler, 1990; 2011; Connell, 1987; 1995; 2009; Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Chadderton, 2013).

Chapter 4 aims to raise the voices of Indo-Fijian women who are at the margins of sports and athletic participation in Fiji. The tenet of counter-storytelling of CRT acknowledges that the unique perspective, experiences and voices of the marginalised 'other' are legitimate, apt and critical to understanding, analysing and improving racial subordination (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). In order to respect the voices of the participants, their colloquial words and artistic writings were employed throughout this chapter, trying to create a space where the reader can literally hear these voices and experience what the participants have experienced too. The non-fiction creative pieces refrain from

employing the participants' language in isolation and presents their daily English language as influenced by the historical, social and political conditions in the Fijian context, thus allowing the power of minority languages in the modern world to be explored (May, 2006). It re-emphasises the importance of minority groups being able to enjoy their own culture, practise their own religion, and use their 'own language' (Hastings, 1988, p. 19). Therefore, weaving the voices of these four participants together potentially creates new spaces of power and new linguistic communities – that is, how the current generation of young Indo-Fijian(s) (women) articulate their capacity to live in Fiji as social beings.

The following segment begins with the short story, *Unpermitted Passion*, which is written in the third person with direct speech; this gives the short story a natural flow and realistic everyday Indo-Fijian flavour. Most importantly, *Unpermitted Passion* brings together significant themes such as race, racism, gender masculinity, (Indo-Fijian and Fijian) emphasized femininity, doing/undoing gender, the extended body and body image; the intersection of these themes, analysed through the intersectional lenses discussed earlier, highlight the conditions and struggles of young Indo-Fijian women in their daily sporting activities.

Following the short story is a five-stanza poem, which has a regular meter, and rhyme scheme of *aabbccdde*. The poem also employs some crude language – this was necessary to reflect the enthusiastic way in which Sapna spoke (she occasionally swore). Furthermore, using rhyme and regular meter leads to heightened aesthetic appreciation, and emotions are more positively perceived and felt (Obermeier, Menninghaus, Von Koppenfels, Raettig, Schmidt-Kassow, Otterbein & Kotz, 2013). These techniques also allowed me to highlight the themes of body image, patriarchy, emphasized femininity and gender relations in the Indo-Fijian community, and reveal how Indo-Fijian women make meaning of their physicality and gender in sport.

Each non-fiction creative piece has a preceding segment explaining the research context in depth. Following the two non-fiction creative pieces is a discussion section which unpacks the data,

unveiling the ‘intersectionalities’ that influence and create their embodied gendered context/experiences. The chapter ends with a concluding segment, which summarises the key findings, and critical analysis of the chapter.

## 4.2 Short Story Research Context

I produced *Unpermitted Passion*, using three Hindu girls’/women’s (Ashriya, Meena and Anshu’s) data. These girls attended (in 2019) the same Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic high school, which is located about 15 kilometres outside of Suva. This narrative has carefully weaved the isolated sporting experiences and perceptions of the three participants and their families and friends into a holistic picture/story. The gendered and racial incidents, characters and settings are real; apart from pseudonyms and some crafted scenes to bring the participants’/characters’ stories together, no other aspect has been fabricated.

The first participant, Ashriya, was 15 years old, in Form 3 (equivalent to Year 9 in Australian education) and the second eldest child in a family of four children. Economics was her favourite subject; she took part in school oratories and was placed in the top 10 in her class (academically); and she loved playing netball and singing. Ashriya and her family struggled financially; her father was a taxi driver and the sole breadwinner. The family of eight (including grandparents) lived in a one-bedroom house in a squatter settlement. Both the interviews with Ashriya took place at the social committee president’s house, as Ashriya’s house was overcrowded. For the first interview Ashriya came in her school uniform, looking very smart and eager. She was vocal and passionate about sharing her sporting and life experiences as the theme of women and sports intrigued her. Ashriya had gone to the extent of borrowing her father’s smart phone to take pictures. The first interview via photo elicitation lasted for 50 minutes and interview two (via ethnographic poetics) lasted for 40 minutes. Ashriya was curious and questioned why I chose this research area – this gave me the opportunity to talk about my sporting background and further improved my rapport with her.

During the poetry workshop, Ashriya was eager to participate in activities and chat with the other participants.

The second participant, Meena, was 18 years old and repeating Form 6 (equivalent to Year 12 in Australian education). Meena was a below average student (academically) and played netball for the school's Under 19 Team; she loved sports and reading. Meena was the eldest in her family followed by a brother and a sister. Her father had passed away a year ago, and her mother worked as a sales representative. Meena had been staying with her paternal aunty (where the interviews took place) for several months, as the facilities there were better for her studies. The first interview lasted for about 40 minutes and the second for about 30 minutes. Meena was a shy girl and spoke very softly; at times it was hard to understand what she was saying. She would give one-word answers and needed lots of nudging with questions; she barely maintained eye contact. Therefore, it was worthwhile for me to observe Meena during the fieldwork when she played rugby with the neighbouring *iTaukei* boys and girls. A different side of this young girl spurted out; so much energy and passion on the field, not a care in the world as to how she looked or who was watching.

The third participant, Anshu was 16 years old and in Form 5 (equivalent to Year 11 in Australian education); she was very passionate about her academic work. Anshu topped her class and her favourite subject was Economics; her goals were to finish her final year of high school and pursue a bachelor's degree. Anshu's father owned a small transport business and both she and her younger sister had access to laptops and smart phones. Anshu had no interest in playing sports but enjoyed watching televised coverage of the Fiji Sevens Team playing; she adored Bollywood movies, reading and studying. She also went for walks and did yoga with her mother and sister. During the interview, Anshu was bold and vocal. The first interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and the second one 25 minutes. During the poetry workshop Anshu got along well with the girls and spoke mostly about school, movies, boys and songs.

The next section tells the story of Ashriya, Meena and Anshu and their sporting experiences in school and in their community.

#### 4.2.1 Unpermitted Passion

Ashriya was running late – her watch seemed to race faster than the bus that she was on. She had to help her mother make *rotis*<sup>13</sup> and her *aji*<sup>14</sup> made sure that Ashriya was up before the sun. She felt so tired; it wasn't easy sharing a small bed with her two younger sisters. Most mornings her body felt as twisted as *jalebi*<sup>15</sup>, unfortunately the feeling was not as sweet. Since their house had only one bedroom, her *aji* and mother slept on a mattress in the same room as the girls. *Aji*'s snoring was as irritating as the background sounds of Bollywood<sup>16</sup> films' fight scenes. The three men of the house – *aja*<sup>17</sup>, her father and Rahul, her elder brother, slept on mattresses in the lounge area, which were cleared off in the morning. It was a crafty affair if one of the females had to go to the toilet in the middle of the night; stepping in between the breathing corpses and reaching the toilet before a pissing disaster was an art that Ashriya and her sisters had mastered. This family of eight lived like sardines in a can.

Ashriya dreamt of getting her family out of poverty and making her parents proud. Her father worked two shifts driving a taxi; his lone income wasn't enough but he was a hardworking man and continued to provide for his family. He was quite strict with the girls and constantly reminded Ashriya to set good examples for her younger sisters. The girls were programmed not to wear short and skimpy clothes and not to be friendly with boys. Doing well in school, staying vegetarian on

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<sup>13</sup> Fiji Indian flat bread.

<sup>14</sup> Paternal grandmother.

<sup>15</sup> A popular Indian sweet made by deep-frying flour batter in pretzel shapes then soaked in sugar syrup.

<sup>16</sup> The Indian film industry.

<sup>17</sup> Paternal grandfather.

Mondays and Fridays, doing their *puja*<sup>18</sup> and helping their mother and *aji* were their conventional mantras. Ashriya didn't have much interaction with her father; there was a hierarchy to follow when it came to solving social problems. For instance, if Ashriya had to vent about her friends or a teacher, her sisters who were 13 and 12 years old, would suffice. If it were the community boys catcalling, then her mother would involve her elder brother, Rahul – a boy having a word with the boys in this matter seemed apt. If the matter was more serious and needed an experienced person, then *aji* would step in. Her father was never directly approached by the girls and *aja* was a 'no go zone'. Their *aji* and mother after all were teenagers back in the '60s and '90s, respectively – what could have possibly changed in 2019? *Aji*, who only went up to class 6<sup>19</sup>, had one solid solution for school related issues – shackle the girls' speech and movement as much as possible with fabricated examples of female deities from the Hindu epics.

Had school fees and bus fares not been free for students in Fiji, Ashriya and her sisters would definitely be staying home and helping with the cooking and cleaning. Not only did this fuel Ashriya to thrive in exams but also to jump at every opportunity that was presented her way – from oratory to netball. Just a couple of weeks ago, she had valiantly joined the girls to try soccer during their Physical Education (PE) class. It was sad that one of her classmates had fallen and twisted her ankle. Ashriya wasn't sure what was worse, Shiela twisting her ankle or the boys teasing her for her clumsiness the entire week. Navin, the class frontrunner would awkwardly fall on the floor mimicking Shiela's fall – leaving the rest of his boy band chuckling. The fall of Shiela led to the premature abortion of girls' soccer. 'Girls just lack the skills to maintain their balance and play soccer,' Master Gopal<sup>20</sup> had remarked. The boys, on the other hand, continued playing soccer during PE. Ashriya had watched them play several times and thought that soccer was rough and not a female domain; she was content with the two loves of her schooling life – Netball and Economics.

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<sup>18</sup> A prayer performed in the morning by Hindus to offer devotional worship to one or more deities.

<sup>19</sup> Year 6.

<sup>20</sup> Indo-Fijian male PE teacher.

It was the netball trials today and Ashriya was desperately vying for the position of Centre for the school's Under 15 team. There were four streams of Form 3, and apart from her, three other *iTaukei* girls were keen for this position. The school approximately comprised 80% Indo-Fijians, 15% *iTaukeis* and 5% mixed/other races. Most of the *iTaukei* boys and girls made it into the school's sports teams if they desired to play, which most did. The *iTaukei* boys mostly played rugby and the Indo-Fijian boys preferred to play soccer. Everyone in Fiji loves watching rugby and no one really knew why the Indo-Fijian boys were uninterested in playing rugby. Perhaps their parents stopped them or they were scared to play the physical game with the big *iTaukei* boys. Only a very few *iTaukei* boys played soccer so Indo-Fijian boys populated the school's soccer teams. As for netball, that was the only team sport for the girls and Ashriya had to fight for her position against much taller and bigger *iTaukei* girls. Ashriya had been training hard after school with her teammates. She even went to the extent of practising passing and catching skills with her sisters using the pink plastic ball their mother had bought for them last Christmas.

Ashriya glances at her watch and wishes she had a mobile phone so she could inform Master Gopal that she was running a little late, but then, unlike her brother, she was not allowed to have a mobile phone or go out at night. Her *aji* never failed to remind her that she was a girl and MUST listen to her parents and elders for her own good. She had questioned her *aji* and mother several times but never got any REAL answers so accepted these restrictions as concerns for her safety.

The bus halted and a few students from Ashriya's school hopped in. Anshu and Meena, who were closely acquainted with Ashriya, noisily made themselves comfortable in the vacant space near her. Indo-Fijians attending the same school and living in the same area would DEFINITELY know each other. The community was close knit with high potential of being distantly related if the biological math during a *kava*<sup>21</sup> drinking session smoothly added up. The girls greeted Ashriya and happily sat beside her.

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<sup>21</sup> A traditional Fijian drink used in social settings, which is extracted from *Piper methysticum*, a plant native to the western Pacific islands.



‘How is the exam prep going?’ Anshu, who always topped her class, enquired.

‘Going well but for now I am focused on the netball trials,’ Ashriya responded.

Meena got really excited by Ashriya’s response and swiftly added that she was selected for the school’s Netball Team again for the fifth consecutive year, some achievement indeed! Ashriya deemed that Meena was an embodiment of the goddess *Durga*<sup>22</sup> and imagined her having several hands, fighting her way through the many hurdles that Indo-Fijian girls encounter. This gave Ashriya so much hope; if Meena could do it, so could she. Meena was extremely passionate about sports and not only did she play for the school’s netball team, but she also played soccer with Indo-Fijian boys after school, and rugby with *iTaukei* youths in her neighbourhood without her mother’s knowledge. She could easily calculate the speed of a ball coming her way in any sport but she couldn’t do the same with a math equation. Ashriya’s eager questions cascaded, there was so much she wanted to know.

‘Are your parents okay with you playing netball?’ Ashriya hurriedly enquired.

‘They are, my mum sometimes comes to cheer for me and tells me that I must win,’ she responded laughingly.

‘That is wonderful, Meena.’

‘I do wish I was a boy though,’ Meena added.

‘Why?’ Anshu jumped in with urgency.

‘I’m not allowed to play with boys or at night but my younger brother comes home around dinner time after playing soccer,’ Meena sadly responded.

‘Boys are lucky, Rahul gets so much freedom even when he is good for nothing,’ Ashriya thoughtfully added.

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<sup>22</sup> Hindu goddess of war whose mythology centres around combating evils and demonic forces that threaten peace, prosperity and the power of good over evil.

‘My father never liked my netball uniform, found the dress too short; he would have been happy if I played in a *ghagra*<sup>23</sup>,’ Meena added lightly.

‘I can’t wait to be selected for the school team,’ Ashriya quickly added.

Anshu, who felt left out of the conversation, interrupted the two girls and started telling them about her PE class – when Master Rusi<sup>24</sup> had asked the girls to play soccer and the boys to try out netball.

Ashriya couldn’t contain her excitement and rushed her query.

‘So how did the boys perform?’

‘Initially they were shy and refused to play then Master Rusi joined to encourage them.’

‘I would like to see boys play netball and that was really nice of Master Rusi,’ Meena complimented.

‘We had a great time laughing at the boys, they looked ungraceful when trying to maintain their balance,’ Anshu added playfully.

‘Why laugh?’ Ashriya probed.

‘They laugh and pass bad comments to us so it was good for them to get a taste of their own medicine,’ Anshu replied.

Meena found it hard to imagine boys playing netball in a netball dress. She wondered how it was different from her wearing jeans and shorts. She didn’t like being called a tomboy and despite adoring her tartan shirts and jeans, she forced herself to wear dresses and skirts during social outings to hide the only way that she knew to walk, which apparently was like a boy. Meena shakes off these thoughts and excitedly recollects the boys vs. girls soccer they played during PE a week ago. She eagerly tells the girls how she had scored a goal and that too when the goalie was a boy. The boys had teased Shiv saying he had no balls, as he couldn’t stop a ball kicked by a girl. Shiv for the first time had felt how girls felt when the boys teased and bullied them.

‘You know, when we have soccer during PE lessons, I never join,’ Anshu casually added.

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<sup>23</sup> An Indian designed long skirt.

<sup>24</sup> *iTaukei* male teacher.

‘Why is that?’ Meena enquired

‘I would rather finish my homework so that I can do revision at home.’

‘I am not a fan of soccer either, I love watching rugby but it’s too dangerous to play,’ Ashriya complained.

‘I have seen some *iTaukei* girls play rugby, they look much stronger than our Indo-Fijian boys,’ Anshu cheekily added.

‘If we are passionate and train hard, we can play any sport!’ Meena proudly specified.

‘I have never seen an Indo-Fijian man play rugby; they are too thin and one tackle might kill them, as for Indo-Fijian girls, it is too hard to imagine us playing rugby,’ Anshu thoughtfully commented.

‘Well, did you know that this year the Mr and Miss Fiji title in bodybuilding went to Indo-Fijians? And let’s not forget Roy Krishna, he is tough,’ Ashriya states mockingly.

‘Roy plays soccer, Ashriya, not rugby, it’s not the same,’ Anshu responded

‘Anshu, maybe you should come and see me play rugby on Saturdays,’ Meena interrupts.

‘No thank you Meena, I have better things to do. I don’t know but for some reason, I don’t even like watching the Fiji women’s team play rugby – it seems unprofessional, they act like boys but don’t play as well as them and they hardly win,’ Anshu continued.

‘It’s a lot of fun, once I was tackled by this boy, I fell but just got up and started playing again,’ Meena said laughingly.

‘That’s too rough for me, I am happy with my walks and yoga with my mum,’ Anshu retorted.

Like her parents, Anshu didn’t think that playing sports was all that important – as at the end of the day entry to university and getting a good job depended on one’s academic merit. She didn’t want to be below average academically or be a tomboy like Meena. She was also glad that she didn’t have any brothers and that her younger sister and her had freedom to do most of the things that they liked without being compared to boys.

‘Well, I really hope you girls end up in the national teams one day,’ Anshu said sarcastically.

‘My brother taught me how to play soccer and I play pretty well, imagine how good I can get if I get professional training,’ Meena added.

‘Most boys in my class are like brothers to me and are very protective,’ Ashriya added.

‘Why do you need protection, Ashriya?’ Anshu asked.

‘From other boys who tease and bully.’

‘So you get teased by boys and then protected by boys; that’s hilarious,’ Anshu responded laughingly.

‘Ah well, if all the boys were that bad then why do you have a boyfriend, Anshu?’ Ashriya questioned playfully.

Anshu had no retort. The bus jerks and suddenly stops and the girls get off. Ashriya was pleased that she had met the girls as the interesting conversation had diverted her mind from worrying about the trials. Anshu wishes Ashriya luck and sends a fly kiss in the direction of the girls as she makes her way to her classroom. Meena walks alongside Ashriya and places her hand on her shoulder.

‘You don’t be nervous Little One; play your best game.’

Meena gives Ashriya a long warm hug and walks towards her classroom. It felt so good to be hugged by Meena; it was like she had transmitted her skills and motivation to Ashriya, who now felt fire in her belly.

Ashriya quickly changes into her blue mid-thigh length netball dress; the dress was very comfortable and she loved the colour. She quickly makes her way to the netball court and spots Viri<sup>25</sup> in the hubbub. Viri’s mum, who played netball in her younger days, has come to watch her daughter play. Ashriya secretly wishes that her mother and *aji* were half as supportive.

Master Gopal and Mrs. Seru<sup>26</sup> moved down the lines and handed the girls their bibs. Ashriya’s team – Form 3B – was scheduled to play against Form 3A and 3C was to play 3D. The

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<sup>25</sup> *iTaukei* girl.

<sup>26</sup> Female *iTaukei* PE teacher.

teams make circles and recite their inspiring slogans, Teams 3A and 3B run onto the court and the remaining girls and boys sit on the concrete outside the marked lines to cheer them on. Team 3B gets the first centre pass and the game rolls out as smoothly as *aji's rotis*. Both the teams were equally good with tit for tat scores. The crowd went ballistic when a goal was scored or when a player fell, or when an adversary stole the ball. Other times, there was total silence as hawk-like eyes followed the smooth sailing of the ball.

Ashriya played with full impact, she ran strongly, marked her opponent, jumped high, and caught every pass. Each time she claimed the flying ball she heard her teammates chant her name, 'Ash, here, Ash ... Ash'. Tevita<sup>27</sup>, who was Team 3A's class clown, gets troubled with Ashriya's brilliance and starts jeering, '*avalila*,<sup>28</sup> *avalila*, *avalila*'. Ashriya didn't speak the *iTaukei* language but she knew what the word meant and that it was directed at her; brushing aside this negativity she continues playing her best game.

The pace of the last quarter changes to the speed of a missile and Ashriya is no less of a pocket rocket. The Goal shooter from Team 3B catches the ball and whilst balancing her footing says a quick silent prayer and hurls the ball into the hoop. The GK<sup>29</sup> of Team 3A in a desperate attempt jumps to distract the ball but the ball glides into the hoop like butter melting on a warm pan. The umpire blows the whistle and Team 3B supporters run to the court to join the players to celebrate the narrow yet deserving win.

Ashriya hastily gets off the school bus and runs the rocky path leading to her home like an SUV<sup>30</sup>. She reaches home breathless and rushes to the bedroom; Sana and Paki knew how keen Ashriya had been to represent the school netball team, and hearing that their sister had been selected as a reserve makes the girls burst into a song-less dance. Paki rushes to *aji* and her mother in the

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<sup>27</sup> *iTaukei* boy.

<sup>28</sup> Skinny and lacking physicality.

<sup>29</sup> Goal Keeper.

<sup>30</sup> Sports utility vehicle.

kitchen and breaks the good news to them. The two women stare at each other in shock, each waiting for the other to say something.

‘You should focus on your schoolwork Ashriya; you have started menstruating, you should think like a woman now!’ *Aji* exclaimed.

‘I do well in exams, netball is also school work.’ Ashriya retorted defiantly.

‘Yes, go play and be a boy’.

‘How will playing netball make me a boy?’ Ashriya abruptly questioned.

‘All this jumping and running will only catch attention of the boys and next thing we know you are pregnant,’ *Aji* snapped.

Now this was plain stupidity, what did playing netball have to do with getting pregnant? Ashriya felt that she was hitting her head against a stone wall. Her mother stood speechless at the display of her daughter’s rebellion. Ashriya didn’t want to turn out like *aji* or her mother – cook, clean, serve the family and listen to what *aja* and her father dictated. In the burn of desire for liberation, Ashriya feels the birth of *Durga* in her. She forgets all normative behaviour – she is a girl and she shouldn’t question why Rahul can go out anywhere at anytime; she shouldn’t question why she has to do housework during the weekend when Rahul can go and play soccer; she shouldn’t question why she can’t have a decent conversation with a boy when Rahul can joke around with any girl; she shouldn’t question how menstruating and playing netball were going to get her pregnant. Draped in frustration, Ashriya rushes to the tiny balcony where her grandfather sits in a wooden chair, smoking tobacco wrapped in the *Fiji Times*<sup>31</sup>, her mother and *aji* desperately try to impede her but she reaches *aja*; all poised and in a steady voice she requests,

‘*Aja!* I have been selected for the school’s netball team, can I play?’

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<sup>31</sup> Fijian Newspaper.

Complete silence engulfs the tiny balcony, her question like the smoke from *aja*'s tobacco, slowly – helplessly – vanishes into thin air... *Aja* glares at his wife and daughter-in-law, indicating that they had failed in their roles. He turns to Ashriya and in a stern voice tells her, 'In this house women behave like women, and not talk back or go jumping around; you should be glad that you are allowed to go to school. In our days, girls were already married off at your age and busy looking after kids.'

Ashriya looks away knowing that anything she says will not make a difference. She walks away without a fuss, deciding that she will defy these orders and continue playing netball in secrecy. How silly she thought, the supposedly elder and wiser ones of her family were compelling her to lie only because her sporting passion was unpermitted in their eyes.

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### **4.3 Poem Research Context**

This poem was produced based on the data collected from a 24-year-old weightlifter/gym goer (Sapna) who was a network engineer in a telecommunications company. Apart from the poetry workshop and the two semi-structured interviews, it was worthwhile to observe Sapna, and train alongside her during her gym sessions, for my ethnographic reflections.

Sapna was born and bred in a small town in Vanua Levu, in Fiji – where her parents successfully ran an automotive business. She had attended multi-ethnic, co-ed primary and high schools studying technical subjects, and mostly found herself in classes dominated by boys. Due to being a shy and clumsy kid, sport was not her forte. Sapna had two much older sisters who were married around 18 and had children. Sapna had moved to Suva to attend university and after graduating and finding a job she and her Muslim boyfriend started renting together in Suva.

Sapna was vocal and spoke eagerly with passion in her interviews; she was comfortable to share personal experiences regarding her boyfriend, family restrictions based on her gender and her clumsiness during high school. Sapna spoke without filter, frequently using swear words such as ‘fuck’ to show her frustration or even appreciation towards events/incidents in her life; this did not seem offensive in the context. Interviewing this participant was pleasurable – like a lunchtime conversation between two friends who had a passion for the gym and mixed martial arts.

#### 4.3.1 Only Female in the Room

I am a small town girl

Unlike mine, my two older sisters’ views don’t curl

Brahmins we are, my *aji* says – the highest caste

A typical mindset she has, which threatens to last

My *aji* forever tells me to wear my skirt long

Because everyone knows to the *Sharma*<sup>32</sup> family I belong

A girl and a boy can’t be friends

No matter what the current trends

I must speak softly and never swear

Fuck! At 5, I was told to wear tights under my dress, so I don’t reveal my underwear.

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I walked in to school with an instructed body

Awkward and clumsy, this *Sharma* was a nobody

I wore the necklace of low self-esteem

Team sports wasn’t for me, neither running nor gym

Computer Science & Engineering were my calling

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<sup>32</sup> A common surname for Brahmins.



In a classroom full of boys, they aspired me to become king  
My Aunties told me to put honey and yogurt on my face  
So that pimple scars were not easy to trace  
She must learn how to clean and cook  
Fuck! At 18, my elder sister got married; never had time to read a book

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I broke many gender-based shackles; my companions from childhood  
In a male-dominated engineering team I proudly stood  
At the gym *Ratu*<sup>33</sup> volunteered to train me; he became my mother-hen  
In all tough situations, Ratu assured me, that I CAN!  
I started befriending other positive gentle-men at work, BUT  
Then the Indo-Fijian females loudly labelled me as a SLUT!  
I moved in with my Muslim boyfriend and life went up hill  
Together we trained, but mum said I looked too thin; my mojo she tried to kill  
Dad is changing, who I have become – no longer causes him gloom  
Fuck! At 24, I am proud to be the only female in a male-dominated room.

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#### **4.4 Reflection and Analysis**

##### **4.4.1 A Triple Layer Analysis of the Stories – Doing/Undoing Gender**

An in-depth analysis of ‘gender construction’ was necessary in this segment; although it might appear that the topic of ‘gender construction’ is old now, it is not outdated in the (Indo) Fijian context as Indo-Fijian women have not been researched in depth in relation to gender and sport.

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<sup>33</sup> *iTaukei* Trainer.

‘The girls were programmed not to wear short and skimpy clothes and not to be friendly with the boys. Doing well in school, staying vegetarian on Mondays and Fridays, doing their *puja* and helping their mother and *aji* were their conventional mantras.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Gendering of the body begins even before birth (Fausto-Sterling, 2012) and continues in childhood (Martin, 1998) where religion, customs, traditions and patriarchy (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016) intersect to guide this gendering. These are the foundations on which further gendering of the body occurs throughout the life course (Martin, 1998). In Ashriya’s context, religion, the Hindu caste system, age (generation gap), class (educational background and occupation of (grand) parents) inevitably intersect with gender to ‘program’ the girls to behave in a certain way that will lead them to fulfil the gendered expectations of her family and community. Therefore, intersectionality becomes central in order to unveil the different dynamics at work in Ashriya’s household, which influence the maintenance of the Indo-Fijian traditional gender (social) order. The elders of the family play a central role in maintaining the gender social order, by educating their families according to the status quo of gender ideology in the Indo-Fijian society. This is similar to the Indian (Hasan, 2015) and Pakistani (Hussain, Naz, Khan, Daraz & Khan, 2015) cultures. Deciphering traditional gender normative behaviour for Indo-Fijians in the diaspora warrants a closer look into gender constructs of the homeland (India) and the host land (Fiji). In contemporary India, religious practices, cultural traditions, social customs, educational processes and the visual and print media intersect to collectively influence, structure, and construct gender identity (Thapan, 2001). The large majority of Indo-Fijians in Fiji are Hindus (Ali, 2004), and like Ashriya and her sisters, other Hindu girls are nudged to perform ascribed gender norms on a daily basis (Balram, 2019; Raj, 2019). Akin to Hindus in Fiji, for the *iTaukeis* (natives) who are predominately (99%) Christians (Tomlinson, 2015), gender relations are influenced by religion (Meo, 2003) and traditional values that emphasise the authority of chiefs and the precedence of men before women (Kanemasu &

Molnar, 2017). The presence of the *iTaukei* culture and Christianity (in Fiji), having roots in Indian patriarchy and Hinduism, and a small number of Indo-Fijians being Muslims and Christians, makes it a complex task to determine how Indo-Fijians (women) do/undo gender.

The repetitive performances of gender norms by Ashriya and her sisters (Butler, 2011) produce docile bodies, which adhere to the set religious/societal disciplinary protocols (Foucault, 1977). Furthermore, practising anything alternative from prescribed gender norms would create the fear of difference where one would potentially encounter societal stigma and prejudice (Hall, et al., 2020). The aforementioned is evident in Ashriya's case, where her questioning (and raising her voice against) her grandparents is against Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Lateef, 1990; Shandil, 2016). Therefore, out of fear of lack of acceptance at home, Ashriya rebels – plays netball in secrecy. The notion of gender fluidity (Butler, 2011) is not understood in Ashriya's household. Instead, the girls are 'programmed' to perform being female only (Butler, 1990), and adhere to the presumption of a binary gender system, which implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex, whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it (Butler, 1990). This is reflected in the excerpt below:

'... She has to do housework during the weekend when Rahul can go and play soccer; she shouldn't question why she can't have a decent conversation with a boy when Rahul can joke around with any girl...' (*Unpermitted Passion*)

*Unpermitted Passion* reveals the different sets of rules Indo-Fijian families impose on girls and boys. For example, both Ashriya and Meena are not allowed to be out at night or mingle with boys and, unlike Rahul, Ashriya cannot have a mobile phone. The aforementioned reveals that Indo-Fijian parents restrict girls more than boys in terms of physical and social activities (Solomon-Moore Toumpakari, Sebire, Thompson, Lawlor & Jago, 2018). This traditional normative perception of

‘doing one’s gender right’ is apparent in the contemporary Indo-Fijian society – where girls (like Ashriya) must learn to cook and clean and maintain distance from boys (Balram, 2019; Raj, 2019), do well in academic pursuits, and are discouraged from sports (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, et al., 2020). Ashriya’s elders believe that as Ashriya was born a female, and Rahul a male, they must behave in certain (different) ways and particular activities/behaviours define their gender (Butler, 2011).

However, as for Sapna, in spite of not having a brother(s), her parents, grandmother and other Indo-Fijian girls impress on her the need to practise and maintain Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, therefore overlooking that the cultural conventions surrounding masculinities and femininities can change according to their environment and present multiple meanings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2019). Ashriya’s grandfather also has orthodox views:

‘In this house women behave like women, and not talk back or go jumping around; you should be glad that you are allowed to go to school. In our days, girls were already married off at your age and busy looking after kids.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

In the above extract, we can see that Ashriya’s grandfather, in trying to restrict Ashriya’s sporting agency, compares her actions to gender normative behaviour of Indo-Fijian women two generations ago. Ashriya playing netball is perceived (by her grandparents) as a violation of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, threatening to destabilise traditional gender hierarchies, thus is discouraged (Sugden et al., 2020). Ashriya’s grandfather is oblivious to fluidity in gender roles and masculinities and femininities – and that identities shift as individuals age and move through the course of their lives (Coles, 2009). Relatedly, Sapna’s mother also tells her that she looks ‘too thin’ when she becomes more toned. Consequently, the girls’ interests, actions and passions are not personal anymore but are regulated by their elders, based on gender normative behaviour (Rajput,

2019; Sugden et al., 2020), affirming the notion that the family is the ground on which the heterosexual patriarchal ideal is nurtured and sustained (Thapan, 2001).

In contrast, Meena displays a different (new) kind of femininity by playing in mixed gender and mixed racial teams – she scores goals too when the goalie is a boy (Shiv). Shiv does not perform or display the tenets of (Indo-Fijian) hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) – he is not able to stop the ball kicked by a girl, so the boys label him as ‘having no balls’. Shiv is connoted as being a ‘sissy’ (not having any balls) and this incident has a (more) harmful designation for Shiv, as he is continuously teased. In hindsight, Meena is labelled as a ‘tomboy’ (but not teased like Shiv) when she displays tenets of masculinity by scoring a goal. However, Heasley and Crane (2016) and Blackmore (2003) from their studies reveal that both tomboys and sissies disrupt the essentialist perception of gender and are negatively looked upon. Thus, both Shiv and Meena get labels for failing to perform their gender in a way that constitutes the materiality of their bodies’ heterosexual imperative (Butler, 2011). However, even though this group is young and mixed (both in terms of gender and race), some gender hierarchies still prevail; this is evidenced by the teasing of Shiv, showing that in their hierarchy, a woman who is ‘masculine’ (scores goals) is above a man who allows those goals in, thus does not ‘have balls’. Gender regulations (Butler, 2011; 2009) still constrain those sporting bodies, blocking their paths to freedom. Sapna also reveals the societal gender regulations she faces:

‘I started befriending other positive gentle-men at work, BUT  
Then the Indo-Fijian females loudly labelled me as a SLUT!’  
*(Only Female in the Room)*

Similarly, Sapna is labelled as a ‘SLUT’ (by other Indo-Fijian females). In Sapna’s case race, religion (and caste) and gender intersect to judge her daily and sporting agency. She is an ‘Indo-Fijian Hindu Brahmin girl’ – therefore making male friends, moving in with her Muslim boyfriend,

lifting weights at the gym and ‘being the only girl in a male-dominated room’, are all inappropriate acts. Moreover, her boyfriend being Muslim adds more complexity – not only of caste (class), but also religion based on historical conflict (Mitra & Ray, 2014). Sapna being a Brahmin (her grandmother follows the caste system and reminds Sapna of it as well) would make it problematic if she were to marry a Hindu of a lower caste, let alone living with her Muslim boyfriend. Religious conflict (and violence) between Hindus and Muslims existed prior to the partition of India and is still evident in post-independence India (Mitra & Ray, 2014). Traditional divisions such as the linguistic and cultural differences between Indo-Fijians of North and South descent transferred from India to Fiji, and still exist. However, this is not with the same intensity as the old Hindu versus Muslim antagonism (Ali, 1979). Thus, Sapna hailing from the highest Hindu caste intersects to further determine how Sapna must speak, act, dress and whom she should mingle with – in order to maintain tenets of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity.

Despite Sapna and Meena performing their gender in subversive ways (Butler, 2011), the gender atmosphere and traditional ideologies surrounding sporting activities in Fiji remain so oppressive that it looks like these young women are inside a gendered solid wall from which there is no escape. The situation for contemporary Indo-Fijian women is not very different from their women *girmitiya*<sup>34</sup> counterparts. The women *girmitiyas* took up traditionally masculine tasks such as working in the field (arising from need and situation), together with traditionally feminine tasks like cooking, cleaning and minding children (Lata, 2009), revealing the changing nature of femininities and performance of fluid gender roles (Butler, 2011). However traditional gender constructs, orthodox masculinity and emphasized femininity tenets were maintained and prevalent, where gender inferiority and subversiveness were (still are) associated with women, and superiority and dominance with men (Hasan, 2015). For example, Ashriya’s grandmother deems that sport is inappropriate for girls:

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<sup>34</sup> Indentured labourer.

‘Yes, go **play** and be a **boy.**’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

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‘How will **playing** netball make me a **boy?**’ Ashriya abruptly questioned. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Ashriya actively challenges her grandmother’s cultural traditional concept of sports being a male/masculine activity. Ashriya is seen at times to incorporate complex and strategic combinations of *resistance* – she continues to play netball despite the family restrictions, and she does not want to become like her mother – voiceless and shackled to a traditional paradigm that considers women to be merely decorative and subservient to men (Shandil, 2016). At other times, Ashriya shows *compliance* – perceiving that rugby and soccer are dangerous for girls, and by accepting not to mingle with boys or go out at night – for her own safety. Therefore, Ashriya’s agency reveals ambivalent femininity, ‘which represents the mass of women who can neither accept nor reject holistically the current dominative hegemonic principles and, more importantly, the position they construct for women’ (Connell 1987, p. 184). Ashriya at times resists orthodox gendered practices, but does not replace existing traditional gender norms, nor do her agencies produce new/different types of gender orders. Ashriya’s (grand) parents, in controlling Ashriya, uphold the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity:

‘She was helping her mother make *rotis* and her *aji* made sure that Ashriya was up before the sun.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

The maintenance of emphasized femininity places emphasis on compliance, and accommodation of hegemonic masculinity and its hegemonic principles is positioned as the ideal (Connell, 1987). It is also interesting to note that not only is Rahul excused from rolling *rotis* (because he is a boy), but her two younger sisters are as well (who are not menstruating yet – therefore are still girls, and not women according to her grandmother). The aforementioned reveals

how age, menarche, and order of birth (Ashriya is expected to get married before her younger sisters) intersect with gender in influencing gender-based performances of Indo-Fijian girls (and boys). Relatedly, Balram (2019) shares a similar practice in her household where the oldest female amongst the siblings is charged with the task of making *rotis*; once the eldest is married off the next female in line gets trained. Sapna reveals the same about her elder sister:

‘She must learn how to clean and cook

Fuck! At 18, my elder sister got married; never had time to read a book.’ (*Only Female in the Room*)

Sapna’s family ensured that her elder sister (as in Ashriya’s case, being the eldest) learnt home management skills before she got married. Married Indo-Fijian women get more prominence over unmarried women (Lateef, 1990), leading parents to coach daughters from an early age towards prayers, doing domestic chores, cooking and maintaining good relationships (Rajput, 2019; Shandil, 2016). It is important to note that Sapna is from a small town, belongs to the Brahmin caste, has a grandmother with orthodox views, has two older sisters and no brothers, and is from a rich family. Therefore, it is evident that class, caste, geography, age, religion and gender of siblings intersect to influence the maintenance of gender orders in Sapna’s household. However, time and experiences also intersect with the aforementioned intersectionalities – as Sapna mentions, her father is changing and accepts that Sapna is ‘the only female in male dominated rooms’. Sapna’s daily and sporting agencies reveal resistance and traits of Connell’s (1987; 1995) protest femininity, which impacts the gender order in her family. Sapna’s agencies challenge the foundations of both intra-relations between femininities (for example, despite the other women calling her ‘slut’ she continues to befriend boys at work, do weightlifting and live with her boyfriend) and inter-relations between femininities and masculinities (by being the only female in the weights room and at her work). Sapna



resists characteristics of compliance and accommodation, which are associated with emphasized femininity. Sapna's father recognises Sapna's resistance and protest, and accepts Sapna's agencies, revealing that protest femininity has fundamental characteristics capable of elaborating and pushing beyond the level of politics, to new forms of gender activism (Connell, 1995).

Moreover, Sapna's body is gendered from early childhood (Martin, 1998); she is taught how to speak and dress in a particular way, and these controls continue in her adolescence (her mother is quick to judge her toned body).

'I must speak softly and never swear ...'

'Fuck! At 5, I was told to wear tights under my dress so I don't reveal my underwear...

Mum said I look thin and my mojo she tried to kill.'

*(Only Female in the Room)*

However, when Sapna lifts weights, she uses standards of traditional male athleticism such as individualism, competitiveness, aggressiveness and power (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). Therefore, Sapna faces the conundrum of managing societal expectations of conforming to traditional femininity (Steinfeldt et al., 2011) whilst maintaining to claim Indo-Fijian female (athleticism) physicality (Kanemasu, 2018). On the other hand, Anshu is not judged, as her doing yoga and walking for cosmetic fitness with her mother aligns with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity norms, and is valued in their community (Balram; 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Raj, 2019).

Gender segregation is evident universally in most competitive sports, consequently as a rule, separate competitions are held for men and women (Pfister, 2010). Ann Travers (sports scholar) takes a nuanced perspective, arguing that sex segregation in sport is significant in normalising and legitimising the philosophy of the two-sex framework (Travers, 2008). Relatedly, Fijian urban kindergartens/schools (Brison, 2009), like in some other parts of the world (George, 2002; Knez et

al, 2012; Paechter, 2006; Thorne, 1986), fail to treat children according to their actual needs and interests, and treat them according to their attributed sex, and separate boys from girls, treating each as a homogeneous group. However, Brison (2009) also notes the existence of mixed play with no particular gender typing at a village kindergarten (in Fiji), where groups of boys and girls during play time began climbing some poles stacked against a tree. Therefore, athletic Indo-Fijian women like Sapna and Meena who do sports that are associated with men are real gender order troublemakers and shakers. These two girls, by continuing to claim Indo-Fijian female physicality, persistently assert that physical power is neither masculine, nor repressive, thereby disrupting the gender binaries/orders of their society (Kanemasu, 2018; Tagg, 2008). However, Master Gopal (and Anshu) have opposing views:

“Girls just lack the skills to maintain their balance and play soccer,” Master Gopal had remarked. The boys on the other hand continued playing soccer during PE.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Moreover, Ashriya seems to be influenced by (and internalises) the views of her *aji* and Master Gopal to some extent. Master Gopal’s perception and agency are in line with certain male teachers who see themselves as ‘one of the boys’ in the classroom, and situate girls as ‘others’ within a classroom dominated by particular forms of masculinity (Skelton, 2002). Anderson (2005) notes that these dominant masculinities usually contain features of orthodox masculinities, such as belittling women and any type of effeminate behaviour by men. This is revealed when the boys tease Shiv for ‘having no balls’ – when he does not save the goal made by Meena, and is also revealed when Navin continuously belittles Shiela for falling and twisting her ankle whilst playing soccer. Also, Sugden et al. (2020), note that sometimes Indo-Fijian teachers (like Master Gopal), on the basis of their cultural upbringing, discourage Indo-Fijian girls from playing sports. Furthermore, Ashriya’s mother also further displays compliance to traditional gender normative behaviour(s):

‘...A boy having a word with other boys in this matter seemed apt.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Ashriya’s mother believes that if Ashriya is hassled by boys in the area, it is apt for her brother to protect her, not because he is one year older, but because he is a boy and would be able to handle it. In hindsight, Rahul on this occasion is set a task (‘have a word with other boys’) with the pressures of performing (and maintaining) traditional hegemonic masculinity and its defining tenets (protection of family (especially females), rationality and controlled and directed aggression). Rahul is compelled to display and confront hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2009) – challenges associated with his gender identity (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002). He must meet society’s expectations to be powerful and protective (McCreary, Saucier & Courtenay, 2005) and defend his sister, and also adhere to the Hindu principles of mother worship (Uma & Alladi, 1989) – that is, performing a task to protect the dignity of his mother/sister. Also, Hindu men (brothers and fathers) must protect their (especially unmarried) daughters and sisters, as the Indo-Fijian woman’s virginity in marriage is the marker of integrity of the men in the household (Shandil, 2016). Therefore, Indo-Fijian men are expected to display, perform and, maintain Indo-Fijian hegemonic masculinity by confronting other men to prevent any disrepute to their sisters, mothers and other females of the family. In the Indo-Fijian (and Indian) society being a ‘real man’ (hegemonic masculinity) goes beyond physical strength (Verma et al., 2006; Shandil, 2016). For a Hindu man, adhering to the cultural and religious tenets of Hinduism is part of hegemonic masculinity. Relatedly, mother worship in ancient India gave women much importance – a practice handed down from the pre-Aryan civilisation – even in the Vedas, where male deities are prominent, there is Aditi, the mother of Gods (Uma & Alladi, 1989). Moreover, the idea of mother worship has been featured in many Bollywood films such as *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975), *Karan Arjun* (1995) and *Fiza* (2000) – where mothers are worshipped, any disrepute against them is avenged, and dignity is restored at any cost (Lata, 2009). Therefore, for Rahul to adhere to his mother’s request in protecting his sister, shows Rahul’s conformity to, and

practising of Indo-Fijian hegemonic masculinity.

Furthermore, the elders of Ashriya's family fail to understand that being compelled to identify with and perform tenets of Indo-Fijian hegemonic masculinity (by Rahul) and (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity (by Ashriya) in their everyday lives, are often uncomfortable for both the men and women (Connell, 1987). However, Meena's case differs from Ashriya's:

'... My mum sometimes comes to cheer and tells me that I must win, she responded laughingly.' (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Meena's mother not only approves of her daughter playing netball, but she also goes to the extent of attending some of her games and cheering for her. There, she is clearly undoing the gender order (Butler, 2011). Her father, on the other hand, allowed her to play but was not happy with Meena's short netball dress. There is a contradiction between Meena's parents; her father does not disallow her from playing but controls her femininity via her extended body image (what she wears) to achieve the arguable Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2019). With Meena continuing to play netball wearing a short dress, she constructs 'different' femininities in the Indo-Fijian context: a femininity that not only 'resists', but subtly 'protests' for gender equality and social justice (Connell, 1995). Meena and Ashriya have no issues with their netball dresses; if anything, Ashriya likes the blue colour and finds it comfortable. Both girls are merely focused on playing a good game, and enjoying a physically active life, but gender fences seem to be omnipresent in the Fijian context to try to shut them down. In contrast, Sugden et al. (2020) note a senior government official (*iTaukei* woman) involved with Sports Outreach, complaining that Indo-Fijian women are difficult to engage in sport because of their resistance towards wearing sport attire. However, no background or further information is provided to validate where this resistance comes from – the parents, the girls themselves and/or both or the (Indo) Fijian society? And the reader is left to wonder and make conclusions. Therefore my stories unveil, for the first time, the complex gendered social realities where all these issues unfold; there are many more tiers than just 'Indo-

Fijian women being difficult to engage’. And to understand these realities is a step to figure out new strategies to bring these girls on board to a healthier and happier life through sports practices.

The next section looks into the (sporting) agency of the participants and how the participants themselves (and others) perceive their bodies and physicality. It discusses how and when (via which agencies) the Indo-Fijian woman’s body becomes abject and/or subversive (Butler, 2009).

#### **4.4.2 Abject Bodies to Bodies That Matter – Cultural Perceptions of Athletic Indo-Fijian Women**

‘I have never seen an Indo-Fijian man play rugby; they are too thin and one tackle might kill them, as for Indo-Fijian girls, it is too hard to imagine us playing rugby,’ Anshu thoughtfully commented. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Anshu declares that Indo-Fijian men are ‘too thin to play rugby and one tackle might kill them’, let alone the idea of Indo-Fijian women playing rugby, or a highly physical sport. Through Anshu’s perception, it is evident that Indo-Fijian women (sometimes even by themselves) are considered to occupy the lowest position in the Fijian masculinity and physicality continuum. Furthermore, emphasized femininity is a cultural construction and therefore materialises differently into bodies of different cultures (Connell, 1987; 1995). For example, emphasized femininity for *iTaukeis* (Williams et al., 2006), like Samoans (Field, 2013), and South Africans (Weber, 2017), means a bigger body and physical strength, which is not in line with Western ‘thin ideals’ of women (Boothroyd et al., 2020). However, adolescent *iTaukei* girls are exposed to both traditional sociocultural pressures that promote a larger body size, and Western pressures and television (Becker, 2004) that promote slimness (Williams et al., 2006). Relatedly, for Indo-Fijians, dainty fair-skinned women who conform to images of slim and petite Indian heroines portrayed via the

Bollywood cinema (Banerjee, 2018; Lata, 2009; Raj, 2019) are the ideal; these women have to balance all these tensions, which can be very tough for them.

Moreover, Anshu, causally brushes off Meena's suggestion for her to watch Meena play rugby:

'Maybe you should come and see me play rugby on Saturdays,' Meena suggested. 'No thank you Meena, I have better things to do. I don't know but for some reason I don't even like watching the Fiji women's team play rugby – it seems unprofessional, they act like boys but don't play as well as them and they hardly win.' (*Unpermitted Passion*)

The above excerpt reveals that Anshu perceives Meena's body as unfitting to the norms of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity of being dainty and soft (Banerjee, 2018; Raj, 2019); one which carries out feminine tasks and does not play rugby (Lateef 1990; Shandil, 2016). Secondly, despite seeing that Meena's body does not fit into Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity norms (as Meena appears tough and is labelled a tomboy), Anshu still perceives Meena's body as unsuitable for the physical demands of rugby, nearly an abject body in the sports realm. Indo-Fijian women have historically been considered least (physically) powerful and least athletic (compared to *iTaukei* women) in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020; Teawai, 2005) – bodies that do not matter (Butler, 1990) in the sporting realm.

Furthermore, Anshu also rejects the idea of *iTaukei* women playing rugby as these abject rugby bodies threaten Fijian hegemonic masculinity norms. Anshu complains that *iTaukei* women rugby players appear 'unprofessional', 'act like boys' and 'don't win'. In this case, an Indo-Fijian girl (Meena) playing rugby is merely unimaginable, and near absurd for Anshu, who embodies cultural emphasized femininity and thus is subservient to hegemonic masculinity norms (Connell, 1995). Butler (2011) defines abject beings as individuals who are not yet 'subjects,' but who

structure a constitutive outside of the domain of the subject; that is, without the abject outside, the subject cannot establish itself (Butler, 2011). Butler furthers this notion by stating that abject bodies will intimidate the realm of the compliant bodies. A good example of this is when Ashriya plays a brilliantly physical game, and Tevita is intimidated to see an Indo-Fijian girl play so well and enter/threaten the *iTaukei* zone of prowess and physicality (sports). Both Anshu and Tevita fail to understand that, despite its cultural conventions, femininity can be fluid and change according to their environment and present multiple meanings (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Similarly, Meena sustains tackles in rugby and scores goals in soccer, shattering both gender and racial stereotypes, thus transforming a body that could be perceived as ‘abject’ into an independent body; she constructs a new gender order in her realm; she drives the contended borders of the acknowledged and generally tolerable bodies (*iTaukeis* in this case), thus expanding the gender norms (Butler, 2011). However, gender diversity is not welcomed by many Indo-Fijians:

‘We had a great time laughing at the boys, they looked ungraceful when trying to maintain their balance.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

The above excerpt reveals Anshu’s lack of inclusiveness and ignorance of gender diversity (Anderson, 2005). Netball was designed for and is dominated by women (Tagg, 2008), thus Anshu rejects queer representations of the boys who play netball during PE, as they challenge established gender norms (Sugden et al., 2020; Tagg, 2008). Anshu laughing at these boys playing netball reveals gender ‘misrepresentations’, which is politically not correct, but has always been a way to have a laugh – Anshu’s laughter is her way to deal with the unknown, unfamiliar or ‘unacceptable’. Ironically, Anshu dares the exact same norms when Ashriya talks about being protected by boys, despite maintaining an orthodox view of masculinity (men as protectors) and femininity (women being delicate and in need of protection) (Coleman, 2003).

‘Initially they were shy and refused to play then Master Rusi joined to encourage them.’

*(Unpermitted Passion)*

Sport is deemed an important aspect for boys’ identities, and is important for a boy’s sense of masculinity (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). By playing netball himself, Master Rusi not only encourages the boys, but also puts a crack into some established gender rules. Despite being the epitome of hegemonic Fijian masculinity, he also promotes a shift from these orthodoxies of masculinities and femininities (Coleman, 2003), and allows recreational opportunities for both boys who subscribe to hegemonic definitions of masculinity, and those who embrace more marginalized masculinities (Connell, 1995; Tagg, 2008). It is also noteworthy that rigid gender norms promote tension, thus when the orthodox (rigid) gender norms are broken, there are more opportunities for relaxation, recreation and laughing.

Moreover, Ashriya is unsupportive of boys being laughed at whilst playing netball; here she supports gender bending (Tagg, 2008) but then opposes girls playing soccer or rugby as she deems these sports to be dangerous and apt for boys – netball is less rough, thus suitable for girls. Ashriya internalises Master Gopal’s perception that Indo-Fijian girls lack skills and physicality to play soccer (and rugby) and are prone to injuries; ultimately, she maintains (societal) established gender norms (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016).

Likewise, Master Gopal has orthodox views regarding gender bending and fluidity (Butler, 2010; Tagg, 2008); soccer is not apt for girls because Shiela fell and twisted her ankle. Master Gopal assumes that the natural (usually biological) differences between men and women make women more emotional and weak (Messner, 2011), thus disqualify them from playing soccer; he (sub) consciously reproduces this orthodox view to his students. On this occasion, both Master Gopal and Anshu perceive gender as a fixed artifice and expect boys and girls to preserve societal gender orders



by performing their gender within the sporting arena according to their biological sex (Butler, 2011), hence conforming to the traditional gender binary (Butler, 1990).

Relatedly, Anshu continues to disclaim Indo-Fijian female physicality and persistently asserts that physical power is masculine. In doing so, she maintains normative gender orders and cultural barriers that justify and influence the lack of women's participation in masculine deemed sports, like bodybuilding, soccer and rugby (Kanemasu, 2018; Knijnik, 2015; Raj, 2019). Messner (2011) deems youth sports as a key site for the construction of soft essentialist narratives that provide opportunities – where girls can choose to play sports or not – but for boys it is assumed that they have the biological make-up (testosterone) to be active, aggressive, and competitive, and are naturally expected to play. In contrast, Anshu, Meena and Sapna perform their gender fluidly by participating in sports associated with men/masculinities (Butler, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Messner, 2011). This is akin to the example that Knijnik (2017) uses in the Brazilian Dressage Competition, to discuss how masculinities became more fluid when men and horses alter themselves whilst participating. Meena and Sapna are able to negotiate hurdles and rise beyond racial and gender disparities to perform their best in the sport(s) that they are passionate about. Relatedly, Indo-Fijian female body builder, Komal Raj has defied all odds and made a place for herself in the sport of bodybuilding in Fiji, and the South Pacific (Raj, 2019). These girls hint at the real contradictions of the diversity in the Fijian context, and stand tall with all those white men who can jump and Asian women who can 'bend it like Beckham' (Hylton, 2008; Ratna, 2011) – bodies that are abject no more; bodies that are becoming subversive (Butler, 2011). Moreover, *Unpermitted Passion* reveals the impact and motivation young/budding athletic women (such as Ashriya) can get from more experienced sportswomen like Meena.

‘Ashriya deemed that Meena was an embodiment of goddess *Durga* and imagined her having several hands, fighting her way through the many hurdles that Indo-Fijian girls encounter.

This gave Ashriya so much hope; if Meena could do it, so could she.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Indo-Fijian girls (unlike their *iTaukei* counterparts) (Kanemasu, 2018), like their international Indian diaspora counterparts (Burdsey, 2015; Ratna, 2011; Thangaraj, 2015), lack national sporting, female role models/heroes. However, Ashriya’s admiration is merely associated with a ‘feminine’ sport – netball; Ashriya does not specifically show appreciation of Meena playing soccer and rugby. Meena’s parents and Ashriya are comfortable with girls playing netball, but not ‘masculine sports’ such as soccer and rugby, or playing with boys. Meena secretly plays soccer with Indo-Fijian boys, and rugby with her *iTaukei* neighbours – thus illuminating that woman athletes continue to face inequalities and criticism for crossing traditional gender lines (Kanemasu & Johnson, 2019; Kitchen, 2006). Meena does not seem to be affected by Fijian masculinity (or the lack of it), and believes that if one trains hard, one can play any sport, even the hegemonic rugby – her fluid gender allows her to be masculine in a female body (Butler, 2011; Messner, 2011).

In comparison, Sapna receives backlash – from her *aji*, mother and other Indo-Fijian women – as lifting weights gave Sapna a visibly toned body, and a low percentage of body fat – her mother tells her that she had become ‘too thin’.

‘In a male dominated engineering team I proudly stood...

I started befriending other positive gentle-men at work, BUT

Then the Indo-Fijian females loudly labelled me as a SLUT!’

(*Only Female in the Room*)

Relatedly, Komal Raj (Miss Fiji 2019 – Bodybuilding) revealed that when she began her bodybuilding career, she encountered a lot of criticism and discouragement from the boys at the gym, by being told that she was too skinny to be lifting weights and was better off being at home eating and trying to gain some weight (Raj, 2019). Bodybuilding is a male-dominated sport in Fiji, and women rarely participate due to the cultural barriers, mental mindset and lack of confidence (Raj, 2019). Thus, based on tenets of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity and heteronormative behaviour, both Sapna and Miss Fiji 2019 are perceived as abject beings/bodies (Butler, 2011). These bodies are turned into bodies susceptible to judgement and exclusion – bodies that do not matter (Ferreira, 2018) – despite Komal Raj winning three medals in the South Pacific Bodybuilding Championship in New Caledonia (Raj, 2019).

Like many Indo-Fijian elders, Sapna's mother, Ashriya's (grand) parents and Meena's father disapprove gender bending and/or sports participation (Sugden et al., 2020); this is unlike Komal Raj's situation where her parents were very supportive (Raj, 2019). A similar disapproval of gender bending is evident in combat sports such as boxing, martial arts and judo. Traditionally, women are taught to be vulnerable and passive, whereas women in combat sports (Channon & Matthews, 2015; Godoy-Pressland, 2015; Knijnik & Ferretti, 2015) empower themselves to practise the exact opposite qualities – such as aggressiveness and strength, therefore shifting gender relations of power (Hargreaves, 2003). These are clear illustrations of Butler's (2011) notion of abject bodies intimidating the realm of compliant bodies. Also, in intimidating compliant bodies via her sporting agency, Meena embodies pleasure:

'It's a lot of fun, once I was tackled by this boy, I fell but just got up and started playing again.' Meena said laughingly. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Meena embodies pleasure whilst playing rugby and experiencing body contact with a (*iTaukei*) boy, which is very rare for an (socially athletic) Indo-Fijian girl. Gard and Meyenn (2000), in their study of physical activity preferences of Australian secondary school boys, reveal that the boys more easily talk about pain than pleasure in sports. In contrast, Meena does not talk about any pain (which she would surely have felt) whilst receiving the tackle. She merely describes the act of being tackled (by a boy) as ‘fun’ and emphasises her body being able to ‘get up’ and ‘get on’ with the game – placing emphasis on ‘pleasure’, rather than pain. In this scenario, the notion of pain-pleasure and pride associated with contact-physical sports is not based on gender or race and is not exclusive to *iTaukei* men (and women). The aforementioned should motivate schools and policy makers to safely introduce physical/contact sports to students of different ethnic backgrounds and genders, thus allowing every individual a fair go to enjoy one’s body safely and without the gender and racial constraints and pressures imposed by inequitable policies and practices (Gard & Meyenn, 2000).

Young athletic Indo-Fijian women’s complex sporting agencies reveal different forms of resistance to societal gender and racial normative practices. Their sporting agency might just convert their abject bodies into subversive bodies (Butler, 2011; Ferreira, 2018). The next section moves on to explore the gender (and class) tensions and paradoxes within Indo-Fijian families and in their society.

#### **4.4.3 Gender Power Tensions and Class**

If the matter was more serious and needed an experienced person then *aji* would step in. Her father was never directly approached by the girls and *aja* was a “no go zone”.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Patriarchal orders rule Ashriya’s household, however, in the same family there is an ongoing gender struggle for supremacy, as matriarchal structure (the older women) like Ashriya’s grandmother also

hold power and authority to ensure gender norms (particularly Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity) (Connell, 1995) are maintained. This is akin to cases in Sweden and Turkey, where older women in the family are tasked with policing and monitoring the behaviour of younger female members, thus silencing any type of resistance against the gender order and patriarchal structures (Ertürk, 2009). Ashriya's grandmother scrutinises Ashriya's daily agency to sustain the whole social order, thus emphasized Indo-Fijian femininity, by ensuring that Ashriya learns to make roti, think (and behave) like a 'proper' woman and not play any sports. Moreover, Lateef (1990), one of the first feminist researchers on Indo-Fijians, in defining an ideal Indo-Fijian woman, emphasises women's subversiveness – not being vocal, loud or argumentative, especially in the presence of males or older females. This is evident via Ashriya's acts of questioning her grandmother, and abruptly involving her grandfather in the 'womanly matters of the house' – both agencies are seen as subversive. In contrast, her mother being quiet, voiceless and conforming to her mother-in-law's authority makes her a 'proper' Indo-Fijian woman.

'Aja glares at his wife and daughter-in-law, indicating that they had failed in their roles.'

*(Unpermitted Passion)*

Furthermore, Ashriya's grandfather glaring at his wife and daughter-in-law reflects the higher authority that he holds in relation to the rest of the males and his wife (matriarch/worshipped mother). Also, Ashriya's mother and grandmother's silence against *aja's* glare, reveals that these women re-enforce patriarchal structures and also, traditional gender normative behaviour, and perceive Ashriya's rebellion to play netball as TOTALLY unacceptable. It is such patriarchal gender ideologies that Butler (1990) questions, aiming to gradually change the existing patriarchal society to a more equal one, which is difficult to achieve when women themselves advocate patriarchal structures (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016). This is different to societies like the United States, where

when individuals age, their gendered identities become altered in ways that diminish gender differences and clear-cut gender representations. Therefore, an older woman might hold the same power as an older man (Silver, 2003).

Similarly, Shandil (2016) notes that older Indo-Fijian women in society are put in the same symmetrical position with Indo-Fijian men – implying the former has the same cultural hierarchical position of authority and respect as the latter. For example, Rahul obeys his mother without questioning ‘and has a word with the boys’ for catcalling at Ashriya. Matriarchy relates back to the long history and practices of mother worship in India (Uma & Alladi, 1989). Mother worship goes much deeper in Hinduism – beef is not consumed as cows are given a mother position – the milk constituent of the cow and the mother are similar (Joshi & Adhikari 2019; Chapple & Tucker, 2000).

Akin to Ashriya’s grandmother, Sapna’s grandmother also holds power to maintain social gender orders (emphasized femininity) in her household. These two matriarchs’ roles are similar to female folksingers (mostly older women) at Hindu weddings – who via their song repetitiously remind the women (brides) to perform their gender MERELY in expected ways (Shandil, 2016). However, in Sapna’s case, her caste (Brahmin) intersects with her gender, adding another layer to the policing of her gender performativity (Butler, 1990) by her grandmother. As Sapna reminisces:

‘Brahmins we are, my *aji* says – the highest caste  
A typical mindset she has, which threatens to last  
My *aji* forever tells me to wear my skirt long  
Because everyone knows to the Sharma family I belong.’

*(Only Female in the Room)*

Despite the fragmentation of the Hindu caste system in Fiji (Lal, 1983), some Indo-Fijians (like Sapna’s *aji*) maintain their social status. In the Indo-Fijian Hindu culture, only Brahmins

perform special prayers and thus have a high level of respect regardless of their economic status. In Sapna's case, her family is also rich, thus even more prestigious. Therefore, social and economic class intersect with gender, age, and traditions and culture (mother worship) to give power and authority to Sapna's grandmother, which appears higher than Sapna's father's authority. Her *aji* has 'a typical mindset which threatens to last', whereas her father is changing, and who Sapna has become 'no longer causes him gloom'.

Moreover, the data reveals that economic class can equip (younger) women with power and authority in maintaining patriarchal structures, where women have the power to take away (other) women's power. For example, Sapna's mother is educated and helps in running the family business, thus has a voice in disciplining her daughter. On the other hand, Ashriya's mother is uneducated, a housewife and much younger than *aji*; she is voiceless and depends on her mother-in-law to make decisions. Therefore, together with matriarchs, younger women who are educated and/or contribute to providing for their families have significant influence and hold cultural power to keep the gender order unmodified (Lee & Beatty, 2002). Often, the data reveals that class (education and employability) intersects with age and experience, gender and race (being Indo-Fijian) (Gines, 2011; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) to maintain patriarchal structures in the Indo-Fijian society. However, Ashriya declaring that she will continue to play netball in secrecy not only destabilises (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity structures, but also proves Foucault's (1977) notion – 'that where there is power there is resistance'. In her resistance to the power that *aji* and *aja* hold, Ashriya manages to crack patriarchal and matriarchal structures.

The following segment discusses how athletic Indo-Fijian women who defy hegemonic masculinities and incline towards gender fluidity (Butler, 1990) and/or protest femininity (Connell, 1995), fetch names/titles that suggest their lack of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity, thus acceptance in their community.

#### 4.4.4 ‘Tomboys/Masculinities/Emphasized Femininity’

Historically both males and females have been esteemed to the degree to which their gender identities conform (appropriately) to their biological sex (Butler, 2010; Heasley & Crane, 2016). Girls who are gender non-conformative and have masculine traits both physically (like muscle and tone), and in demeanour (such as being competitive, aggressive, and independent) are referred to as tomboys (Coyle et al., 2016). Thus, a girl having short hair and playing physical contact sports might qualify her as a tomboy (Kanemasu, 2018; Kolnes, 1995; Wedgwood, 2004). Similarly, boys who are gender non-conforming and have negative traits associated with femininity such as crying easily or easily getting scared are labelled as ‘sissy’ (Coyle et al., 2016). Both tomboys and sissies disrupt the essentialist perception of gender (Heasley & Crane, 2016). As Meena reveals her experiences:

‘She didn’t like being called a tomboy. Meena did adore her tartan shirts and jeans but these days forced herself to wear dresses and skirts during social outings to hide the only way that she knew to walk which apparently was like a boy.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Meena is versatile when playing any sport and is no longer the soft-spoken shy girl. Meena has no issues wearing a netball dress whilst playing netball but prefers jeans and shirts in social settings. However, when taunted with the label of tomboy, Meena ‘forces herself to wear skirts to hide the way she walked – like a boy’. The aforementioned confirms that societal emphasis on gender conformity can lead to discouragement and compel children to exhibit qualities that they do not conform to (Heasley & Crane, 2016). Both Meena and Sapna face similar conundrums in athletic contexts: they display masculine traits like strength and assertiveness, but are compelled to display femininity in social contexts through appearance and dress (Bennett, Scarlett, Hurd Clarke & Crocker, 2017). Meena fails to display female-ness as both absolute and biological based constructs (Connell, 1995), but displays heterodoxy (Coles, 2009) and subversiveness (Butler, 2011) by secretly



(from her parents) playing rugby with her *iTaukei* neighbours.

Anshu is critical of Meena, because Meena plays sports traditionally associated with boys, and does not perform well academically. Therefore, Anshu's views are based on Meena's gender intersected with race (being an Indo-Fijian girl) and class (poor performance in academic work). And instead of admiration for Meena's embodied strength and prowess, Anshu somehow critiques her and translates those qualities as Meena being a tomboy. Children (Anshu) are aware of within-gender hierarchy and tend to value other children who most readily conform to the gender binary – those who do not conform are ridiculed, bullied or socially isolated (Heasley & Crane, 2016). The disapproval of gender disorder (by Anshu and Ashriya's (grand) mother), risks marginalising women who seek empowerment through women's solidarity to break away from masculinist norms and patriarchal orders (Akyüz & Sayan-Cengiz, 2016).

Moreover, Wedgwood (2004) notes that Australian schoolgirls playing football start developing a stronger embodiment and some describe themselves as tomboys. However, despite Meena developing a physically stronger female embodiment like the aforementioned girls, unlike them, she finds the term 'tomboy' derogatory. She tries to disassociate herself from the 'tomboy' label by wearing clothes in social settings that conform to (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity and compulsory heterosexuality (Bidwai, 2013; Connell, 2009). Therefore, via Meena, Ashriya and Sapna's sporting agencies, it is evident that traditional gender boundaries limit the range of sporting options available to girls, deeming that it is not feminine for them to play sport (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Kanemasu, 2018).

Moreover, Anshu (similar to South African families who do not accept or support their daughters playing a traditionally male sport – soccer (Pelak, 2009)), disapproves the idea of *iTaukei* female rugby players despite considering them more robust and physical than Indo-Fijian men. Both aforementioned parties reject Butler's notion of masculinity/ies existing in any body, and that masculinity and femininity are performative – not based on biology (Butler, 2010). In contrast,

Brazilian women football players perceive the sport in different ways. Some players use football to oppose the hegemonic gender order in the sport; others think that it is imperative to follow normative femininity in order to be acceptable to the press, stakeholders and society, whereas some reject normative femininity and fight for the ‘naturalness’ of women in football (Knijnik, 2015).

Anshu perceives (*iTaukei*) women rugby players as ‘boyish’ because they challenge the masculinist/heteronormative norms of the Fijian hegemonic rugby discourse (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013) by playing a sport associated with *iTaukei* men. The Fijian rugby discourse (hegemonic masculinity) is not a shared zone and remains with *iTaukei* males. This is similar to soccer’s representation of hegemonic masculinity in Brazil, where women playing football is not fully accepted (Knijnik, 2015). In Ashriya’s case, claiming physicality in a female-associated sport still fetches her a label from her grandmother who regards (all) sports as masculine activities, even netball, which is considered a sport for girls in the Fijian context (Kanemasu, 2018). Her grandmother calls her ‘a boy’ since netball means running and jumping – activities that are opposite of biological females (Heasley & Crane, 2016). Ashriya’s grandmother perceives that Ashriya’s sporting agency and rebellion could potentially get her pregnant:

‘All this jumping and running will only catch attention of the boys and next thing we know you are pregnant.’ Aji snapped. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

For Ashriya’s grandmother, the body movements associated with sports are ‘unwomanly’. She is also threatened by the uncontrolled freedom that girls get via sporting agencies (Kanemasu, 2018) – this could attract boys and potentially lead to pregnancy before marriage, which would be a disgrace to the family. There is much pressure for unmarried Hindu girls to protect their virginity as this is an important tenet of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity and increases a girl’s value in the

‘marriage market’ (Persaud, 2014; Shandil, 2016). *Aji* also emphasises the impacts of menarche and importance of education:

‘You should focus on your schoolwork Ashriya; you have started menstruating, you should think like a woman now!’ *Aji* exclaimed. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

In *aji*’s (like Anshu’s) view, the female body develops in terms of biology and should not be tampered with by the embodied and sometimes aggressive (‘mannish’) nature of sports. *Aji* also imparts misconceptions, shame and stigma associated with menstruation to Ashriya (like older Indian women), which impede girls’ transition into womanhood (Dudeja et al., 2016). Ashriya must behave like a ‘proper woman’ after menarche by performing activities that are desirably feminine (Connell, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2019). Ashriya’s grandmother also encourages her to focus on her academic work and not play netball, revealing that the (educated) mind vs. (untampered) body both play an important role in the construction of gender within the Indo-Fijian culture.

Educational pursuits are encouraged in (many) Indo-Fijian homes (for both girls and boys) due to insecurities resulting from racial based coups – education is perceived as a way out of poverty (good jobs and migration) (Balram, 2019; Naidu, 2008). Also, Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity does not merely focus on women being good home and family managers, religiously sound, soft-spoken, respectful to elders and maintaining principles of patriarchy – there is also emphasis on an educated girl who has a well-paid job. The aforementioned epitome makes a complete packaged woman and an ideal marriage prospect. In hindsight, *aji* (and the Indo-Fijian society) fail to realise that with progress, education also advocates liberation, where girls like Ashriya learn to gain/raise their voices, thus threatening to destabilise Indo-Fijian cultural norms (Shandil, 2016). However, interestingly unlike Ashriya’s case, Sapna’s older sisters (who come from a rich family) were nudged towards marriage after high school, some ten years ago. As for Sapna, she chooses to study and enter

a field of work that is dominated by men; slowly her father has accepted that she is ‘different’.

The following section moves on to explore the expected body image and extended body norms associated with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity and how young Indo-Fijian women navigate these expectations in their everyday (sporting) lives.

#### **4.4.5 Body Image and the Extended Body**

‘My Aunties told me to put honey and yogurt on my face

So that pimple scars were not easy to trace.’ (*Only Female in the Room*)

Sapna’s aunties condition her to achieve a lighter and pimple free face – one that is more marketable for marriage. Indian women with dusky complexions have suffered a tremendous amount of stigma and shame about how they look, which is shaped by society’s unrealistic standards of beauty (Banerjee, 2020). The drive for ‘beauty’ is instilled in girls from a very young age (Choi, 2000). Sapna is coached to acquire beautiful, light and glowing skin, and not appear very toned (masculine). These qualities are totally opposite to those (competitiveness, aggression and power) that Sapna performs in male-dominated arenas – the gym and at work. Thus, Sapna’s aunties emphasising the maintenance of female beauty, precipitate disempowerment towards Sapna’s weightlifting – an agency that threatens a shift from emphasized femininity – jeopardising the production of a subservient Indo-Fijian woman for marriage (Shandil, 2016). Sapna’s mother demotivates her from her sporting agency:

‘I moved in with my Muslim boyfriend and life went up hill

Together we trained but mum said I looked too thin; my mojo she tried to kill.’ (*Only Female in the Room*)

Sapna's mother disapproves Sapna's toned look and tells her that she looks 'too thin' – this is similar to the judgements that Komal Raj received from boys at the gym when she started to lift weights. Unlike, Sapna, Meena and Ashriya, Anshu is disinterested in playing sports; she fears gaining muscles and looking like a tomboy/boy. Anshu prefers walking and doing yoga, thus adhering to images of the female body depicted via the Bollywood cinema (Lata, 2009). Ultimately, both Anshu and Sapna are petite women, but Sapna's robust and toned body is not in line with the tenets of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity, as it depicts assertiveness and strength which are associated with men (Heasley & Crane, 2016; Raj, 2019).

Indo-Fijian women (like Anshu) internalise the cultural norms associated with body image and practice cultural self-discipline (Foucault, 1977; Sugden et al., 2020). They perform their gender in line with the aforementioned constructs and maintain emphasized femininity (Bartky, 1997; Kanemasu, 2018), regarding 'being slim' as beautiful (Kérchy, 2005), therefore rejecting athletic identities and body images. However, Ashriya, Meena and Sapna (athletic girls) celebrate their female athletic identity/body image, and only focus on body aesthetics (clothing and make-up) to emphasize their femininity when coaxed or compelled by the family/society. These three (moderate to high) athletic girls do not condone (but rather celebrate) muscles/tone akin to Australian women football players (Wedgwood, 2004), Brazilian women surfers (Knijnik, Horton & Cruz, 2010) and (globally) women in combat sports (Godoy-Pressland, 2015).

Additionally, Sapna's grandmother controls how Sapna clothes her (female) body – the gendered body defines the extended body, and it is also defined by it.

'My *aji* forever tells me to wear my skirt long...' (*Only Female in the Room*)

Girls and boys are to dress (clothing, jewellery, shoes and hair style,) according to the traditional perspective of their gender. Relatedly, Blakemore's (2003) research with 3 to 11-year-olds disclosed that their peers negatively evaluated boys with feminine hairstyles or clothing. Meena notes a similar experience:

'My father doesn't like my netball uniform, finds the dress too short; he would be happy if I played in a *ghagra*,' Meena said laughing. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Meena's father is unhappy with the short length of her netball dress, and would prefer her playing in a *ghagra* – which conceals much of the body. Ashriya's father also ensures that the girls dress appropriately – like 'decent' (Indo-Fijian) women. Interestingly, the girls' brothers' dress styles appear a silent matter – neither mentioned nor questioned. The aforementioned is in line with Bennett et al. (2017) and Kanemasu's (2018) revelations that women who play sports constantly have to negotiate their athletic and feminine identities in and outside of sport. For example, Sapna has to maintain two separate identities and (extended) body images. Whilst lifting weights, she needs to wear attire which is comfortable, body hugging and does not get in the way – unlike the 'long skirts' which her grandmother prescribes. Moreover, lifting weights results in Sapna having a toned body, resilience and strong will – features that are aloof from Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016; Steinfeldt et al., 2011). In social settings, Sapna is expected to be soft and graceful, but her experiences at work and the gym have given birth to a different kind of woman – one who confidently says 'FUCK' in order to raise her voice and/or illuminate passion for her sporting agency. Sapna's language, gym clothes, male friends, Muslim boyfriend and, male-dominated work collectively reveal her lack of compliance to emphasized femininity (and traditionally normative body images) and conservative gender binaries. Thus, Sapna's agencies create a new kind of Indo-Fijian femininity.

Relatedly, Meena attempts to break Anshu's impenetrable stereotypes about the body image of Indo-Fijian women lacking physicality:

'... As for Indo-Fijian girls, it is too hard to imagine us playing rugby' (Anshu – *Unpermitted Passion*)

Meena proudly reminisces about being tackled by a boy and being able to resume play. Meena emphasises her robust and resilient (athletic Indo-Fijian) female body. Meena clearly embodies pride and pleasure that is involved in being able not only to deal and cope with a (*iTaukei*) boy's tackle, but also to feel confident and strong enough in her own (Indo-Fijian) female body. Despite Meena proudly standing as an epitome of an Indo-Fijian strong woman rugby player, she is not able to persuade or motivate Anshu to watch her game, let alone Anshu being inspired to play sports. However, Meena's sporting agency and prowess manages to mesmerise Ashriya, who imagines Meena's body to be in line with a Hindu deity – having several hands. Meena reciprocates this perception by perceiving Ashriya's body as being capable, strong and equipped with prowess to perform well. According to Meena, all Ashriya needs to do is 'play her best game'. For Meena sport provides a social, cultural, gendered and racial equalitarian space, where one can succeed as long as one works hard (Withycombe, 2011).

The following section moves on to explore the lived experiences (racial and gendered) of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji's sporting platforms.

#### **4.4.6 Participants' Lived Experiences of Gendered and Racialised Segregation in Sports**

'Most of the *iTaukei* boys and girls made it into the school's sports teams if they desired to play, which most did.' (*Unpermitted Passion*)

In Fiji, sport is actively preserved and protected as indigenous space and one reason for this is the prominence of ethno-racial stereotypes (Sugden et al., 2020). *Unpermitted Passion* generally echoes (and via Anshu's views) stereotypes that *iTaukeis* are born with strength and natural prowess for sports. It is as if just genes and cultural background could decide the prowess of an individual sports person, without taking into account their social and educational experiences (Hylton, 2008). Fiji has a hegemonic masculine culture (Kanemasu, 2018; Tora et al., 2006) where *iTaukei* men occupy positions of power by dominating the two markers of physicality – the military and rugby (Kanemanu, 2018; Teawei, 2005; 2008). This is revealed in the data through Anshu's lack of acceptance of Indo-Fijian men rugby players and *iTaukei* women rugby players, thus confirming that the masculinity (and physicality) of *iTaukei* men is culturally (and nationally) exalted over other forms of masculinities (Connell 1995). Sugden et al. (2020) note that despite the stereotypes of lacking physicality for rugby, a few Indo-Fijian men play the sport. However, like Anshu, the *iTaukei* men think that Indo-Fijian men do not belong with rugby, thus do not accept them to play in their circles. Therefore, race influences the gender 'social scale' in Fiji and rugby is not made equitable for (interested) Indo-Fijian men (Sugden et al., 2020).

Racial segregation in sports (in Fiji) begins in school – where a particular sport is assigned to (and represents) a particular race. For example, during PE lessons the common practice is to automatically separate *iTaukei* boys into rugby, and Indo-Fijian boys into soccer, as though their ethnic backgrounds make these choices 'natural' (Sugden et al., 2020). In hindsight this impedes Indo-Fijian boys' participation in rugby in the future. Sports segregation on racial and gendered lines is evident in *Unpermitted Passion* – for example when Meena (who practises her gender and ethnicity fluidly) plays soccer; apart from her, the other players are all Indo-Fijian boys (no *iTaukei* boys and no girls at all) and when she plays rugby the team comprises merely *iTaukei* boys and girls (no other Indo-Fijians).



Furthermore, the Fiji Rugby Union promotes a national sport that is ethnocentric and exclusive (racist). Indigenous stakeholders of rugby emphasise rugby's indigeneity and use stereotypes of Indo-Fijians lacking physicality (and size) to bar interested players, thus maintaining *iTaukei* dominance in the sport (Sugden, et al., 2020). In contrast, in New Zealand the changing ethnic make-up of rugby has shifted the focus from an exclusive preserve of Pākehā men to a shared space with Māori and Pacific islanders (Grainger, Falcous & Newman, 2012). Moreover, masculinity (and femininity) does not mean the same thing to everyone and in every culture; it varies in how it is understood, experienced, and lived out in daily practice (Connell, 1987; 1995; Coles, 2009). The aforementioned is revealed via Ashriya and Anshu's perceptions:

'Roy plays soccer, Ashriya, not rugby, it's not the same.' Anshu responds. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

The above excerpt reveals that unlike Anshu, Ashriya perceives Roy Krishna's soccer agency and success as Fijian hegemonic masculinity in relation to other men – despite the common subordinated identities of Indo-Fijian men in comparison to *iTaukei* hegemonic masculinities (Kanemasu, 2018). A number of Indo-Fijian sportsmen such as Vijay Singh (golfer) (Prasad, 2009), Nilesh Chand (body builder) (Cama, 2019), and Joy Ali (boxer) (Singh, 2015) have excelled at international levels. Also, Fiji's number one soccer player, Roy Krishna has stood out in mixed racial teams (in Fiji and internationally) and played professional soccer in top leagues in Australia, New Zealand and India (Cama, 2020). However, for Anshu, none of the aforementioned sportsmen qualify as epitomes of Fijian hegemonic masculinity.

Soccer is Fiji's second most popular game (for men) and considered an Indo-Fijian/migrants' sport (Hays, 2006; Prasad, 2013), and softer in comparison to rugby (Sugden, 2020). Therefore, Indo-Fijian men who play the sport still occupy spaces of subordinate/marginalised masculinity

(Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Despite being known as an Indo-Fijian sport, soccer is a shared space, with *iTaukei* men playing at club levels and in the national team (James, 2015), unlike rugby, which is relatively closed and ethnocentric (Sugden et al., 2020). Rugby and the military have contributed to the ideas of racial hierarchy (Teaiwa, 2005), practices of racist exclusion (Kanemasu, 2018; Presterudstuen, 2010; Sugden et al., 2020), and racist violence via racial based military coups (Naidu, 2008). Therefore, it is crucial to inject into the race discourse, the different forms of racism faced by Indo-Fijians (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), in order to explore gender constructs in the Indo-Fijian society. For example, the military coups aggravated racial polarisation in Fiji (Naidu, 2008), initiating racist policies favouring the welfare, investment and growth of *iTaukeis* and disfavours Indo-Fijians, which resulted in the emigration of many Indo-Fijians (Naidu, 2008).

Also, Anshu makes it explicit (and also reproduces) the stereotypes associated with Indo-Fijian women playing rugby, not only because they are females, but also because they are Indo-Fijians.

‘...As for Indo-Fijian girls, it is too hard to imagine us playing rugby,’ Anshu thoughtfully commented. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Therefore, race is interwoven with gender and acts to undermine Indo-Fijian women’s rugby (or sporting) pursuits, validating CRT’s tenet that race and racism is socially constructed – is prevalent and enduring (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Furthermore, Indo-Fijian girls (like Anshu) who internalise such racialised and gendered stereotypes associated with physicality, masculinity, heteronormative behaviour and the hegemonic sports discourse (Sugden, et al., 2020), not only maintain these stereotypes by not participating in sports, but also attempt to discourage other women (Meena and Ashriya) who have interest in playing sports (rugby). In doing so, they act as gatekeepers of the traditional gender – binary order.

‘I have seen some *iTaukei* girls play rugby, they look much stronger than our Indo-Fijian boys.’ (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Despite not appreciating *iTaukei* women playing rugby, Anshu perceives them as physically stronger than Indo-Fijian men, thus (sub) consciously perceives gender as fluid (Butler, 2011) and as a consequence of this gender fluidity, masculinity occupies *iTaukei* women rugby players and signifies a mighty female body (Butler, 1990). In Fiji, Indo-Fijian subordinated masculinity is challenged by *iTaukei* women but hegemonic masculinity remains rigid and unchallenged (Kanemasu, 2018). Roy Krishna and the Indo-Fijian indentured labourer/farmer (ancestors) (Ali, 2000) are positioned as ‘real men’ (Verma, et al., 2006) and dominant in terms of Indo-Fijian traditional masculinity, but are subordinated (Connell, 1995; Coles, 2009) in comparison to the robust rugby player or military officer who signify *iTaukei* and Fijian hegemonic masculinity (Kanemasu, 2018). For Indo-Fijian men, apart from physicality – social, religious, economic, and cultural capital are also important markers of masculinities (Coles, 2009; Verma et al., 2006). For example, Ashriya’s father is socially a ‘real man’; he works two shifts and looks after his old parents, children and wife; these are positive aspects of Indo-Fijian traditional masculinity (Shandil, 2016; Verma et al., 2006).

Relatedly, Anshu does not perceive Meena’s sporting agency as acts of ‘proper’ Indo-Fijian women:

‘Maybe you should come and see me play rugby on Saturdays,’ Meena suggested.

‘No thank you Meena, I have better things to do,’ Anshu responds. (*Unpermitted Passion*)

Anshu is not keen to watch Meena play rugby, perhaps because she does not have time and interest – as she even uses her PE lessons to complete her homework. Furthermore, Anshu is also not interested in watching Ashriya play netball – a sport typically played by girls in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018). Even on the bus, Anshu is uninterested in the sports conversations the girls are having. However, Anshu enjoys watching *iTaukei* men play rugby, but rejects watching (*iTaukei*) women play the same sport. The international success of the men’s Sevens Rugby team in the World Series (Pickup, 2017) and being Olympic gold medallists twice in a row (Hutchinson, 2021) have prompted pride in the national team from both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian communities. Anshu’s rejection of sports participation and merely spectating *iTaukei* men playing rugby, reflect conformity to heterosexual normative behaviour and maintenance of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, thus rejecting gender bending/fluidity (Tagg, 2008). For example, Meena and the *iTaukei* women rugby players, through their sporting agency, enter a traditionally *iTaukei* male zone, thus Anshu does not accept this disorder – she also does not accept boys playing netball or girls playing soccer. Moreover, Anshu herself prefers walking and doing yoga as opposed to playing a sport.

Therefore, Meena playing rugby, soccer and netball disrupts stereotypes of *iTaukeis* being ‘naturally’ gifted at sport and Indo-Fijians in academic work – mindsets which promote deficits for both groups in the reverse (Sugden et al., 2020). Meena being great at sports problematises the subordinate masculinity/femininity positions of Indo-Fijian women in the matrix of Fijian masculinities, and her passion for rugby challenges racial and gender stereotypes associated with physicality and dominant masculinities in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Meena enjoys the physical aspect of sports – be it netball, soccer or rugby – she is proud to get up after being tackled by an *iTaukei* boy, and she is not afraid to score goals even when the goalie is a boy (Shiv). Meena is not intimidated by race (*iTaukeis*) and/or (dominant) masculinities/femininities (*iTaukei* boys, *iTaukei* girls and Indo-Fijian boys) around her.

In contrast, Ashriya prefers playing netball in school – a typical female sport in Fiji played by some Indo-Fijian girls in high school but dominated by *iTaukei* girls in multiracial schools (Kanemasu, Johnson, & Molnar 2018). Ashriya plays well but is still judged (by Tevita) based on her race. Moreover Ashriya's (grand) parents restrict her from playing sports based on her gender – both aforementioned parties find it inappropriate for Ashriya to participate (for different reasons). Thus, the data reveals that when Indo-Fijian girls move away from their preconceived epitome of 'lack of physicality' and emphasized Indo-Fijian femininity position, they are rejected (by *iTaukeis* and their own kindred) for disrupting the existing gender/racial order. Furthermore, *iTaukeis* fear that sports and physicality might one day erode as a site of *iTaukei* dominance (Sugden et al., 2020). For example, Tevita catcalls at Ashriya – '*Avalila, Avalila*' – literally meaning 'skinny', but when used with Indo-Fijians it also means 'weak and lacking physicality'. However, disapproval of Indo-Fijian women in sports and stereotypes of their lack of physicality are not merely limited to *iTaukeis*; Navin (Indo-Fijian boy) finds it necessary to make fun of Shiela when she falls whilst playing soccer – she MUST be weak or have 'no skills', as Master Gopal emphasises.

In Fiji, *iTaukei* females dominate team sports for women (Kanemasu, Johnson, & Molnar, 2018; Molnar, Amin, & Kanemasu, 2018) and the idea of Indo-Fijian females as sportswomen is laughed at, with stereotypes that they just cannot play sports (Sugden, et al., 2020). The national netball team solely comprises *iTaukeis*, despite some Indo-Fijian girls like Meena and Ashriya being passionate and playing (well) in school. The narratives of the young Indo-Fijian women reveal the different types of masculinities and femininities, which *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians perform on the Fijian 'social gender scale'. Hegemonic masculinity associated with *iTaukei* men (rugby and military) is placed at the top of this scale, whereas passive sedentary Indo-Fijian female bodies rest at its bottom. In between these two extreme positions of domination and subordination are several other bodies such as the Indo-Fijian male soccer players occupying places of inferiority in relation to the male and female *iTaukei* rugby players, and superiority in comparison to the Indo-

Fijian women and non-athletic Indo-Fijian men. There are also unique cases of a handful of young Indo-Fijian women (like Sapna and Meena) in this gender/racialised continuum, who display athleticism and disrupt this neat scale by moving upwards from their preconceived passive sedentary bodies at the bottom of the scale.

This chapter critically examines the two non-fiction creative pieces and provides valuable insight into the gendered and racialised (intersecting with class – economic and social) world of the participants – which can constrain their ability to be involved in sports and to manage their bodies according to their own will. The intersectionality matrix has been employed throughout the discussion to make visible the double inequalities that (athletic) Indo-Fijian girls/women face – a complex system of oppression based on race and gender where occasionally the young athletic women can be ‘saved’ by challenging the gender norms, but then are undermined by their ethnicity – or vice versa. However, both Meena and Ashriya are from impoverished families and a lower social/economic class than Asnhu and Sapna, thus they face an added layer (triple degree) of challenge; for example, Meena is displaced, she has to live at her aunt’s place because the facilities are better there for her to study. As for Ashriya, her struggles associated with social class are countless – she lives with seven other people in a one-bedroom house, lives in a squatter settlement with no proper yard to play or train, merely has a (pink) plastic ball to practise her netball skills, and if public transport and schools were not free, she would not even be at school – yet this young woman manages to do well both in sports and academically.

#### **4.5 Key Findings of the Chapter**

In this section, I summarise the key findings and critical analysis of this chapter. The findings reveal that:

- Young Indo-Fijian women (and men) are encouraged (even compelled) by their family (elders) to perform gender normative behaviour/acts aligned with patriarchy in most families,

and in some families (such as Sapna's and Ashriya's) matriarchy as well, in order to maintain the Indo-Fijian rigid binary gender order. However, the research reveals that despite some Indo-Fijian women having some power, patriarchal structures are still dominant. For example, Ashriya's grandfather's glare is unquestionable despite her grandmother having power in disciplining Ashriya and her sisters. However, rather than questioning the patriarchal structures, her grandmother's power is exerted to maintain them, in a subtle power game.

- Apart from patriarchy and matriarchy the (social and economic) class of a (younger) woman and the principle of mother worship hold some power in maintaining traditional gender orders in the Indo-Fijian society.
- For Indo-Fijian girls from poor families, there is greater emphasis on educational achievements rather than emphasis on maintaining a physically strong and athletically skilled body (brain vs. brawn). Therefore, sporting agencies are less favoured, discouraged or even restricted.
- Athletic Indo-Fijian women who play sports traditionally associated with men (rugby, weightlifting, soccer), have to maintain two separate gender identities – whilst playing sports they use standards of traditional male athleticism and while in social settings they are compelled to employ tenets of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity.
- Athletic Indo-Fijian women resist traditional gender constructs, racism and Fijian masculinities, and disrupt gender/racial orders by moving up from their preconceived and somehow socially desired passive sedentary bodies at the bottom of the Fijian gender/masculinity scale.
- Often when (athletic) Indo-Fijian women resist and disrupt traditional gender orders and perform agencies associated with ambivalent femininity they also end up complying with the hegemonic gender/racial order.

- Athletic Indo-Fijian women themselves are not troubled by their body image (or sports attire) but are questioned and controlled via societal objectifying gazes (their elders, other Indo-Fijian women, and *iTaukeis*), which perceive Indo-Fijian women's bodies as a misfit for sporting agencies.
- Indo-Fijian women who internalise social stereotypes continue to disclaim Indo-Fijian female physicality and persistently assert that physical power is masculine – thus maintain and reproduce Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity. They threaten to influence their own sports participation and that of other Indo-Fijian women. In hindsight, athletic Indo-Fijian women continue to hurdle gender, racial and class fences and move beyond their stereotyped 'abject' bodies as they perform (sporting) agency using traits of ambivalent femininity and (few) even protest femininity.
- Embodied pleasure experienced through contact/physical sports like rugby is fluid, and not exclusive to any gender or race. Thus gender-neutral sports lessons in school for boys and girls of all races can break established gender/racial stereotypes and promote a shift from the orthodox views of masculinities/femininities.



# Chapter 5 Sociocultural Influences of Indo-Fijian Women's Sport Participation

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon Butler's (1990) theory of gender fluidity; gender being a social construct and Connell's (2009) notion of hegemonic masculinity (and traditional masculinities) and emphasized femininity. Moreover, CRT's notions – race as a social construct (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010), interest convergence and its tenet of counter-storytelling (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006) have been employed to make visible the race and power relations (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010), and the diverse nature of (political, institutional and structural) oppression of Indo-Fijians (women) (Naidu, 2008; Ratuva, 2003) in relation to their everyday and sporting agencies.

Five participants' data were selected to represent the themes whilst responding to the research questions:

1. How do the attitudes, barriers/challenges, pleasures, and histories of resistance and opportunities of Indo-Fijian girls/women influence their sports participation in Fiji?
2. How equitable, inclusive and effective are Fiji schools' Physical Education lessons in understanding, aiding and responding to Indo-Fijian girls' cultural needs and perceptions of physical activity and sports?

The participants' narratives demonstrate how the sporting lives of Indo-Fijian women are crossed by interconnected experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, class, religiosity and geography, both at home and the community. Their narratives inspired me to interlace a poem and one-act play to present participants' data in an evocative way (Koelsch, 2015). Presenting data via non-fiction creative pieces not only makes visible the themes, but also emotionally engages the reader/audience, and evades turning a participant's complex story into a single linear narrative (Koelsch, 2015).

Furthermore, the sporting stories (voices) of Indo-Fijian women (others) are ignored because they are not apt markers of the dominant Fijian sporting culture (Lopez, 2003). Therefore counter-narratives (non-fiction creative pieces) are needed to interrupt and disrupt the voices of the dominant group (Milner, 2007). I then thematically analyse the two non-fiction creative pieces to raise the marginalised voices of Indo-Fijian women, and also to show the power of alternative voices within the Fijian context.

The first non-fiction creative piece in this chapter is a one-act play, which is based on the experiences of four participants (Khushi, Razia, Jasmine and Roshni). These young women were 20 to 24 years old, and from different walks of life, with rich stories. The second non-fiction creative piece is a poem based on the data of 22-year-old Fanny who was a video editor and dancer (performer); she was separated from her husband and pregnant during the period of data collection.

The poem and one-act play are written in simple everyday language to show how (young) Indo-Fijians communicate in the Fijian context, thus allowing readers to relate to and understand the participants' experiences. Some non-English words have been used (explained in the footnotes) mimicking the conversations (and observations in social settings) that I had with the five participants.

The following segment begins with the one-act play, *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*, which entails three scenes. The play enabled me to create dialogues between the characters/participants presenting their data (from interviews, written free verses and poetry workshops), in a holistic and free flowing fashion – mimicking how young Indo-Fijian women mingle and communicate in their circles. Following the one-act play is a six-stanza poem, which has a regular meter and a rhyme scheme of *aabccd*. Refrains are used at the end of each stanza for literary effect and also to reveal the negative/positive nature of the persona's experience. The poem has a chronological flow where each stanza shares experiences from infancy to preschool – primary school – high school and finally, adulthood. The poem needs to be read aloud to fully grasp its rhythm – that is, the ups and downs of

Fanny's sporting life. Furthermore, the use of refrains and rhyming words allows for amplified appreciation and understanding of the feelings and emotions of the persona (Obermeier et al., 2013), whilst illuminating the constraints she faces.

Each non-fiction creative piece has an antecedent segment, which explains the research context in depth. A discussion section follows the non-fiction creative pieces, and the chapter ends with a brief section which discusses the chapter findings.

## **5.2 One-Act Play – Research Context**

The four participants (Khushi, Razia, Roshni and Jasmine) were selected for this play because they had all completed high school, so apart from their childhood sporting experiences (at home), their primary and also their high school sporting experiences, I could also get holistic stories of their sporting experiences whilst in tertiary institutions and/or working, being married/divorced and/or having kids. The play is a platform, which illuminates the complex social context of the participants' diverse sporting experiences, who have quite different (sometimes similar) social compositions, which makes each narrative distinct, rich and essential.

All four participants lived on the Eastern side (Suva) of Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu. Khushi, Roshni and Fanny followed Hinduism, Jasmine – Christianity, and Razia – Islam. All the participants spoke English effortlessly as the medium of instruction in Fiji schools is English. Four of the participants spoke Fiji-Hindi as their mother tongue, except for Jasmine whose parents promoted English at home, so she had only a basic understanding of the local language. None of the Hindu girls were certain about their castes (refer to Appendix 2a) – a system part of Hinduism, which provides for the ordering of groups in society (Cox, 1948).

Khushi had spent her childhood and primary school education in Rakiraki,<sup>35</sup> where her family had a farm. Khushi and her mother moved to Suva when she was in Form 5 (equivalent to Year 11 in Australian education) to live with her married sister. She had her high school education at an Indo-Fijian managed co-ed, multiracial school in Suva. Khushi visited her father once a month on the weekend, and that is when she re-united with her cousins and played soccer. Both the interviews with Khushi took place at her sister's home where she lived. Khushi was soft-spoken but not shy during the interviews and poetry workshop; she was a tall girl who stood out in a crowd. Khushi's demeanour during the interviews reflected her passion for soccer and outdoor activities. Each time she spoke about soccer, her eyes would light up, voice would increase, and gestures would accompany her stories. Khushi enquired if this research project had a sports event in which she could participate. Unfortunately, I did not have the resources to organise a sports event and/or mitigate risks associated with such events. Instead, I connected her with a few athletic girls in the project and in my circle with whom she could play some sports and/or be informed about sports events. Each of her interviews lasted for approximately 50 minutes.

The second participant (Razia) worked as a clerical officer/receptionist at a car hire company. She was divorced and had a 5-year-old son. She and her son and lived with her (paternal) grandmother, parents and younger brother and sister. Razia had her primary and secondary school education at a Muslim school; she played goalkeeper during PE in high school and enjoyed it. Apart from soccer, Razia loved reading and dancing. Razia freely gave very detailed descriptions of her experiences during the interview and didn't require nudging. Her interviews took place at her home during weekdays after work and lasted for about 50 minutes each. Razia also enquired about my sporting experiences; sharing my stories with her helped build further rapport.

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<sup>35</sup> A farming district in Fiji's Ra province – located in the western division of Viti Levu.

The third participant (Jasmine) was studying physiotherapy and lived with her parents and two younger brothers. Jasmine had an athletic childhood, as her mother had introduced her to volleyball in her mixed racial circle of friends when they lived in Levuka<sup>36</sup>. Jasmine attended a multiracial co-ed primary school in Levuka and a Christian managed, co-ed, multiracial high school in Suva. Jasmine started dancing in her childhood and continued in primary and high school – she still performs at family functions and various events. In high school, Jasmine did martial arts and played chess; she started (fashion) modelling a few years ago and this encourages her to work on her fitness and physique. She does some cardio and body weight training at home. Jasmine was very passionate and keen to share her experiences and her interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each; the interviews were conducted at her university cafeteria over a cup of coffee.

The fourth participant (Roshni) was a housewife and mother of two (1 year old boy and 3 year old girl). Roshni had had her primary school education in a co-ed multiracial school in Ba,<sup>37</sup> and her high school education at an Indo-Fijian managed co-ed, multiracial school in Suva. Her family moved to Suva after their farming land lease was not renewed. Roshni's husband was a taxi driver and he earned enough for the family to live comfortably. Roshni loved playing netball in primary school and was interested in javelin in high school but discontinued either because she was not accepted into team sports or was discouraged by her PE teachers, thus she decided not to participate in high school sports. Roshni was vocal but it was a little difficult to have long interviews with her as her children were quite a handful and required her attention. The interviews took place at her home and lasted around 30 minutes each.

The one-act play has carefully weaved the isolated sporting experiences of the four participants into a holistic picture/story through a fictitious setting of a wedding event. The experiences, characters (despite the pseudo names) and their background stories are real. The

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<sup>36</sup> A town on the eastern coast of Ovalau in the Eastern Division of Fiji.

<sup>37</sup> Rural farming area located in the western division of Viti Levu.

wedding scene was necessary to bring these characters together and allow the reader to understand the complex interconnectedness of gender, race, body image and class issues in a (Indo) Fijian context. The next section unfolds the stories of Khushi, Razia, Jasmine and Roshni.

## 5.2.1 One-Act Play: Tomboy with Butter Fingers

### 5.2.1.1 ACT I SCENE I. The Wedding Hall.

The lights in the wedding hall twinkle like sparkling stars of the night skies. The ambience is so vivid – men smartly dressed in *kurtis*<sup>38</sup> or formal shirts; the women all decked up showcasing colourful *saris*<sup>39</sup>, bangles and striking *bindis*<sup>40</sup>; as beautiful as *Diwali*<sup>41</sup> *rangolis*<sup>42</sup>. The smell of *ghee*<sup>43</sup>, sugar, and curry spices sneaks from the kitchen to meet the array of the guests' perfumes in the hallway. Bollywood dreamy gigs garnish the group conversations like coriander in a curry. The guests eagerly anticipate the arrival of the bride and groom. A warm finger traces Khushi's arm, compelling her to turn around and face the two ladies behind her; she recognises one of them.

**KHUSHI**

Hey Raz! Good to see you, how have you been?

**RAZIA**

I am well Khushi, couldn't recognise you though. By the way, this is my neighbour Roshni  
(pointing to a woman in her early 20s sitting next to her).

Both Khushi and Roshni exchange greets and Razia fixes her gaze on Khushi in admiration and  
grins.

**RAZIA (Continuing)**

You look so tall and beautiful!

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<sup>38</sup> Refers to waistcoats, jackets and blouses, which sit above the waist without side slits.

<sup>39</sup> An Indian attire for women that consists of an unstitched drape varying from 4.5 to 9 metres; when draped in a particular manner it gives rise to an attire that is complete in every aspect.

<sup>40</sup> A coloured dot worn on the centre of the forehead.

<sup>41</sup> Hindu festival of lights.

<sup>42</sup> Is an Indian art form, in which patterns are created on the floor or the ground using materials such as coloured rice, and dry flour.

<sup>43</sup> Clarified butter.

**KHUSHI**

Oh! Thank you (Laughingly)

**RAZIA**

I'd barely be reaching your shoulders (Chirpily).

The three young women laugh noisily and the few women sitting around them roll their eyes at the distraction. Razia indicates a vacant seat beside her and Khushi moves to make herself comfortable there. Razia touches Khushi's arm lightly and warm memories of their after-school walks, spark. Khushi and Razia attended different schools in the same area and were neighbours during high school.

**RAZIA**

From a tomboy to a temptress; how did you do it?

Khushi blushes at Razia's comment; her mind races back to the fields where she played soccer with her dad and male cousins. Moving to Suva was hard to settle in and make friends as not only was she a country girl but also called a tomboy – she never understood why though! Khushi feels uncomfortable and quickly changes the topic.

**KHUSHI**

By the way, how is your little boy?

**RAZIA**

Ayan is a handful; he is in kindergarten already.

**KHUSHI**

How time flies! I am sorry about your divorce; how is it living with your parents again?

**RAZIA**

I am glad that the marriage chapter is over in my life (Voice quivering)

My family has been very supportive and has given so much love to Ayan.

**ROSHNI**

I don't know how you do it Raz, there are so many restrictions when living with in-laws; I am glad I didn't have to experience that.

**KHUSHI**

You are a strong woman, Raz! Not only did you stop potential goals from behind the post but put a stop to being treated bad (Sympathetically).

Razia sighs as her mind dribbles to the school's football field; she always played the goalie and enjoyed stopping goals despite her *abbu*<sup>44</sup> being against sports – even if she played with girls. Her parents never spoke about sports at home or encouraged her brother and her to play. Her mum had never kicked a ball in her life and her father never shared any sporting stories.

**RAZIA**

Oh! How I loved stopping goals but funnily wondered how it would have felt to score goals.

**KHUSHI**

I love playing the Striker position – what stopped you from trying?

**RAZIA**

I felt too thin and wasn't sure about running. I always thought if I ran hard I could fall – that would have been embarrassing and my *abbu* would have been furious if I came home with any injury.

**KHUSHI**

Once you start running and playing, you discover new things about yourself. I am glad I was allowed to play with my male cousins even when I was the only girl there. The experience actually toughened me up. Does Ayan play soccer?

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<sup>44</sup> Father.



**RAZIA**

I want Ayan to play but he must prioritise studies. The way things are in Fiji for us, I would prefer him to move to Australia or New Zealand.

**KHUSHI**

I have heard my mother say the same – that soccer wouldn't give me a good job. I only get a chance to play when I go back to Rakiraki. There aren't many playgrounds in this area, and the few that are there, are always populated by the *iTaukei* rugby boys or Indo-Fijian soccer boys; no space for us.

**RAZIA**

Guess it wouldn't be safe to play around boys; and I can only imagine the level of catcalling by the Indo-Fijian boys. I feel the indigenous males give more respect to Indo-Fijian girls compared to our boys.

**KHUSHI**

True that! But the *iTaukei* boys aren't interested in us in any way. I wish there were more facilities targeted at women; I don't wanna be at a playground practising my soccer skills in fear of being harassed.

**RAZIA**

My brother plays soccer but we never discuss or play sports together.

**ROSHNI**

(Cuts in) I loved playing netball in primary school but I didn't play much sports in high school as I was hardly given free time after school; any time away meant washing dishes or helping mum cook. Once I really got interested in javelin but my sports teachers said it was too dangerous for me and to choose something safe, but the *iTaukei* girls were allowed to freely throw javelin like superheroes – could they not have taught me (Sarcastically)?

**KHUSHI**

Primary school was the best days, I didn't care how I looked and played freely every day. Adulthood is so demanding (Laughingly); work, study and household chores – I get exhausted – when to play soccer then?

**ROSHNI**

In Ba, the schools didn't have good sports facilities like Suva schools, but I still played netball. In high school my Indo-Fijian teachers actually made me believe that playing with the boys was abnormal and wrong.

**KHUSHI**

Settling in high school in Suva was hard; the *iTaukei* girls didn't prefer us in their circle. It was different in the village – the *iTaukeis* were friendlier and more accommodating; the villagers actually taught me how to swim – that was special.

**ROSHNI**

I found it hard with the *iTaukei* girls when I moved to Suva; I got ridiculed a lot by them and didn't get accepted in their netball circle during PE.

**KHUSHI**

In the classroom Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* girls can work together but not in sports; they think we can't play netball, but then I never was interested in catching a ball; I loved kicking it (Laughingly), and there was no soccer for girls in our school.

**RAZIA (Cuts in)**

School sports are just for *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijian boys – no one bothers about us (pause); by the way, do you still wear your famous ripped shorts Khushi (Laughingly)?

**KHUSHI**

I do – my father used to disapprove of short clothes but is more accepting now – maybe because I am working and independent.

**RAZIA**

Lucky you! My *abbu* is very strict, he wouldn't allow girls to even wear jeans, let alone skimpy sports uniforms. This divorce means more restrictions for me.

Razia leans to touch the numerous green and gold bangles that Khushi is wearing.

**RAZIA**

(Continuing)

My *dadi*<sup>45</sup> reminds me to stay away from 'cheap' activities and not bring shame on the family again; I was only 18 – not ready for marriage. We were only dating and once the family found out, I was forced to stop seeing Nahum or get married to him.

**KHUSHI**

I am so sorry that you had to go through all this, Raz (Sympathetically).

**ROSHNI**

My parents even restricted me from playing sports or going out thinking I'd get involved with boys. In my primary school, I loved sports and who knows I could have become a PE teacher! I really will be supportive if my daughter shows interest in sports. Never know what these kids would want to do when they grow up – as is, my younger brother was never interested in playing any sport and only loved books.

**KHUSHI**

I've never seen an Indo-Fijian female PE teacher; no role models to motivate us. Even local newspapers and TV are all about the Fiji rugby Team. When Komal Raj won the women's bodybuilding title, she was put on some back page and then forgotten.

**RAZIA**

I am slowly accepting our traditions and even the Fijian culture – no matter how hard you try, you can't get a domestic cat to plough the land, you need a bull.

Amidst the girls' deep conversation Roshni's phone rings and she answers it.

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<sup>45</sup> Paternal grandmother.

## ROSHNI

Girls I really need to leave, my little one is unwell.

## KHUSHI

But the wedding hasn't started yet (Complainingly)

## ROSHNI

Perks of being a mother – I can't move beyond the dishes in my sink and minding the kids – my once beloved netball is merely a dream now. (Laughingly)

Roshni picks her bag, hugs the two girls and bids them farewell.

A swift melody creeps into the hall, charming enough to divert the girls' attention. Groovy drumbeats fill the air and a group of youths dancingly lead the groom's party. Some guests stand up whilst others gaze through the gaps in the crowd, to get a glimpse of the groom. The tall, fair, handsome groom takes his place in the wedding *mandap*<sup>46</sup> and the *pundit*<sup>47</sup> begins the rituals. The groom's procession settles themselves in the seats reserved in the front. A little later, the beautiful bride, clad in a red *ghagra choli*,<sup>48</sup> and heavy laden with trendy jewellery, is escorted with the poignant lyrics playing in the background. After the bride and groom exchange garlands, the duo settle in the *mandap* like *achars*<sup>49</sup> in an oil filled jar. The *pundit* begins the wedding ceremony.

## RAZIA

I love the Indian culture, music, art, clothes, jewellery, festivals and spices – all so beautiful.

## KHUSHI

Yes, I love Hindi songs, dances and films – makes me feel Indian. It's sad how we get painted as damsels in distress if we dress pretty, dance or don't play sports.

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<sup>46</sup> Covered (and decorated) structure with pillars.

<sup>47</sup> A Hindu priest.

<sup>48</sup> Indian attire which is a combination of a long skirt and blouse with embroidery work and/or intricate design.

<sup>49</sup> Pickles.

**RAZIA**

Dancing is sports – I love it. It requires much stamina, balance, flexibility and strength. Dance should be part of the PE lessons too, not just netball. One size doesn't fit all you know! Had dance been part of PE, I would show everyone who is boss; I can dance for hours.

The girls move their focus to the couple in the *mandap* as they take the seven *phas*<sup>50</sup>.

**KHUSHI**

It's all about maintaining racial stereotypes, like sports, government, the land, tourism – all are associated with *iTaukeis* and education, business mindedness, being stingy and non-physical with Indo-Fijians (Sarcastically).

**RAZIA**

Speaking of stereotypes, look at those *phas*, despite the explanations, I still fail to understand why the groom must lead the bride in four *phas* and the bride lead in only three.

**KHUSHI**

Absolutely! (Annoyingly)

You know, sports in schools are more about competition rather than participation (Thoughtfully).

**KHUSHI**

PE lessons need to be more enterprising and promote sports like badminton; most of my female cousins play it – they can be good players like Indian women are with hockey, cricket and badminton.

**RAZIA**

PE is not examinable and no one checks what's happening so the teachers just do whatever – in their eyes if we are not performing, then just sit and spectate the stronger girls play.

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<sup>50</sup> Essential ritual of a Hindu wedding; it signifies the union of two people for the next seven births.

**KHUSHI**

Everything is about rankings, be it national exams or sports. Who gives a rat's ass about sports for pleasure and health and fitness (Frustratingly)?

**RAZIA**

We are the forgotten lot; first our sporting interests and welfare are neglected, and then we are accused of not being interested in sports. (Thoughtfully)

**KHUSHI**

Some PE teachers are harsh and insensitive. I once dropped the ball and this female *iTaukei* teacher called me butter fingers. It was embarrassing and demotivating. Can you imagine being called a tomboy and then butter fingers – a tomboy with butterfingers – what an image – totally put me off PE classes in high school.

**RAZIA**

My PE teachers acted like they had won several gold medals for the country in the Olympics (Laughs out loud).

The girls' deep conversation is interrupted by the voice of a middle-aged man who takes up the microphone and announces the dinner service – urging women and children to go first.

**SCENE 2. The Dining Area**

Women and children sit eagerly, ready to be served. For big occasions like this, both men and women cook but it is rare to see women serving food during the actual function. It is usually the younger men and boys who take up this role. Khushi and Razia sit with their empty plates and a young man approaches them with a pile of *puris*<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Deep fried bread made from unleavened whole-wheat flour that originated in India and is made during special occasions in the Indo-Fijian community.

**KHUSHI**

Two please (Shyly)

The young man gently slides two *puris* on to Khushi's plate, looks into her eyes and smiles.

**YOUNG MAN**

Only two (Teasingly)

**KHUSHI**

Should do for now (Bluntly)

**YOUNG MAN**

No wonder you have such a great figure (Flirtatiously).

Khushi chooses not to respond and the young man moves on to Razia who giggles at the comment.

He feels embarrassed, serves Razia and quickly moves on.

**RAZIA**

He wasn't bad looking Khushi; was really into you (Laughingly).

Another young man stands in front of the girls with a basin of potato and pea curry, followed by a man serving jackfruit curry...

**KHUSHI**

He shouldn't focus on my figure but worry about his tummy, which was threatening to pop into my plate before the *puris* that he was serving (Mockingly).

**RAZIA**

You are gorgeous; I don't blame him for trying (Laughingly). Plus, sooner or later you will get married.

**KHUSHI**

I am not against marriage, but I fear restrictions like not being able to play soccer with my cousins  
and having to make *rotis* every morning (Thoughtfully)

**RAZIA**

So you don't have a boyfriend?

**KHUSHI**

Why boyfriend? I could very well have a girlfriend (Jokingly). Honestly speaking, no one has caught  
my attention, plus I barely have the time.

Both girls giggle as they enjoy the flavoursome spicy feast. Razia's eyes travel a distance to a group  
of women chatting; she spots a familiar figure.

**RAZIA**

You see that lady in the orange sari?

Khushi looks around and spots the lady that Razia was talking about.

**KHUSHI**

Ya, what about her?

**RAZIA**

She taught me Accounting in Form 3<sup>52</sup>.

**KHUSHI**

Were you the teacher's pet (Lightly)?

**RAZIA**

She used to be so strict and always on my case; any boy I spoke to was assumed to be my boyfriend.

**RAZIA (Continuing)**

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<sup>52</sup> Equivalent to Year 10 in the Australian education system.



Athletics Day was worse – teachers would complain about our lack of participation. What a joke!  
You can't suddenly pick us up to make numbers in sporting events when the entire year goes into  
prioritising top athletes for soccer and netball (Frustratingly)!

**KHUSHI**

It's funny, Indo-Fijian female teachers make the largest percentage of teacher numbers in the country  
and I haven't seen one of them involved in PE.

After eating the girls move to the hall and join the other guests to watch a group of girls dancing.  
Razia's phone rings and she answers it amidst the commotion, her *abbu* tells her that he is on his  
way to pick her up. Khushi volunteers to walk with Razia to the car park.

**SCENE 3. The Car Park**

Razia gives Khushi a long, warm hug and hops in to her *abbu*'s taxi. Khushi walks to the railings on  
the other side to delight in the beautiful view of the lit city. She takes a deep breath and contemplates  
her chats with Razia. She places her hands on the cold railings and hears a whisper followed by the  
sound of bangles, the figure draws closer and Khushi quickly turns around.

**FEMALE VOICE**

Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you; I just came out for some fresh air.

**KHUSHI**

That's okay, (Extending her hand) I am Khushi<sup>53</sup>.

**FEMALE VOICE**

Give me some as well (Giggles).

Both girls end up laughing at the pun.

**FEMALE VOICE**

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<sup>53</sup> The name means happiness.

I am Jasmine (Smilingly).

Jasmine moves closer to Khushi and touches the material of her sari.

**JASMINE** (Continuing)

I love your sari and those bangles are beautiful (Admiringly).

A parked car turns its headlights on – giving Khushi the opportunity to see the young woman clearly – a tall and beautifully toned brown girl with sharp features and a perfect jawline.

**KHUSHI**

Dear Lord! You look very toned (Excitedly).

**JASMINE**

Well, thank you Miss, it's a lot of hard work, I do lots of resistance training and dancing.

**KHUSHI**

What do you train for?

**JASMINE**

Well, I do modelling and dance performances, so I train to build my stamina and strength.

**KHUSHI**

Oh! Wow! That is impressive (Surprised); a model and a dancer – sounds like a Bollywood fantasy.

Do you go to the gym to train?

**JASMINE**

I would love to go to the gym, but it is quite expensive and crowded after work hours – can barely get any equipment – it would be good to have 24-hour gyms.

**KHUSHI**

I tried going a few times and started enjoying it until I had some Indo-Fijian boys on my case who found it their duty to help me or advise me on things; just because I am a girl; mind you I am taller than most of them.

**JASMINE**

I actually don't mind the boys helping; I myself have asked a couple of times for a male to take off the 20 kg plates from the bar; it's ok to ask for help.

**KHUSHI**

Ya, but it can get annoying – ask help once and some even follow you thinking you will now need help with everything. Sometimes you just wanna go and do your own thing.

**JASMINE**

That's true, I wouldn't like my space invaded too.

**KHUSHI**

So you train at home?

**JASMINE**

Yes, in our backyard – I have a set of 3 kg dumbbells, which I use together with body weight exercises. Sometimes I jog in the backyard but dad doesn't like that.

**KHUSHI**

Why (Curiously)?

**JASMINE**

We have boys renting in the flat opposite us and dad thinks they watch me and isn't comfortable with that.

**KHUSHI**

Are you comfortable with it?

**JASMINE**

By the time I come back from uni, I am pretty exhausted and I just wanna get on with my training – I never notice them there.

**KHUSHI**

What are you studying at uni?

**JASMINE**

Physiotherapy; I am in my final year now.

**KHUSHI**

Goodness me! What other surprises do you have – how do you find the time?

**JASMINE**

From childhood my mum encouraged me towards sports and dancing. She was, still is, a great netball and volleyball player. Mum is amazing; does everything for my brothers and I so we can focus on schoolwork and extra-curricular activities; I even played chess and did martial arts (Appreciatively).

**KHUSHI**

Good on your mum for allowing you to have a sporty childhood. I have played only soccer with my cousins and dad.

**JASMINE**

It's not 'only' soccer, we surely need some Indo-Fijian girls in the national soccer team, if Roy Krishna<sup>54</sup> can do it, why can't Khushi (Passionately)?

**KHUSHI**

I just don't find the time and people to play with in Suva. Whilst growing up in Rakiraki, I had male cousins and neighbours to play soccer with. Life was quite different there.

**JASMINE**

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<sup>54</sup> Highly paid Indo-Fijian international soccer star.

I can relate; I used to play a lot of volleyball with mum and her mixed racial friends when we lived in Levuka. Team sports seemed almost impossible in Suva. I have never been accepted in *iTaukei*-dominated teams – despite trying so hard for netball in school; I was always put in as a reserve.

**KHUSHI**

Netball was the only sport for girls during PE and I was never into it.

**JASMINE**

The *iTaukei* girls generally have more freedom than us.

**KHUSHI**

True that! Indo-Fijian parents are like militias when it comes to boyfriends. Some of my cousins who were dating in high school were compelled to stop courting and a few eloped or got married; they ended up having no careers, let alone exploring sports.

**JASMINE**

Yes, early marriage means so many more unexpected responsibilities.

**KHUSHI**

I haven't mingled much with boys apart from playing soccer with my cousins; dad mostly sat in the porch to watch or played with us. Now I wonder if he was secretly being protective (Laughingly).

**JASMINE**

I hope you continue playing soccer and join a club.

**KHUSHI**

Well, if I didn't have to work and study simultaneously I could practise more.

**JASMINE**

My brother and I had to give up martial arts in high school as the fees had become too much for my parents to afford (Gloomily).

Jasmine turns to a voice calling from the dark.

**JASMINE**

I think someone is calling you.

**KHUSHI**

It's my cousin, looks like he is ready to go home.

**JASMINE**

Going already, I was really enjoying this chat.

Khushi quickly takes her phone out from her tiny side bag, which hangs casually at her hip.

**KHUSHI**

What's your number? Maybe we can catch up for coffee after work one day.

**JASMINE**

9224345, I would love that!

Both girls get up to leave.

**JASMINE**

Gosh girl, you are taller than me.

**KHUSHI**

I think my height will take me to great heights someday (Playfully).

Jasmine waves Khushi good-bye and walks towards the doorway of the hall. Khushi joins her cousin and starts walking down the street to stop a taxi.

**JASMINE**

You think you can teach a model to play soccer? (Roars from a distance)

The question excites Khushi; this beautiful, smart, Bollywood-like model, really thought that Khushi could teach her some soccer skills. Her heart beams with pride, she feels like a powerful and skillful

girl not a tomboy with butter fingers. Her listening capacity is compromised in the moment of her glory and she walks oblivious to her cousin's enquiries about the tall, pretty girl who wants to play soccer...

## **The End**

### **5.3 Poem Research Context**

This poem was produced based on Fanny's data – a dancer/choreographer and video editor. Fanny was separated from her abusive husband, and pregnant during the time of data collection. Fanny had started living with her mother, stepfather and 12-year-old brother, who were compassionate towards her. Fanny had left her job as a video editor as she was finding it hard to cope with the pregnancy. Fanny's interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes each and took place at her mother's house where she had permanently moved after her separation. Fanny was enthusiastic about sharing her sporting and domestic violence experiences – she wrote three free verses when everyone else wrote one.

Fanny was born in Suva and spent her childhood and high school living with her (maternal) grandparents, two aunts and uncle. She had been dancing from childhood and performing during school concerts and family functions; she had joined a dance group where she learnt choreography and did group and solo performances. Fanny got married at 18 to her boyfriend at the time, as her grandfather did not approve of her dating. Fanny is a Hindu and was not aware of her caste but mentioned that her biological father was Muslim. She had attended a multi-ethnic, co-ed Christian primary and high school. Fanny had a sporty childhood with her uncle and male friends in primary school. She had developed an interest in soccer but there were no girls' soccer teams at her school and her request for one was brushed off. Neither did netball interest her, nor was she accepted into the *iTaukei-dominated* teams so she didn't play sports in high school and merely focused on dancing.

Fanny was shy and nervous during the first interview and spoke softly; during the poetry workshop and second interview a funnier, more vocal and passionate side of this young woman was revealed. It was very empowering to listen to the saga of Fanny – a resilient girl.

### 5.3.1 Boo hoo! Woo hoo!

I started dancing as soon as I was out of my diaper

In her youth, my mother too was hyper

Oh, how beautiful I felt when I arched my back, stretched my hands

And when I heard the crowd go

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

Woo hoo... woo hoo... hoo...

I played soccer with my uncle since preschool

At his dribbling skills, I could only drool

Oh, how strong I felt when I kicked the ball hard

When I heard my uncle go...

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

Woo hoo... woo hoo... hoo...

I indulged in touch rugby in Year Two with Ben & Joji<sup>55</sup>

They taught me goosesteps even when I was a 'she'

Oh, how smart I felt when I coned them both

When I heard my classmates go...

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

Woo hoo...woo hoo... hoo...

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<sup>55</sup> Names of *iTaukei* boys.



My Indo-Fijian girlfriends believed that girls shouldn't play rugby or sweat

I begged to differ when they said I must act like a feminine cat

Oh, how confused I felt when they judged my play

When I heard the girl group go ...

Boo hoo ... boo ...hoo... hoo...

Boo hoo...boo ... hoo... hoo...

I asked, but Mr. Sathish said 'NO' to girls' soccer team

To play netball with the *iTaukei* girls was a pathetic dream

Oh, how unaccepted I felt being rejected twice

When I heard the soccer boys and netball girls go...

Boo hoo ... boo ...hoo... hoo...

Boo hoo...boo ... hoo... hoo...

I started noticing my narrow waist, thin legs and petite frame

Perhaps they were right, in the sporting landscape I was lame

Oh, how happy I felt when I could dance freely

When my hips shook away all those painful voices going...

Boo hoo ... boo ...hoo... hoo...

Boo hoo...boo ... hoo... hoo...

I mourn my bruised and bashed body from a bad marriage

But I am stronger with this baby in my carriage

The thoughts of my shackled dancing feet

And his curses still echo in my ears

Boo hoo...boo ... hoo... hoo...

I am thrilled that my parents have broken all conventions

And encouraged me to dance again

These days, I groove to their reassuring voices

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

## 5.4 Reflection and Analysis

### 5.4.1 A Math of Geography – Access to Sporting Resources and Individuals

‘Whilst growing up in the rural side, I had male cousins and neighbours to play soccer with. Life was quite different there compared to here.’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above excerpt reveals that in order for Khushi to play sports she needs access to other athletic individuals. Since there are very few athletic Indo-Fijian women (Kanemasu, 2018), Khushi is not able to participate in community sporting activities in Suva. To understand the different social and cultural layers of the participants, the intersectionality of (occupied) geographical locations, with gender, race and class needs acknowledgement (Gines, 2011; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). For example, Khushi does not play soccer with boys (strangers) in Suva, due to feeling uncomfortable and unsafe, however, her sporting agency changes based on her geographical location – she feels safe around familiar men thus plays soccer when she goes to Rakiraki.

Khushi’s experiences are similar to those of Aliza Husein, the lone Indo-Fijian woman to represent Fiji at the Pacific Games in 2019. Like Khushi, Aliza also started football in the backyard with her cousins and brothers (Rakautoga, 2020). Both the girls’ playing soccer (in safe spaces) with boys challenges traditional notions of gender which accentuate one’s gender performance to be limited to their biological sex (Butler, 1990).

‘I used to play a lot of volleyball with mum and her mixed racial friends when we lived in Levuka. Team sports seemed almost impossible in Suva. I have never been accepted in *iTaukei*-dominated teams – despite trying so hard for netball in school; I was always put in as a reserve.’ (Jasmine – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Jasmine, like Khushi, had better opportunities to play sports (in Levuka) with her mum’s mixed-race group in her childhood. Moreover, in their childhood these girls did not encounter racism in their different rural dwellings – instead, they experienced positive sporting encounters with *iTaukeis*. For example, the villagers taught Khushi how to swim, and Jasmine played volleyball with her mother’s mixed racial friends. In primary school Fanny also freely played rugby with *iTaukei* boys. The experiences of these girls reveal that racism is a social construct and totally dependent on particular socio-geographic contexts (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). For example, Jasmine does not face racism in her childhood when living in a rural setting but does when she moves to Suva. Thus, in this case, geography intersects with institutional barriers (school and teachers) and racial politics/discrimination (Jasmine only put in as a reserve) to influence Jasmine’s access to other sporting individuals and resources, thus her sporting agency. These young Indo-Fijian women, like culturally diverse Australian women, need access- enhancing initiatives in public, commercial and community sport facilities to promote social inclusion (Cortis, 2009). However, in spite of the lack of access to sporting facilities, networks, and community events, Jasmine trains in the backyard and when opportunity allows, Khushi plays soccer with her male cousins, neighbours and father in Rakiraki. However, Razia’s case differs from the aforementioned girls:

‘Lucky you! My *abbu* is very strict he wouldn’t allow girls to even wear jeans, let alone skimpy sports uniforms.’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Razia did not have movement in geography, and in high school she had access to sporting facilities (soccer playground) and individuals (other girls to play soccer with) during PE. However, Razia hid her sporting agency from her father, who was concerned about the sports uniform being culturally inappropriate, the male gaze and injuries associated with girls playing sports. For conservative Muslims there is much emphasis on women to conceal their bodies from the male gaze (Kay, 2006; Mitra, 2009; Stride, 2016) thus sports participation is considered inappropriate without gender segregation (Kay, 2006). For Razia, her gender intersects with her ethnicity and religion (Indo-Fijian Muslim girl) where both patriarchy (her father) and matriarchy (her grandmother) ensure that Razia performs her gender 'correctly' (Butler, 1990) from her daily agency to the clothes that she wears. Stride (2014) points out the importance of the layers of gendered and ethnic identities of South Asian Muslim girls that need to be reflected on in order to meet their multiple and diverse needs in PE. Stride's (2014) point is akin to the proposal of CRT, which accentuates the importance of culturally relevant curriculums in schools that cater for differences instead of merely the dominant Anglo-Celtic practices (Pang, 2012) and *iTaukei* privileges in Fiji's case. Sugden (2020) notes that, in Fiji, there have been no efforts made at the planning levels to accommodate Indo-Fijian girls in school PE lessons, as they are considered least athletic and aloof from sports. Thus, there is a need for individual approaches to inclusion in schools that create a sense of belonging (for Indo-Fijian girls) based upon valuing and respecting different ethnic backgrounds and supporting the process of social integration (Frearson, 2013).

Therefore, in the next section it is important to look at the participants' experiences during school PE lessons in terms of their equity and cultural inclusiveness, and also practices of PE teachers.

#### 5.4.2 Ethno-culturally Inclusive & Equitable PE lessons and (De)motivating (PE) Teachers

‘Dancing is sports – I love it. It requires much stamina, balance, flexibility and strength.

Dance should be part of the PE lessons too, not just netball. One size doesn’t fit all you know!’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Dance as sport has been seen as promoting social integration – an opportunity for personal growth, and social inclusion (Raiola, 2015). Razia, Fanny and Jasmine love dancing and have the required skills and physicality to perform it. Some Indo-Fijian girls and young women also participate in Indian classical dancing (Cattermole, 2008) and many in contemporary Bollywood style dancing (Lata, 2009). In the sports of figure skating and artistic swimming, Indian classical dance has made its mark (Sharma, 2019). Nonetheless, in the Fijian context, sports like soccer, for example, are considered soft and associated with Indo-Fijian men (Sugden, 2021), let alone considering dance as a sport or ‘real’ physical activity.

Indo-Fijian men have had some breakthroughs in sports at the international level, such as Vijay Singh (golfer) (Prasad, 2009), Nilesh Chand (bodybuilding) (Cama, 2019), and Roy Krishna (Fiji’s number one soccer player) (Cama, 2020). However, these sportsmen and the aforementioned sports are merely representative of marginalised masculinity and hold a subordinate status in relation to the powerful gendered and racial image of the *iTaukei* rugby player (men). As for Indo-Fijian women, a few have represented Fiji on international stages in minor sports, or sports that are considered soft (bodybuilding, hockey and pistol shooting) (Doviverata, 2019; Raj, 2020), but not in the dominant (and most physical) sports discourse – rugby, and the most popular sport for females in Fiji – netball (Kanemasu, 2018). Akin to gender (Butler, 1990), race is also a social construct (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010), thus Indo-Fijian men being disassociated and discouraged from rugby (the ultimate physical sport in Fiji) (Sugden, 2020) and associated with sports considered soft (golf, bodybuilding and soccer) risks them being further labelled as lacking physicality and falling short of

being ‘proper Fijians’ (Presterudstuen, 2010). Relatedly, Indo-Fijian women not being visible in dominant team sports in the country, portrays them and the sports that they participate in as ‘soft’ – sports for weaker and somehow ‘lesser’ people, who are subordinated in the intersectional status quo scale. Therefore, the *iTaukei* men are epitomes of Fijian hegemonic masculinity and the *iTaukei* women epitomes of Fijian emphasized femininity. Thus, the image, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010) around Indo-Fijians lacking robust frames (Teaiwa, 2008) for tough sports (Presterudstuen, 2010) by *iTaukeis* are merely gendered (and racial) ways to portray that Indo-Fijians are ‘less Fijian’ than *iTaukeis*.

Moreover, apart from patriarchy, gender, dominant sporting culture and race, factors such as finding sustainable and workable interventions (PE curriculum and lessons), and space are also crucial vehicles for sports (Sawrikar & Muir, 2010).

‘We are the forgotten lot; first our sporting interests and welfare are neglected and then we are accused of not being interested in sports.’ (Thoughtfully) (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

According to Razia, sports in her school are not ethno-culturally sensitive and inclusive and no one bothers about the sporting interests of Indo-Fijian girls. Similarly, Sugden et al. (2020) disclose that during Fiji high schools’ PE lessons, sports for students are decided based on gender and race assumptions (*iTaukei* boys – rugby, Indo-Fijian boys – soccer, and *iTaukei* girls – netball). And Indo-Fijian girls are considered so low in the gender hierarchy of masculinities, and femininities (Connell, 2009) that they do not have access to a sport which they could participate in without fear and judgement (Kanemasu, 2018). CRT is committed to social justice, offering elements of liberation and transformation in response to racial, gender and class subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and ensures that power imbalances and resource distribution lie at the centre of any

interrogation (Hylton, 2005). Assumptions about Indo-Fijians (women) continue to inform policy makers, schools, teachers, leaders, and the general public (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). For example, Sugden (2021) notes that the Fiji Rugby Union, which comprises indigenous stakeholders, employs stereotypes of Indo-Fijians lacking physicality to maintain *iTaukei* dominance in the sport. Furthermore, *iTaukei* sports coaches' assumptions and stereotypical labels (on lack of physicality and prowess) about Indo-Fijian girls who are interested in sports not only discourage them from sports, but bar them from playing (Sugden et al., 2020). These racial assumptions and practices question Fiji's ratification of the CEDAW – as Article 10 (g) clearly states that all women must be 'given the same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education'. Thus, policy makers have failed to make a culturally inclusive PE curriculum (Sugden, 2020), which caters for the unique/diverse needs of marginalised (racial) groups (Stride, 2014). Relatedly, Khushi reveals that her school segregated students according to their gender:

'I never was interested in catching a ball; I loved kicking it (Laughingly), and there was no soccer for girls in our school.' (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The aforementioned reveals that during PE lessons students' sports participation was determined in a binary way (MALE vs. FEMALE), based on one's sex, with no in-betweens or opportunities of doing one's gender in a different/new way (Butler, 1990). Thus, despite having interest in playing soccer, there was no team to practice this agency and Khushi totally withdraws from sports in school. Similarly, Fanny has no opportunity to play soccer in school, and it is impossible for her to penetrate a heavily dominated *iTaukei* netball team. The men and women's rugby teams in Fiji (at school, club, national and international levels) are populated by *iTaukeis* (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; Kanemasu, 2018) and Indo-Fijian boys/men mostly play soccer (Sugden, 2021). However, the same racial based opportunity that is given to *iTaukei* girls towards rugby is denied to Indo-Fijian girls

(like Fanny and Khushi) at school level for soccer. This scenario is in line with the realist point of view of CRT that racism is more complex than merely unfavourable impressions of members of other groups – it is a means by which society allocates privilege and status to one (dominant) group whilst marginalising other groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Donnor, 2006; Milner, 2007; Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). Indo-Fijian women sit at the bottom of racial-gender hierarchies in Fijian sporting contexts, thus are not advantaged by tangible benefits or opportunities in sports.

Furthermore, apart from being deprived of a fair go in the sporting realm, Indo-Fijian girls/women receive embarrassing labels based on their race and gender intertwined, which is mostly absorbed from the oppressor's (*iTaukei* PE teacher) cultural heritage (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010).

‘Some PE teachers are harsh and insensitive. It was embarrassing and demotivating.

Can you imagine being called a tomboy and then butter fingers – a tomboy with butterfingers – what an image!’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above excerpt reveals that other students label Khushi as a tomboy, which is a stereotype directed at her gender, and her *iTaukei* PE teacher calls her ‘butter fingers’ when she misses a catch – a label in response to her race – Indo-Fijian women not having the prowess to catch a ball. These gendered and racialised labels collaborate to jeopardise Khushi’s sporting interests/participation in high school. Sugden et al. (2020), during an under 13 girls’ soccer match in a rural town in Fiji, reported seeing an Indo-Fijian player (girl) sitting on the reserve bench eager to play, but told by her female *iTaukei* coach that she will get a chance when she ‘stops playing like a fairy’. Therefore, gender clearly intersects with race and despite the rural geography (unlike Khushi and Jasmine’s cases), this young Indo-Fijian girl is stopped from playing based on the fact that she is an Indo-Fijian girl. Discrimination of Indo-Fijian women in sports advances the interests of the larger part of the Fijian society – and there is little incentive to eradicate it. For example, *iTaukeis* simply laugh at the



idea of Indo-Fijian women playing sports (Sugden, et al., 2020) and indigenous stakeholders of dominant sports discourses (rugby) maintain sports as an indigenous forte (Sugden, 2021). Also, Indo-Fijian parents discourage girls from sports and encourage them towards academic pursuits (Naidu, 2008). Therefore, in Fiji's most prevalent school athletics competitions, it is extremely rare for Indo-Fijian girls to compete among thousands of school children (Kanemasu, 2018).

Similarly, in high school Roshni's gender intersects with race to deprive her of a fair go in sports and physical activity participation. Firstly, as mentioned above, her Indo-Fijian teachers actually made her believe that playing with boys was 'abnormal and wrong'. Secondly, Roshni was keen to try out javelin but was told that it was dangerous for her and to try something else, whereas 'the *iTaukei* girls were allowed to freely throw javelin like superheroes'. There was no effort made to take Roshni's interest seriously, and to teach her how to throw a javelin. It is almost impossible for *iTaukeis* (some Indo-Fijians too) to look past stereotypical views associated with sports and Indo-Fijian girls – they are merely seen as a homogenous group, which is not physical and athletic (Sugden, 2021). There is also a lack of awareness amongst Fijians on Indian sporting archetypes. For example, Roshni is judged based merely on her race (as *iTaukei* girls are allowed to throw javelin), when Annu Rani (Indian woman Javelin thrower) has thrown (javelin) over the 60-metre mark winning medals at Asian games, Asian championship and South Asian games (Chakraborty, 2021). Moreover, there are eight Indian women in the Women's Javelin Throw World Rankings, and not a single *iTaukei* woman ([www.worldathletics.org](http://www.worldathletics.org)). Roshni's race is coined with her gender, and her teachers assume that Roshni too, like Khushi has 'butter fingers' – not capable of throwing a javelin and will not do well at competition level, thus the effort is not made. The act of depriving Roshni of a fair go in sports based on racial and gendered assumptions is what CRT often refers to as interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Milner, 2007). CRT advocates that such traditional notions (such as labelling Indo-Fijian girls as weak and lacking physicality and depriving them of a fair go), act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups (Donnor,

2006) such as the *iTaukei* sports teachers in this case. Relatedly, the indigenous stakeholders of rugby in Fiji label Indo-Fijians as too physically weak to play rugby, to maintain their interest as custodians of physicality and hegemonic masculinity in Fiji. In hindsight, this ‘interest’ is reproduced each time national and club level rugby teams are represented merely by *iTaukei* players. This reproduction of power is then translated beyond the sporting platform where *iTaukeis* alone are deemed apt to represent the nation culturally and politically (Mishra, 2007).

Moreover, Khushi reveals that even though her female cousins did not play soccer with the boys they were interested in other sporting agencies – they played ‘a lot’ of badminton:

‘They should introduce minor sports like badminton. My female cousins used to play that a lot.’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

It is evident that Indian women have done well in individual sports at world championships, such as boxing (Mary Kom), wrestling (Vinesh and Geeta Phogat), golf (Aditi Ashok), athletics (Dutee Chand and Hima Das), gymnastics (Dipa Karmakar), shooting (Hina Sidhu), javelin throw (Annu Rani) (Chakraborty, 2021) and in archery, Dola Banerjee and Komalika Bari (Garg, 2010). India has also produced world class women players in racquet sports, such as Sania Mirza (tennis), Rani Rampal (hockey), Harmanpreet Kaur (cricket), Manika Batra (table tennis), Saina Nahwal (badminton), PV Sindhu (badminton) and Dipika Pallikar (squash). Not only are these Indian female sports stars role models in India, but for Indians in the diaspora as well (Chakraborty, 2021). Some Indo-Fijian women have also excelled in individual sports, such as Komal Raj who was Miss Fiji two years in a row (2018 and 2019) in bodybuilding (Raj, 2019), and 20-year-old law student, Shayal Prasad, who was the youngest player on the field representing Fiji in the 2019 South Pacific games in pistol shooting (Doviverata, 2019). Furthermore, Elisha Kumar (Indo-Fijian living in Australia) became the first South Sea Islander and (Indo) Fijian to win the Australian schools’ girls 50-

kilogram division boxing title (Seru, 2021). Therefore, incorporating minor sports into Fiji schools' PE curriculum/lessons (Dorovolomo & Hammond, 2005; Sugden, 2020) and also (racquet) sports that Indo-Fijian women can relate to culturally and/or have role models in (Chakraborty, 2021), might appeal to and accommodate the interest of minority groups and/or groups with different ethno-cultural backgrounds (like Indo-Fijian women) than the indigenous people. Relatedly, Khushi promotes the inclusion of racquet sports based on the success of Indian (women) archetypes:

'I think Indo-Fijian girls will be good with racquet sports like Indian women are with hockey, cricket and badminton.' (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The Indian women's hockey and cricket teams are in the top 10 in the world; the Bollywood cinema also produced a film *Chak De! India* (2007), which centres on gender inequality in India via a struggling women's field hockey team that later wins the national championships (Rajesh, 2007). Moreover, 2021 saw the release of a film – *Saina* – that was a biography of the sporting trajectory of the former world number one Indian badminton player, Saina Nehwal (Vyavahare, 2021). These resonate deeply with Khushi as she associates herself and her kindred with these (Indian) women with whom she has an ancestral link. In the Fijian context, Divyanka Kumar has had success in hockey and is the only Indo-Fijian player in the women's national hockey team (thedragflick.com).

However, Khushi and Fanny do not get to play soccer, and do not get to realise their full (sporting) potential at school. The PE lessons in their schools did not accommodate their ethno-cultural and/or individual 'difference'/needs, thus their social and educational human rights as stated in CEDAW Article 10 (g) were not exercised. Furthermore, Jasmine and Fanny are not accepted in *iTaukei* circles, thus in team sports like netball they are judged by (PE) teachers/sporting officials based on their race and gender (Sugden et al., 2020). Nevertheless, unlike Jasmine and Fanny's

experiences, Aliza Husein, who hails from Ba (western (rural) side of Vitilevu), accentuates the positive role her *iTaukei* team members played where she felt accepted despite being the only Indo-Fijian girl in the national soccer squad (Rakautoga, 2020).

Therefore, it is necessary that the different layers of ethno-cultural factors and culture around the geographical areas that Indo-Fijian women live in (urban, rural, city, village), are accounted for whilst designing PE curriculum and lessons. Despite policy on paper claiming to account for racial, gender and class equality, in terms of participation and inclusiveness (Naupoto, 2012), the way PE lessons are actually conducted is highly dependent on the school and the (PE) teachers, which ultimately impacts Indo-Fijian girls'/women's sporting lives.

The next sub-section moves on to discuss the lack of role models in the local context and how this influences the sporting interestedness and agency of young Indo-Fijian women.

#### **5.4.2.1 Lack of Role Models**

‘It’s not “only” soccer, it is great – we need some Indo-Fijian girls in the national soccer team, if Roy Krishna can do it, why can’t Khushi (Passionately)?’ (Jasmine – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Jasmine motivates Khushi, who then appreciates her soccer prowess (more); this reflects that empowerment through women's solidarity can help in breaking away from Indo-Fijian gender/patriarchal norms (Kanemasu, 2018). Furthermore, Jasmine uses Roy Krishna's success – who makes international news (Cama, 2020) as an example to motivate Khushi. Jasmine is unaware of the lone Indo-Fijian female player (Aliza Husein), who represented Fiji at the Pacific Games in 2019 (Rakautoga, 2020). This is because (as Khushi also states) local news and media coverage of sports in Fiji mostly concentrate on dominant sports discourse like rugby (Kanemasu & Molnar,

2013) – this aligns with CRT’s notion that racism is systemic, and not just demonstrated by individual people with prejudices (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). Racial inequality in Fiji is not only evident in the political and sporting arenas but is interwoven into other parts of life, such as the media, which (re)produces dominant sports discourses and thus racism.

Moreover, Razia mentions that Indo-Fijian teachers on the basis of their cultural upbringing, are typically unsupportive and discourage Indo-Fijian girls from partaking in sports (Kanemansu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Indo-Fijian girls are instead encouraged not to talk too much or too loudly or be argumentative, especially in the presence of males or older females (Shandil, 2016).

‘...They only would stand in groups and chat during sports days; pathetic role models (Sarcastically).’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

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‘Never seen an Indo-Fijian female PE teacher; no role models to motivate us.’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Moreover, Khushi had never seen an Indo-Fijian PE teacher – it is evident that in Fiji, Indo-Fijian female PE teachers are a rare sight and an increase in their numbers could encourage sports participation of Indo-Fijian girls (Kanemasu, 2018). Therefore, there is a need at planning and policy making levels to pave pathways for (athletic) Indo-Fijian women to enrol in sports and PE teaching courses, to set examples for other Indo-Fijian girls and provide them with safe spaces to play without being judged (Sugden, 2021). Like in the case of the US (during the 19<sup>th</sup> century) where mostly unmarried (women) were PE teachers and devoted towards girls’ sports, providing them with a safe space for participation (Costa & Guthrie, 1994).

The lack of role models in their everyday lives, like their Indian counterparts in the diaspora (Burdsey, 2015; Ratna, 2011; Thangaraj, 2015) leads athletic Indo-Fijian girls to conform to societal gender norms, therefore making their participation seem subversive (Sugden et al., 2020). For girls like Fanny, Roshni, Khushi and Jasmine, their sporting interests and passions are negatively impacted by discouragement and (at times) ridicule both by *iTaukei* (PE) and Indo-Fijian (academic) teachers. Apart from being poor role models, these teachers sustain and reproduce Indo-Fijian patriarchal controls and cultural heritage which dwells on racial assumptions – on both occasions demotivating Indo-Fijian girls from sporting activities.

The following sub-section looks into how schools emphasise sports as a platform of competition rather than participation, and how this influences the sporting trajectories of young Indo-Fijian women.

#### **5.4.2.2 Participation vs. Competition in Fiji Schools**

‘Everything is about rankings, be it national exams or sports. Who gives a rat’s ass about sports for pleasure and health and fitness (Frustratingly)?’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Despite Fiji ratifying the (CEDAW) in 1995, and claims of inclusion and fair go for all Fijians in benefiting from quality sport programs (Naupoto, 2012), in practice the *iTaukeis* continue to dominate the nation’s sporting culture at both high performance and grassroots levels (Kanemasu, 2018; Prasad, 2013). Thus, the focus lies in producing super athletes and resilient sports teams dominated by *iTaukeis* (rugby and netball) and Indo-Fijian boys (soccer), excluding other minor sports (Dorovolomo & Hammond, 2005) and minority/marginalised groups. Khushi and Razia both

amplify the neglect of Indo-Fijian girls' sporting interests and lack of fair go towards their participation – shaping at school level:

‘Come Athletics Day once a year, these same teachers would complain about our lack of participation. What a joke! You can’t suddenly pick us up to make numbers in sporting events when the entire year went into prioritising top athletes for soccer and netball (Frustratingly)!’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Furthermore, PE is non-examinable in Fiji schools (Dorovolomo & Hammond, 2005) and neither the PE teachers nor Indo-Fijian parents are concerned with the lack of participation from Indo-Fijian girls (Sugden et al., 2020). Dorovolomo & Hammond (2005) note the importance of including the general school population and not only the gifted students whilst organising inter-school sports competitions. However, as stated above, boys (both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian) and *iTaukei* girls are encouraged in schools to play particular sports, whilst Indo-Fijian girls are left totally outside, without any choice of physical activity or sport. This exclusion is based on previous gendered and racial prejudices, adding to those discriminations a third educational exclusion – thus several layers of exclusionary practices are interwoven here to discriminate against these girls in their sporting lives. The aforementioned discrimination not only leads Indo-Fijian girls (like Razia) to internalise their presumed lack of physicality labels (Kanemasu, 2018), but they also are fearful of being teased and judged if they participate in sports (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2021). Indo-Fijian girls are presumed to lack interest in sports but in actuality their needs and voices are silenced and not accounted for at the PE/sports policy planning and development stage. Thus, the ‘counter-storytelling’ tenet of CRT accentuates recognition of the sporting experience and voices of Indo-Fijian girls/women (others) as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analysing

and improving racial subordination (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) experienced on the sporting platforms of Fiji.

The following section looks into the cultural and gendered appropriateness of sports for young Indo-Fijian women. In doing so, it illuminates the complexities and influences of marriage, divorce, motherhood and spinsterhood in the sporting lives of young Indo-Fijian women.

### **5.4.3 Cultural and Gendered Appropriateness of Sports for Indo-Fijian Women**

#### **5.4.3.1 The Married and Divorced Women – Birds with Clipped Wings**

‘Speaking of stereotypes, look at those *phas*, despite the explanations, I still fail to understand why the groom must lead the bride in four *phas* and the bride lead in only three.’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The Indo-Fijian woman’s body and agency are controlled by her husband – for example, Fanny was restricted from dancing by her abusive husband. This oppression of women’s bodies clearly reflects the lack of playful opportunities for Fanny to dance, let alone play soccer. The Hindu wedding ritual re-emphasises the dominant position of the man and the (expected) subordinate position of the woman – the couple take seven *phas* around the altar where the groom leads the first four *phas*, and the bride leads the remaining three (Shandil, 2016). An Indo-Fijian woman is accustomed to patriarchal controls on her body and agency from childhood by her father, uncles and brothers and later by her husband (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016). As Fanny recounts:

‘I am thrilled that my parents have broken all conventions  
And encouraged me to dance again  
These days, I groove to their reassuring voices



Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...

Woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo...' (Fanny – *Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*)

Fanny faces patriarchal controls quite differently via the different men in her life. For example, despite her husband being younger, he follows stricter controls of patriarchy and Indo-Fijian traditional masculinity (Everitt-Penhale & Ratele, 2015). This is in contrast to the actions of Fanny's young uncle and stepfather, and similar to the (orthodox) controls exercised by her male sports teacher (Mr. Sathish). Both Mr. Sathish and Fanny's husband reproduce orthodox gender norms akin to Hindu wedding rituals, emphasising that women be submissive and subordinate to their husbands (Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016). Wedding folklore goes on to remind the bride that her playful teenage years with girlfriends are over, and womanhood and management of her family and marital life must be her focus (Shandil, 2016).

The reproduction of gender is always a negotiation with power, which after marriage the husband and in-laws take control of (Shandil, 2016). Fanny's body being controlled by her husband towards obligatory social norms forces her to perform the agencies of a married woman (Shandil, 2016), thus limiting her own control over her body's movements, including of course any forms of physical activity. Thus, Fanny's subservience to not dance and/or play soccer in fear of her husband becomes the forefront of her gender and this is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth (Butler, 2009). However Razia, who is a Muslim woman, faces a triple layer of restrictions, before marriage, whilst being married and even more after her divorce. As Razia reveals:

'My *dadi* reminds me to stay away from "cheap" activities and not bring shame on the family again.' (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Razia being divorced, a single mother and living with her parents intersect with her gender, race and religion (Islam) and warrant stricter patriarchal (and matriarchal) controls on her body and

agency. Razia's father and grandmother police her body, words, clothes and actions – let alone allowing Razia to play soccer, which could potentially 'bring shame on the family again'. Razia is compelled to adhere to the societal patriarchal and matriarchal controls associated with gender, race and religion. She already carries many culturally undesirable labels, such as 'Muslim-divorced-single mother-living with parents' and fears attracting further labels such as 'cheap/bitch'. Therefore, Razia conforms:

'I am slowly accepting our traditions and cultures and now feel that no matter how hard you try, you can't get a domestic cat to plough the land, you need a bull.' (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Razia is subordinated to the mainstream patriarchal viewpoint and deeply internalises gender and racial stereotypes – believing that Indo-Fijian girls lack physicality (Kanemasu, 2018). She consents to gendered (and racial) ideologies and becomes complicit in the reification of misogynist social mechanisms (Shandil, 2016). Razia's mind and body have been shaped to perform her gender in line with Indo-Fijian, Muslim (Islamic) cultural norms – she does not challenge these structures (unlike Fanny who continues to dance after her separation), and thus does not participate in any sport or physical leisure activity.

The next sub-section explores how the (sporting) agencies of single Indo-Fijian women differ from their married and divorced counterparts.

#### **5.4.3.2 The Spinsters – Free Birds but Not Yet an Eagle**

'I played soccer with my uncle since preschool  
At his dribbling skills, I could only drool  
Oh, how strong I felt when I kicked the ball hard...'  
(Fanny – *Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*)

When in preschool, Fanny experienced no barriers to her sporting and leisure agency (soccer and dancing), thus she did not internalise the gendered stereotypes perpetuated in society, leading to a more fluid gender performance (Butler, 1990; Knijnik, 2013). Even her young uncle is oblivious to traditional gender orders and norms, and plays soccer with her. Therefore, Fanny is not exposed to gendered and racial assumptions from her family/cultural heritage (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). However, Fanny experiences opposite (complex) scenarios in school:

‘My Indo-Fijian girlfriends believed that girls shouldn’t play rugby or sweat  
I begged to differ when they said I must act like a feminine cat  
Oh, how confused I felt when they judged my play...’

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‘I asked, but Mr. Sathish said “NO” to girls’ soccer team  
To play netball with the *iTaukei* girls was a pathetic dream  
Oh, how unaccepted I felt being rejected twice...’ (Fanny – *Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*)

Fanny encounters a triple layer of marginalisation in primary and high school, which diminishes the appeal of sports for her and leads to anti-sporting internalisations. The above excerpts reveal that in her early childhood years, Fanny did not encounter gendered/racial constraints, but is exposed to this process when she grows up and goes to school. Segregation of ethnicities begins in childhood; in kindergartens in Fiji, teachers contribute to emerging class-based identities in a society traditionally structured by ethnicity (Brison, 2011). When in Year Two, Fanny’s (Indo-Fijian) girlfriends judge her sporting agency (playing rugby with *iTaukei* boys and sweating) as ‘unfeminine’. These Year Two girls reproduce (Indo) Fijian gender and racial normative

behaviour/performance – however Fanny and the two (Year Two) *iTaukei* boys all play rugby together, and are oblivious to gender and racial othering.

Moreover, later in high school Fanny's request for a girls' soccer team is rejected (by Mr. Sathish) – Indo-Fijian patriarchal structures, and she is not accepted in *iTaukei* circles to play netball. Finally, gender coincides with race and racism (Chadderton, 2013) and discriminates against and segregates Fanny – she is marginalised by being rejected by the *iTaukei*-dominated netball team because she is an Indo-Fijian girl. It is quite rare for Indo-Fijian girls to play in *iTaukei*-dominated school netball teams (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Therefore, Fanny gets confused, feels judged and is rejected (twice!) by contradictions that come from 'the system', from (Fijian) society's unwritten discriminatory barriers. The different gendered practices in school and the family influence how Fanny performs her gender at the different sites. Ultimately, the gendered and racial practices which Fanny experiences (during her schooling days) outside her home leads to her disconnection from sports despite being single and not having the pressure and restrictions of a married (or divorced) Indo-Fijian woman (Shandil, 2016). Often, as in Fanny's case, the layers of gendered and ethnic identities of marginalised women are not reflected upon, and consequently their multiple and diverse needs in sports and PE are not met (Stride, 2014).

Relatedly, Khushi (despite being a single woman) faces layers of gendered tensions, as an Indo-Fijian woman training in the gym is a rare sight and 'inappropriate' according to orthodox standards (Balram, 2019).

'I started enjoying it until I had some Indo-Fijian boys on my case who found it their duty to help me or advise me on things just because I am a girl; mind you I am taller than most of them.' (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above excerpt reveals that the Indo-Fijian boys perceive Khushi's body as weak or her as naïve and offer help – a typical case of gendering along binaries of sex (Butler, 2010) where boys take on the masculine role and girls to live and perform submissive roles (Shandil, 2016). In their

‘mansplaining’ the boys also assume Khushi’s subservient position in the Fijian gender hierarchy, thus taking on the masculine role (which is instilled from birth), and offer help as the gym is a space associated with boys (Balram, 2019). Nonetheless, Khushi strongly claims that her gender and her biological make-up do not define strength and physicality – ‘she is a girl yet taller than most Indo-Fijian boys’. Unlike Khushi, Jasmine has differing views on seeking help from boys at the gym:

‘I actually don’t mind the boys helping; I myself have asked a couple of times for a male to take off the 20 kg plates from the bar; it’s ok to ask for help.’ (Jasmine – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Gender is established within individuals through performance and repeated practice to the extent that individualities are suppressed to achieve gender uniformity (Butler, 2009). Indo-Fijian girls are accustomed to being protected by their fathers, brothers and husbands and lifting heavy loads is considered by many as against the ‘nature’ of a woman’s body. Jasmine does not attempt to lift the plate herself first; she assumes that she would not be able to lift and remove 20 kg, thus allows the boys to take up their ‘rightful’ masculine role. In this instance, the potential of the female body to perform diverse gender forms is nullified by social preconditions (Shandil, 2016). Despite participating in different sports and practising martial arts from primary school, traditional gender roles are still so deeply embedded in this young single woman that she internalises the lack of physicality as a common ‘female trait’ (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005). In this instance, this is how the social construct of gender (Butler, 1990) appears to be naturally/biologically – girls cannot do heavy lifting and must have male assistance. Jasmine takes on her traditional feminine role at the gym (a masculine space) and seeks help from boys who display traditional masculinity (strength) (McCreary et al., 2005).

On the other hand, there are occasions when Jasmine is seen to be resisting traditional gender roles, for example, she continues to train in the backyard despite her father's surveillance for her safety; other times Jasmine accepts it – like by assuming that her body is incapable of lifting 20 kg and seeking help from boys. Thus, there is a mix of compliance and resistance (Connell, 2009; Knijnik, 2015) in Jasmine's agency – she somewhat cracks some (gender) barriers and simultaneously creates new ones – her body occupies shades of conformity and subversiveness towards traditional gender normative roles/behaviour. As for Khushi, she (most of the time) performs her gender fluidly; she strongly resists the gender status quo and rebels against traditional gender normative roles/behaviour. The aforementioned is reflected in her view towards marriage:

'I am not against marriage, but I fear restrictions like not being able to play soccer with my cousins and having to make *rotis* every morning (Thoughtfully).' (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Khushi fears the restrictions and heightened subservience that accompany a married Indo-Fijian woman (Shandil, 2016). She also understands how difficult it is to challenge societal gender normative behaviour (especially for married women) in relation to sports participation, when Indo-Fijian families do not promote women and sports as this would clash with traditional notions of femininity (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Khushi is interested in soccer, which is traditionally a (Indo-Fijian) male sport; such sports receive greater disapproval and some Indo-Fijian women play soccer surreptitiously (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020).

Khushi's soccer agency is not perceived as subversive (Butler, 2009) as it would have been for a married woman who is past her time for socially playing and dancing (Shandil, 2016). Khushi playing soccer with her father and cousins and being the only female player 'toughened' her up – that is masculinity occupied her female body from childhood (Butler, 1990). However, Khushi is still

perceived to violate traditional gender norms by playing soccer with boys, thus acquires the title ‘tomboy’ as she does her gender in unexpected/new and culturally inappropriate ways. Unlike Khushi, Roshni’s experience with sports in childhood was quite different:

‘I was hardly given free time after school; any time away meant washing dishes or helping mum cook.’ (Roshni – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

From childhood Roshni’s body has been trained like a machine to perform tasks appropriate to her gender (in the orthodox view), which mirrors her gender to her biological sex (Butler, 2010). When an individual is born, their life is planned out based on their biological sex (Butler, 2009), where parents and elders of a family play a crucial role in deciding and planning gender roles and performativity (Balram, 2019; Raj, 2020). In Hinduism there is emphasis on the daughter being a virgin – signifying the father’s ability in maintaining the purity of his daughter. Therefore, Hindu women’s bodies are programmed from childhood to be obedient, silent and not mingle spontaneously with men in social settings to bring dishonour to the family (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016).

Relatedly, Razia who is Muslim and Jasmine who is a Christian also face some form of restrictions by their elders in terms of clothing, mingling with boys and sports/physical activity participation, like many other Indo-Fijian girls (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016; Sugden et al., 2020). Therefore, Indo-Fijian parents start teaching girls from a very young age how to cook, clean and maintain good relationships (Balram, 2019; Raj, 2019) and if these Indo-Fijian female bodies do not perform their gender roles right, it shows that the parents failed in teaching them correctly (Shandil, 2016). When an Indo-Fijian girl decides to play sports, she is making a decision about her body and Indo-Fijian parents find this quite intimidating (Kanemasu, 2018) as they believe that such controls could potentially lead to having sex and getting pregnant (Sugden et al., 2020).

The next sub-section looks into how young Indo-Fijian mothers navigate their traditional gender roles of motherhood and what roles sports and physical activity play in their lives.

#### **5.4.3.3 The Mothers – Birds with Parental Wings**

‘Perks of being a mother – I can’t move beyond the dishes in my sink and minding the kids – my once beloved netball is merely a dream now. (Laughingly).’ (Roshni – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

For Roshni, motherhood means lack of time for social, recreational and sporting activities, unlike single women (Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Brown et al., 2001) like Jasmine who is able to negotiate her time better with studies and physical and recreational activities. Despite desiring to be more active, many mothers are not, due to a combination of structural (e.g., lack of time, money, energy) and ideological influences (e.g., sense of commitment to others) (Brown et al., 2001).

However, research shows that mothers in sport leadership roles are able to negotiate potential barriers and manage their multiple roles if they have strong support networks and specific integrating strategies to create work-family-leisure balance (Leberman & Palmer, 2009). But for Indo-Fijian (athletic) women they lack any form of support network from friends and families as traditionally sports are seen as violating normative feminine behaviour (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020), unlike *iTaukei* sportswomen who get better support from their family and social network (Kanemasu, 2018). Both the school and society in Fiji continue to maintain *iTaukei* interests in sports like the colonisers did under colonial rule (1874–1970) – where *iTaukeis* for their loyalty to colonisers were rewarded with the paramouncy of their interests (chiefs and elite allies got privileged access to political power and economic resources) versus the welfare of Indo-Fijians (Durutalo, 1986). Thus, CRT helps in illuminating how schools and the Fijian society, in maintaining *iTaukei* interests



(similar to Anglo-Celtic privilege) in sports, might play an active role in subordinating Indo-Fijian (women) in sporting realms (Pang; 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Nonetheless, Jasmine's mother, who is athletic and values sports, not only encourages and supports Jasmine's sporting agency, but also creates pathways for sports from childhood.

'From childhood my mum encouraged me towards sports and dancing. She was, still is a great netball and volleyball player... I even played chess and did martial arts (Appreciatively).' (Jasmine – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above excerpt reveals that Jasmine's mother included her when she played volleyball in her mixed-race circle of friends – she also paved pathways for Jasmine to play chess and do martial arts. Thus, Jasmine's basic human rights towards sports and leisure activities are fulfilled in the home setting but not in school (similar to the challenges faced by Fanny).

Unlike Jasmine, Roshni did not have that kind of time at hand where she could play sports, let alone be encouraged – her mother (unlike Jasmine's mother) involved her in household chores after school. In both the young women's cases, the mothers apply parental surveillance (Lang, 2010; Pang, 2012). In Jasmine's case, it is an inclination towards sports and leisure activities (together with her schoolwork), and for Roshni it is towards Indo-Fijian (orthodox culture) emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009), where girls must learn to perform tasks like cooking and cleaning – programmed for marriage (Balram, 2019; Raj, 2020). Roshni has opposing views to her parents:

'My parents even restricted me from playing sports... I really will be supportive if my daughter shows interest in sports. Never know what these kids would want to do when they grow up – as is, my younger brother was never interested in playing any sport and only loved books.' (Roshni – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above excerpt shows Roshni favours gender fluid performances, and unlike her parents is determined to support her daughter's sporting agency. Also, Roshni does not have orthodox views and does not associate masculinity with boys and femininity with girls. Roshni supports her brother's love for reading and non-participation in sports, even when her brother is not performing his gender in the traditional expected way.

Relatedly, Jasmine's athletic mother introduced her (and somewhat programmed her body) towards sports at an early age, and thenceforth Jasmine's interest and prowess grew. In this case, Jasmine's mother's everyday discourses about sports and health and fitness perform a surveillance effect (Lang, 2010) on Jasmine from childhood. Thus, Jasmine's everyday (sporting) agencies are monitored and subtly policed by her mother (Lang, 2010; Lee, Johnson & McCahill, 2018). Therefore, the data reveals that parents with orthodox perspectives (like Roshni's mother), police their daughters to perform their gender in line with traditional standards of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity. In contrast, athletic mothers (like Jasmine's) practise similar surveillance and policing, but towards unorthodox practices, thus Jasmine's body is not being programmed for marriage. Unlike Roshni's mother, Jasmine's mother does most of the household chores herself – and Jasmine gets to exercise her basic human rights (as ratified in Article 10 (g) of CEDAW) towards sports, leisure activities and educational participation – her body and mind are moulded holistically.

The next segment illuminates the racial inequities which (young) Indo-Fijian women face, and how these racist practices influence Indo-Fijian women's perception about sports and their own participation.

#### 5.4.4 Racial Disparities and Identity Crises in the Diaspora

‘It’s all about maintaining racial stereotypes, like sports ... associated with *iTaukeis* and education... being stingy and non-physical with Indo-Fijians (Sarcastically).’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

In Fiji, apart from sports, distribution of political power and state resources (parliamentary seats, state scholarships and civil service jobs) has been based on race and advantaged the *iTaukeis* for a long while (Sugden et al., 2020). Also, *iTaukei* cultural traditions are officially championed over those of Indo-Fijian and other communities (Lal, 2002). Indo-Fijians have developed a Pacific identity and have constructed a transnational space around Fiji; also by living in Fiji their social, cultural and religious practices have undergone many changes (Voigt-Graf, 2008). This Pacific identity becomes problematic when Indo-Fijians are perceived to lack physicality (Teaiwa, 2005; 2008), thus are not considered ‘proper Fijians’ (Presterudstuen, 2010). Relatedly, the data reveals that since Indo-Fijians are not fully accepted as Fijians (Kanemasu, 2018; Presterudstuen, 2010), Khushi searches for a sense of connectedness (Lata 2009; Voigt-Graf, 2008) and feels nostalgia towards Indian culture, art and music. Razia also points out:

‘We are the forgotten population; first our sporting interests and welfare are neglected, and then we are accused of not playing sports (Thoughtfully).’ (Razia– *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

The above data shows that the welfare and interests of Indo-Fijian women are neglected based on racial and gendered assumptions – this becomes a violation of Indo-Fijian women’s human rights. Consequently, Indo-Fijians are committed to education (and also due to the cultural differences of

values, beliefs and practices) and perform better than their *iTaukei* counterparts in secondary school (Dakuidreketi, 2014) and in tertiary institutions (Otsuka, 2006). Razia has similar goals for her son:

‘I want Ayan to play but he must prioritise studies. The way things are in Fiji for us, I would prefer him to move to Australia or New Zealand.’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

In relation to the tenet of differential racialisation of CRT, it can be seen that Indo-Fijians have been racialised at different times by the dominant groups (first the colonisers and later *iTaukeis*), in response to shifting needs – such as the labour market. For example, at one point Indo-Fijian farmers were needed to work on farms and once the indenture period was over, farmlands were not freely given to these farmers to work on for their own livelihood. Therefore, Indo-Fijians’ pursuit of academic qualifications has been fuelled by a sense of insecurity about their socio-political vulnerability (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009) and a racial push factor from the sporting realms (Sugden, 2021). Thus, from childhood Indo-Fijians are encouraged by parents to perform well academically, have well paid skilled jobs and/or immigrate to developed countries (Balram, 2019; Narsey, 2002). Structural discrimination and racism have been highly prevalent and enduring post-coup (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) where Indo-Fijians have been epistemologically marginalised, silenced, and disempowered in different aspects of society (Chadderton, 2013). A similar racialisation of South Asian athletes has been noted in hegemonic sports discourses in the diaspora – where South Asian athletes are perceived as misfits in relation to normative conceptions of British sportsmen/women (Burdsey, 2015), and in relation to hegemonic notions of American masculinity (Thangaraj, 2015).

As for Indo-Fijian women, they are ‘othered’ to a greater extent where these women are not only nearly invisible from sports participation but also sports leadership and managements roles. The

*iTaukei* men dominate sports (rugby, hockey, boxing, swimming, judo, athletics, cricket) leadership roles and Indo-Fijian men hold leadership positions in mostly soccer and bodybuilding. As for the women, it is the *iTaukei* women who have leadership roles in netball (Rakautoga, 2020), karate, and have also reached presidency level for Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (Cabenatabua, 2019). Khushi furthers this ‘othering’ through her whole schooling experience:

‘In the classroom Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* girls can work together but not in sports’

‘I once dropped the ball and this female *iTaukei* teacher called me butter fingers...’

(Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Khushi faces racial segregation in high school – she is not accepted in *iTaukei*-dominated team sports – however in the classroom, Indo-Fijians work in mixed racial groups (Otsuka, 2006; Dakuidreketi, 2014). Indians had a long-established history of literacy and schooling, thus Indian children grasped the teachings of the colonisers eagerly. In contrast, the indigenous people hail from a traditional culture that depended on oral tradition, thus schooling seemed foreign and alienating (Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995). In line with Khushi’s experience, working in groups in the classroom promotes the facilitation from Indo-Fijians towards *iTaukei* groups, however this is not reciprocated in the sporting fields for Indo-Fijians. Sports discourse in Fiji is an *iTaukei* zone and there is no room for inclusion (Sugden, 2021). Indo-Fijians are still referred to as *vulangis*<sup>56</sup> (Ravuvu, 1991) and not being ‘proper Fijians’ (lacking robustness – both physically and spiritually) (Presterudstuen, 2010). Thus, such racist perceptions and practices rob Indo-Fijians (women) of a fair go to exercise their basic human rights to sports participation.

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<sup>56</sup> Visitors/Foreigners.

Furthermore, healthy competition to acquire a spot in national sporting teams/spaces is only possible if selectors and officials remove preconceived racial labels in regard to physicality and prowess around Indo-Fijians (Sugden, 2021). For example, in the case of Tavua College super athlete Yeshnil Karan (Indo-Fijian boy), who did not qualify to represent Fiji in the 2019 South Pacific Games (SPG) despite running the finals of the Coca-Cola 2019 Games<sup>57</sup> 3000 m and 1500 m faster by a length of 100 m to defeat the local Fiji (*iTaukei*) rep, Petero Veitacomaki, to the SPG. Fiji Athletics blamed Karan for not attending the trials, despite him contesting that he was not aware of it – there was no consideration that Karan lived in a rural area with no access to the media (TV, newspaper), thus sparking debates on racism and class in Fiji Athletics (Lagonilakeba, 2019). Clearly, Karan did not get to exercise his basic human right and equal right as a Fijian to participate, thus nullifying endorsed sporting policies on equal opportunities for all Fijians to participate (Naupoto, 2012).

Consequently, such racist acts lead to Indo-Fijians losing hope in sporting realms – therefore parents (like Razia) push their children to pursue academic excellence. The chance for a fair go is even more difficult for an Indo-Fijian woman, as together with racism/racial barriers, they also face gender discrimination in their own society, where their agencies and (extended) body have to navigate patriarchal controls as well (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). This results in Indo-Fijian women's near invisibility in the country's sports arena. Khushi, however, reveals a different experience from her childhood:

‘It was different in the village – the *iTaukeis* were friendlier and accommodating; the villagers had actually taught me how to swim – that was special.’ (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

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<sup>57</sup> High School National Competitions.

In Rakiraki (rural area), Khushi found the *iTaukei* villagers friendly, inclusive, tolerant and helpful – they taught her how to swim. This is opposite to the intolerant *iTaukei* (female) sports teacher who labels Khushi as ‘butter fingers’ when she fails to catch the ball – her teacher labels and mocks her as a sportswoman (Sugden et al., 2020) without knowledge of Khushi’s passion and prowess in soccer.

Relatedly, the *iTaukei* girls’ (sports) groups in high school exclude Roshni, Fanny and Jasmine, reflecting Fiji’s postcolonial order that has been strongly shaped by physical power, which is overwhelmingly associated with *iTaukeis* (Kanemasu, 2018). Consequently, there is a lack of support for cultural diversity in the higher levels of competitive sport, and a lack of media images that immigrant women can relate to (Sawrikar & Muir, 2010). As Khushi reflects:

‘Even local newspapers and TV are all about the Fiji rugby Team. When Komal Raj won the women’s bodybuilding title, she was put on some back page and then forgotten.’  
(Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Local media favours dominant sports discourse (rugby) and culture in Fiji (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013), and there is a lack of representation of Indo-Fijian athletes in the media, even those who play/participate at national and international levels (such as bodybuilder Komal Raj). Such deterrents de-motivate Indo-Fijian women’s sporting interests, thus participation, where most (like Fanny and Razia) start focusing on intellectual work, arts, dancing, secure/skilled employment and/or skilled migration (Balram, 2019; Narsey, 2002). Therefore, the media (all forms) needs to illuminate the sporting agencies of individuals from different (minority) ethnic backgrounds in order to encourage sports participation (Sawrikar & Muir, 2010) of these minority groups.

The next segment looks into how race, gender and geography intersect to influence the participants’ segregation from team sports in school.

#### 5.4.5 Segregation of Indo-Fijian Girls/Women from Team Sports

‘To play netball with the *iTaukei* girls was a pathetic dream

Oh, how unaccepted I felt being rejected twice

When I heard the soccer boys and netball girls go...

Boo hoo ... boo ...hoo... hoo...’ (Fanny – *Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*)

Indo-Fijian girls like Fanny face a twofold hurdle in sports. For example, soccer is considered an Indo-Fijian male domain (Sugden, 2021) and then *iTaukei* females assert dominance in female associated (popular) sports like netball (Kanemasu, 2018). Therefore, the hegemonic sports discourse in Fiji has a double layer of discrimination, embedded in orthodox gender views and racial prejudices that work against Indo-Fijian women like Fanny (Sugden et al., 2020).

Indo-Fijian girls (like Roshni) stop playing netball in school because they internalise racial based stereotypes and get anxious playing in an *iTaukei*-dominated team in fear of not being able to cope and being laughed at (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018). Not only does this affect the performance of those few girls who play in mixed racial teams, but it is also a big deterrent to participation in the first place (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Based on racial assumptions, even (PE) teachers (both *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians) perceive that the Indo-Fijian female body lacks the capacity to ‘perform’ sporting agency (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020). For example, Roshni and Fanny’s teachers discourage them from trying javelin and soccer and consequently reproduce the stereotypes of Indo-Fijian women as a homogenous group and position them as most marginalised compared to the *iTaukei* women and Indo-Fijian men (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2008).

Racial segregation and stereotypes are prevalent in Fiji from kindergarten (Brison, 2011) to primary then high school and right through to adulthood (Sugden, 2021). The history of segregation



of *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians dates back to the indenture period where colonial powers segregated the Indians and natives, favouring native rights over the new migrants (Durutalo, 1986). Therefore, the colonial power structure nurtured preoccupation with ‘race’, which laid the foundation of the postcolonial political (dis)order (Naidu, 2008; Kanemasu, 2018). Initially when government schools were established not only were boys and girls separated – but the *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians were segregated as well (Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995). As a consequence of the aforementioned, when Roshni, Khushi and Jasmine moved from rural areas to Suva (city), they were not accepted into team sports – teams according to the country’s racial composition that were supposed to be ‘mixed racial’. Thus, the ‘mixed racial’ label becomes contradictory – in theory these teams are ‘mixed racial’, but in reality this beautiful façade of racial harmony only exists in the political speeches (Knijnik & Spaaij, 2017).

However, Khushi’s childhood swimming experience (narrative) with the villagers makes the already complex issues of racial segregation, and racism, even more complex. The aforementioned illuminates the premise of CRT that racism is not necessarily demonstrated by individual people but instead involves manifestations of structures and systems in society (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). Relatedly, athletes like Yeshnil Karan face racism at institutional (nation) level. However, Khushi experiences the nurturing of racial assimilation at community and grassroots levels in the village. Khushi and the other girls are frustrated with the roles that the *iTaukei* (female) students, their Indo-Fijian (female) teachers and *iTaukei* (and Indo-Fijian) PE/sports teachers play in cultivating their lack of sporting interest thus participation. Jasmine reminisces a similar experience:

‘Team sports seemed almost impossible in Suva. I have never been accepted in *iTaukei*-dominated teams – despite trying so hard for netball in school; I was always put in as a reserve.’ (Jasmine – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Jasmine (like Khushi) had also moved from a rural area to Suva and experienced ‘otherness’ actioned by *iTaukei* sports teachers who place her on the bench as a reserve – a situation faced by other (out of the few) athletic Indo-Fijian women in Fiji (Sugden et al., 2020). This is also akin to Indian women in Australia who perceive access to sport as equal, but not necessarily the opportunity to participate – thus leading to social exclusion (Sawrikar & Muir, 2010). Jasmine’s oppression however is complex – it is not the orthodox gender or patriarchal structures that influence her netball agency – if anything her (athletic) mother encourages her to play sports. Jasmine’s race situates her on the bench – reducing her to a ‘silenced voice’ and an (almost) ‘abject body’ (Butler, 2011). For Jasmine (similar to Fanny), race and racism influence her participation – but when race intersects with sporting geography, it benefits and promotes Jasmine’s (unlike Fanny’s) sporting agency. For example, when playing sports in Levuka (rural) in her mum’s mixed racial circle, Jasmine is not judged on her phenotype and assumptions are not made about her physicality. However, later in high school when she moves to Suva (city), race intersects with geography yet again, but this time she is judged based on her race and this hampers her sports participation. The racism that Jasmine, Roshni and Fanny face is systemic, and not necessarily just demonstrated by individual people with prejudices (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). Thus, this section reveals the ‘permanence of racism’ in the Fijian sporting context, which is constantly promoted via the ideology that *iTaukeis* are natural at sports and have sporting physicality and prowess. It leads to *iTaukeis* actually being privileged in sporting realms and Indo-Fijians (especially women) being (doubly) disadvantaged.

The next section looks into stereotypical labels and images based on race and gender, and their effects on the sporting pursuits of Indo-Fijian women.

#### **5.4.4 The ‘Tomboy’, the ‘Temptress’ and the ‘Butter Fingers’ Epitomes; the Never-ending Gender Paradox**

‘From a tomboy to a temptress; how did you do it?’ (Razia – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Khushi’s sporting agency is associated with masculinity according to Razia’s orthodox perceptions; Razia applies surveillance (Lang, 2010) on Khushi’s body and finally appreciates her performative act (Butler, 2009) as a ‘temptress’ as opposed to a ‘tomboy’. However, despite continuing her soccer agency, Khushi is uncomfortable with the ‘tomboy’ label – she has played sports from childhood and masculinity has occupied her female body since then (Butler, 1990). She perceives the ‘tomboy’ label as derogatory as she does not see playing soccer as an agency limited to men. In contrast, (unlike Khushi) girls playing Australian Rules football start developing a stronger embodiment and some describe themselves as tomboys (Wedgwood, 2004). Therefore, having short hair and playing soccer might qualify one as masculine/tomboy in some cultures (Kanemasu, 2018; Kolnes, 1995; Wedgwood, 2004) but not in others, revealing that even norms of desired femininity (Connell, 2009) and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990) differ in different cultures/countries (Wedgwood, 2004).

Similarly, Fanny is teased in high school on her ‘narrow waist’, ‘thin legs’ and ‘petite frame’. However, unlike Khushi, Fanny internalises these racial and gendered labels and disapproving gazes, and accepts that her body is not apt for soccer and netball (sports). Sport (and dancing) is an arena where people perform by putting their bodies on the line and are subjected to frequent objectifying gazes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Interestingly, the gazes ‘appreciate’ Fanny’s body (movements) when she dances for a highly populated Indo-Fijian crowd – it is common and culturally appropriate for single Indo-Fijian girls to dance at special occasions and school events (Cattermole, 2008; Lata, 2009). Therefore, Fanny’s body (image) is celebrated – ‘the crowd go woo hoo ... woo hoo...hoo,’ when she ‘arches her back’ and ‘stretches her hands’ – she becomes an epitome of a sexy woman – a ‘temptress’ like Khushi. However, the gazing of the same body

changes in the sporting arena; in this multiracial context (where the spectators are multiracial) her body is negatively perceived, booed and judged. The racial based assumptions about Fanny ‘being lame’ in the sporting field in this case has not only been absorbed by *iTaukeis* (mostly from their cultural heritage), but internalised by Indo-Fijians and then (re)produced by both groups. In hindsight, these assumptions continue to inform public civic institutions, schools, churches and individuals’ private, personal, and corporate lives (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010).

Moreover, Khushi being a tall, beautiful girl draped in traditional Indian attire and jewellery makes her the perfect epitome of a ‘proper’ Indo-Fijian woman – thus she experiences the male (flirtatious) gaze. There is great paradox in the definition of Khushi’s body image by Razia, where she tells Khushi at the wedding how ‘tall and gorgeous’ she is, emphasising the clothes and bangles that Khushi is wearing. However, in school Khushi was not that tall, played soccer and wore ‘ripped shorts’ thus, Razia labelled her a ‘tomboy’. Razia overlooks gender fluidity and that Khushi’s body was performing different acts at different times – she instead wonders how Khushi managed to transform from a ‘tomboy’ to a ‘temptress’. Razia’s perception of gender is influenced by the embodiments of the extended body – that is, how the material body is clothed and presented. Jewellery and traditional Indian clothes are esteemed as highly feminine in the Indo-Fijian society and epitomise women as beautiful, delicate and soft (Banerjee, 2020; Lata, 2009; Raj, 2019). Gendered subjectivity in this case is constituted through performativity (Butler, 2009) where Khushi is labelled as a ‘temptress’ when her extended body image is aligned with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995, 2009). And when she does not clothe her material (female body) correctly (wearing ripped shorts), and performs sporting agencies which employ masculine traits – she is labelled as a ‘tomboy’.

The Indo-Fijian society discourages gender bending (Tagg, 2008), and provides very firm governing boundaries within which individuals are to observe and perform their gender correctly (Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2021). In contrast, Khushi practices her gender fluidly (Butler, 1990)

similar to Knijnik's (2010) Brazilian female surfers with rhizomatic bodies and Wedgwood's (2004) Australian female football players with multiple gender identities. All three aforementioned parties perform their gender in different and new ways.

Moreover, parents and elders of the Indo-Fijian society, religious practices, and the Bollywood cinema embody and (re)produce disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance, which conform to cultural normative behaviour. Consequently, (some) Indo-Fijian girls (like Razia) themselves start (re)producing these cultural embodiments and practices thus become obedient (docile) bodies (Foucault, 1977). They then go on to either advocate or repetitiously perform orthodox gendered behaviour(s) (Butler, 2009) which other Indo-Fijian women epitomise (Shandil, 2016). Those (like Khushi) who do not conform, are labelled:

'Can you imagine getting called a tomboy and then butter fingers – a tomboy with butterfingers – what an image! I decided not to play any sports in high school.' (Khushi – *Tomboy with Butter Fingers*)

Khushi's body occupies different spaces at different times – for example, she is a 'country girl' who tries to settle in Suva (city) – so geography plays a role. Secondly, she is judged on the masculinity that occupies her body from childhood from playing soccer and she is labelled a 'tomboy', thus gender politics shape her epitome. Khushi is also referred to as a 'temptress' when her extended body conforms to Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009). And finally, she is called 'butter fingers' by her *iTaukei* (female) PE teacher so racial discrimination comes in to play. Razia and other Indo-Fijians' views (like Indians), associate prettiness and softness with femininity and strength and toughness with masculinity (Bidwai, 2013; Sugden et al., 2020). Therefore, athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women are often seen as bulky and manly (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020).

Moreover, Khushi's *iTaukei* PE teacher's perspectives about physicality and (emphasized) femininity are fuelled by her *iTaukei* cultural heritage. Despite having a masculine (patriarchal) gender culture (Tora et al., 2006; White, 2005), the *iTaukeis* (like Samoans and Africans) prefer powerful and physically bigger women (Field, 2013; Kanemasu, 2018; Weber, 2017). This preferred cultural epitome of a woman promotes fluidity in their gender as the (material) body that these women occupy, and the epitome of physicality that their bodies reflect make *iTaukei* women more powerful, fierce and athletic (masculine) than even Indo-Fijian men (Kanemasu, 2018). This disrupts traditional gender stereotypes that masculinity merely occupies a male body (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, *iTaukei* women solely represent the national women's rugby teams (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017) and Indo-Fijian men do not play rugby at national (or club) level. Thus, the *iTaukei* women's bodies are perceived to have more masculine traits than Indo-Fijian men, let alone making a comparison with Indo-Fijian women who are almost invisible in (women's) sporting domains in terms of participation (Kanemasu, 2018) and leadership/management roles.

Khushi embraces fluidity in gender and plays soccer and is also fluid about sexuality (states to Razia she could have a boy or girl friend as a future dating prospect). On the other hand, Khushi despises the 'tomboy' label and ends up embracing Jasmine's body aesthetics of femininity – a dancer, model and physiotherapist. Both Razia (to a large extent), and Khushi (to some extent) end up absorbing androcentric and patriarchal ideologies associated with body image and engrain shades of this unintentionally (Shandil, 2016) into their daily lives.

## **5.5 Key Findings of the Chapter**

In this section, I summarise the key findings and critical analysis of this chapter. The findings reveal that:

- Indo-Fijian girls play some level of sports in primary school, whether in urban or rural areas, and mostly became aware of and experience some form of gender and racial segregation and discrimination in (high) school.
- Indo-Fijian girls living in rural areas did not encounter racism via *iTaukeis* and exclusion from team sports and leisure activities, however when they moved to Suva (high) schools, and similar to the city dwelling Indo-Fijian girls, they too experienced racism and unacceptance by *iTaukei* girls into team sports.
- There were no platforms for athletic Indo-Fijian girls to discover and/or have access to other athletic Indo-Fijian girls to play sports mostly because there are a very few of them and also no pathways or initiatives exist to improve Indo-Fijian women's access to sports facilities and sporting individuals.
- (Sports) teachers either motivated by racism and ethnocentrism (*iTaukeis*) or by traditional gender norms (Indo-Fijians), play some role in (de)motivating Indo-Fijian girls from sports participation.
- There is a lack of Indian and Indo-Fijian (relatable) women sporting archetypes. Also, my research reveals that Indo-Fijian girls (and *iTaukeis* too) lack awareness of the existing (few) Indo-Fijian (and Indian) sports women, and the participants' stories reveal that Fijian television and newspapers place more focus on dominant Fijian sports.
- Both the school and society in Fiji continue to maintain *iTaukei* interests in sports like the colonisers did under colonial rule (1874–1970). Thus, PE lessons in schools are focused on dominant team sports (rugby, soccer and netball) and competition rather than promoting participation by being ethno-culturally inclusive and equitable.
- Sports are considered culturally inappropriate for Indo-Fijian women and the lack of empowerment and support for these young women by their own community influences their participation (or lack of it). Moreover, the married women, divorcees and mothers were less

likely to participate in sports or leisure activities in comparison to their counterparts who were single.

- (Athletic) parents who had played sports themselves in their younger days were more supportive, understanding and even motivating towards their daughters' sporting agency. And at times athletic parents who introduced sports at an early age (and through their everyday discourses about sports and health and fitness) performed a surveillance effect on the child from childhood.
- Traditional gender norms, race and racism intersecting with the participants' geographical location and age determined the segregation of Indo-Fijian girls/women from supposedly 'mixed racial' team sports.
- Indo-Fijian women's physicality is perceived as weak and unfit for sports by *iTaukeis* (and also by Indo-Fijians themselves) and often, Indo-Fijian women internalise racial and gendered labels and discontinue their sporting quests in the (high) school spaces.



# Chapter 6 Pleasures and Benefits of a Sporting Life: Indo-Fijian Women's Experiences

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon Butler's (1990; 2011) and Connell's (1987, 2005) gender theories, combined with Lefebvre's discussions of the production of social space (1991) and Puwar's (2004) concept of space invaders. A few other case studies on perception on sporting/leisure 'space(s), such as Gupta & Ferguson (1992), Pavlidis (2018) and Van Ingen (2003) have also helped me to illuminate the sporting trajectories of athletic Indo-Fijian women who invade sports spaces that are dominated by *iTaukeis*. Invading *iTaukei*-dominated sporting platforms means Indo-Fijian women have to hurdle multiple fences to make themselves (somewhat) visible in Fiji's sporting scenes. Despite the Fiji government ratifying the CEDAW in 1995 ([www.fwrn.org.fj/](http://www.fwrn.org.fj/)), and it now being part of the country's legal structure, Indo-Fijian women in Fiji still struggle in several aspects of gender equality and racial discrimination in Fijian sporting arenas, in order to fulfil their basic rights of benefiting positively from sports and physical activity participation according to CEDAW (Article 10 g).

After reading and re-reading all (12) the participants' transcripts – four participants' data revealed that they were at the time (regularly) engaged in sporting activities (either moderately or extremely) and enjoyed the positive benefits of sports; thus these girls were selected to represent the themes of this chapter. The chapter presents the data (stories) of two highly athletic young Indo-Fijian women via a short story (Dipika) and screenplay (Meena) and two moderately physically active Indo-Fijian girls (sisters – Ariel and Sania) via the lyrics of a song. Weaving creative non-fiction pieces from the participants' data was apt – these stories further evoke the readers (Dowling et al., 2012) and can act as valuable informative resources, enabling readers to enter into lived

sporting realities (Quarmby et al., 2021) of the participants and better understand their experiences. A thematic analysis was then carried out on the non-fiction creative pieces.

The first non-fiction creative piece in this chapter is a short story, which is based on the sporting trajectory of Dipika (23 years old), who is a hockey player (club and national level) and works as a network engineer in a telecommunications company. Dipika is a Hindu, belongs to the Kshatriyas (second highest) caste and originates from Lautoka<sup>58</sup>. She had moved to Suva for tertiary studies six years ago and remained there after she found work in Suva. Dipika speaks fluent Fiji-Hindi, English and fair level of the *iTaukei* language and Hindi. Her father is a retired high school teacher and her mother a housewife. Dipika enjoyed playing netball in primary school and played both netball and hockey in high school. She is a foodie and when she has any free time she enjoys trying new food with friends and family.

The second non-fiction creative piece, which is a screenplay (*The Serevi MaGiC*), is a slice of life from 18-year-old (Year 12) Meena's life. Meena played netball for the school's Under 19 Team, soccer with Indo-Fijian boys in school and rugby on the weekends with her *iTaukei* neighbours. Her father passed away a year ago and her mother works as a sales representative; Meena has a younger brother and a younger sister. Meena is a Hindu, unaware of her caste, speaks fluent Fiji-Hindi and English and fair level of Hindi and the *iTaukei* language. Meena was a shy girl but when she played sports a strong, resilient and happy girl was evident.

The third non-fiction creative piece is a song based on the sporting experiences of two sisters – Ariel (16 years old) and Sania (15 years old) who have been playing badminton from childhood. The girls have tried other sporting activities during PE lessons in school. The sisters are Hindus but unaware of their caste. Both girls speak fluent Fiji-Hindi and English, they understand Hindi but hardly speak it and have a basic understanding of the *iTaukei* language. Their father is a heavy

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<sup>58</sup> A city in the western division of Fiji's largest island, Viti Levu, which is also known as the sugar city.

machinery mechanic, and mother a housewife – their parents are very supportive towards sporting and extra-curricular activities that interest the girls. The sisters are full of life and quite limitless.

All four participants have unique stories based on their lived experiences and, as in previous chapters, the following non-fiction creative pieces aim to generate a discussion (conversation) about the intersectional boundaries that these young women have to traverse and overcome in their everyday sporting experiences in Fiji. The next segment begins with Dipika's story (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*<sup>59</sup>) and is followed by Meena's saga (*The Serevi MaGiC*) and finally the experiences of Ariel and Sania are relayed via the song *Big Sister – small sister*. Each non-fiction creative piece has an antecedent segment, which explains the research context in depth, and a discussion section follows the non-fiction creative pieces.

## 6.2 Short Story – Research Context

I produced this narrative, *The Girl with the Valiant Gada*, using the data gathered from 23-year-old Dipika in Fiji, in 2019. During the time of the six months data collection Dipika worked full time and trained all evenings, so the only possible time to interview her was during her lunch hour in the kitchen at her work. This also allowed me to observe Dipika's interactions with her workmates and vice versa. I also observed Dipika during her hockey training sessions and was invited to a hockey tournament where I had the opportunity to observe her competitive side and have conversations with (and observe) her teammates, coach, manager and other spectators. On the day of the match, I was the only Indo-Fijian woman (apart from Dipika) amongst the spectators, officials and players – there were two Indo-Fijian boys playing in two different teams. Dipika enjoys playing hockey and welcomes any form of sports; for her playing hockey is important for physical and mental fitness – 'being busy she said – helps her to wonder less so there is no room for anxiety'.

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<sup>59</sup> The Hindu god Hanuman's main weapon.

This narrative has carefully weaved the observations and conversations arising during the interviews, poetry workshops (and participant written free verse), training sessions and hockey matches into a holistic picture/story of Dipika's sporting experiences. The language used in the short story is simple everyday English that Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis* use to communicate with each other. Also some Fiji-Hindi and *iTaukei* words are used, as some *iTaukeis* used their mother tongue (and also some Fiji-Hindi phrases) during the training and actual tournament. Dipika also used lots of short *iTaukei* phrases whilst playing hockey, and off the field as well with her teammates. The plot, incidents/events, characters and settings are factual; apart from pseudonyms and order of events (un)folded, no other aspect has been fabricated.

### 6.2.1 The Girl with the Valiant *Gada*

The scorching sun threatens to pierce through Dipika's skin; she stops jogging – her five feet four inches well-toned frame proudly arches as she gasps for air. Her teammate, Titilia<sup>60</sup> jogs past her – lifting her tee shirt quite high to wipe sweat off her face – revealing a long, brown and robust torso. Not only was Dipika the lone Indo-Fijian girl in the Panthers Hockey Club, but also at club level hockey in Fiji. Dipika was a rare sight amongst *iTaukei* and mixed-race girls. She proudly showcased her prowess and enjoyed it despite her own kindred not appreciating girls playing sports.

Dipika resumes jogging and sweat musically trickles on her back; just like Titilia she lifts up her tee shirt to wipe her face. Her bold four pack and sports bra catwalk for mere seconds – she is oblivious to the people around her. Dipika's mind jogs to her office and she vividly recalls the fascinated looks on her colleagues' faces – like *ghee*<sup>61</sup> on her *paratha*<sup>62</sup> – when she carried her hockey stick to work.

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<sup>60</sup> *iTaukei* girl.

<sup>61</sup> Clarified butter.

<sup>62</sup> Indian flatbread that is cooked on a hot plate using clarified butter.

Dipika went to an Indo-Fijian managed primary school, and since early childhood has had a lot of interest in sports. When she was in Year 3 the sight of senior girls playing netball really excited her, and she approached the teachers to join, but was told that she was too young. Despite being turned down, she went out of her way to make friends with the senior girls, and started playing netball from Year 3 up till Year 8 – she also played netball in Indo-Fijian teams during sports days at university. It was a lot of her father’s influence too – he was a high school teacher and a keen soccer and hockey player in his youth. Dipika started doing certain things, which people said girls couldn’t, or weren’t supposed to do – like cleaning the car, climbing a ladder and doing mechanical and building repairs with her dad. Her mother and two elder sisters weren’t intrigued by sports but always supported her.

Most of the Indo-Fijian women that Dipika encountered in her extended family, university and work perceived playing sports in a negative light – this was quite demotivating, but she rose beyond these petty things and focused on the bigger picture – HOCKEY. She was not shy or reluctant to illuminate her hockey trajectory – her Facebook and Instagram pages were colourfully bedecked with pictures of herself and her team members playing hockey and attending sports events. Dipika enjoyed the numerous likes and positive comments her social media posts received.

Coming from Lautoka five years ago, making it into a Suva hockey team and working as a network engineer in a renowned telecommunications company, spoke volumes about her achievements. At work too, Dipika was the lone (Indo-Fijian) girl in her department amongst Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* males. When she had first started playing for the Panthers, she wasn’t accepted just like that – it took some time; she had to work hard and show everyone that she meant business. Dipika was her own motivation and had proved many wrong – she did her best, whether it was a 3 am work call or five days a week training – she always found a way to balance things, even if it meant that she had to do her washing at midnight.

Memories of when Dipika first picked up the hockey stick in high school seemed like yesterday. Being a staunch devotee of Lord *Hanuman*<sup>63</sup>, she avowed the hockey stick as *Hanuman's gada*, and the love for hockey quickly grew in her. From childhood, Dipika stayed vegetarian on Tuesdays and prayed to Lord *Hanuman*; this was a little unusual as *Hanuman* is considered a God of strength and is a bachelor, and mostly men pray to him. Indo-Fijian women are fonder of Lord *Shiva*, Krishna and the many female deities.

Dipika also did not eat beef and pork and at times felt left out during team functions, where beef and pork were predominant on the menu. All her hockey team members, coaches and managers were Christians, thus it was a norm to have Christian devotions and prayers for comradeship, strength and success; she often wondered why she couldn't have a Hindu prayer added. No one thought about these LITTLE things and Dipika didn't want to question and encourage further gaps between her and the others – everyone knew that there was racial tension between Indo-Fijians and the natives in Fiji.

Ana catches up with Dipika and gently taps her shoulder, compelling Dipika to shake out of her daydreaming.

*'Tolo mada Dipz'*<sup>64</sup>

*'Eyo, Eyo'*<sup>65</sup> Dipika responds.

Dipika was now used to being spoken to in the *iTaukei* language – initially she had had a hard time adjusting, as she couldn't understand when the *iTaukei* girls would talk in their mother tongue around her. The mixed-race girls would mostly use English and sometimes a bit of *iTaukei* slang. The *iTaukei* girls encouraged Dipika to speak with them in the *iTaukei* language for easier communication – this was NECESSARY even when everyone spoke fluent English. Since then, Dipika had started communicating with the girls in the *iTaukei* language with some English words –

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<sup>63</sup> The Hindu god for wind – well known for his extraordinary daring feats, strength and loyalty.

<sup>64</sup> Hurry up Dipz.

<sup>65</sup> Yes, yes.

a new language coined and it worked – Dipika was better accepted. This didn't stop Dipika from wondering how it would be if the girls spoke to her in Fiji-Hindi. She missed speaking Fiji-Hindi; they say you express yourself best in your mother tongue, but these days Dipika let her hockey stick do all the talking on the field.

Coach Michael calls the girls to the centre of the field for cool down stretches and the girls slowly trickle in. Mike was a wonderful and positive man from a mixed racial background and a former national hockey player; the girls adored him. The girls busily stretch as Coach Mike updates them on the upcoming national club competition and national team selection. They lend him their ears fully with each having their own dreams that they eagerly desired to fulfil. The Panthers Club had at least four girls consistently representing the national team for the past five years, and this year again the club aimed to qualify as many players as possible.

'Mark it in your calendars, the first Friday of next month, you all will be in camp and the tournament begins on Saturday, 10 am,' Coach Mike's voice hovers over.

Enthusiastic mutter rises in the field, like boiling *masala chai*,<sup>66</sup> but Dipika remains quiet. The girls rush to Coach Mike with several questions and Dipika approaches him only when everyone leaves.

'Coach Mike, it is my elder sister's wedding during the weekend of the tournament,' with disappointment on her face.

'I am so sorry to hear about the clash Dipika, I can allow you to play and return home in the evenings,' Coach Mike responded thoughtfully.

'That will be rather impossible Coach, as the wedding is back home in Lautoka, and Hindu weddings are a three day affair.'

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<sup>66</sup> Indian spiced tea.

‘I am sorry, I have no authority to make any changes to the tournament dates.’

Devastation devours Dipika; there was no way she could miss her sister’s wedding. Had the wedding been in Suva she could work something out but Lautoka was like three hours drive away.

After dinner, Dipika video calls her mum and is greeted by her cheerful family. Being the youngest and living away from home had been hard for Dipika. Her mum had always done many chores for them, allowing the girls to focus on their academic work and extra-curricular activities.

‘We are having our hockey tournament and national team selection on the weekend of Arti’s wedding,’ Dipika finally lets it out.

‘I’ll probably try out next year,’ Dipika adds disappointedly.

‘Oh no! That is a shame, how much hard work you have been putting into your training,’ Arti interjects.

Dipika’s dad impatiently jumps into the conversation.

‘You go ahead and play the tournament and come home when you are done, as for the wedding, the rest of us will be here.’

‘You focus on your training Dipu. Hockey makes you happy,’ Arti warmly adds.

Dipika feels speechless with her family’s understanding and support. Arti’s wedding was important to her, but this tournament was even MORE important. How lucky she was to have such an understanding family – not a usual thing in Indo-Fijian families, especially towards girls and sports.

It was around mid-day of the tournament day and both the Panthers men’s and women’s teams had won their pool games and made it to the semi-finals. The Panthers looked sharp and



determined as they lined up opposite their opposing team, the Savages. The ambience was quite delightful with a small crowd of families and friends of players geared to cheer their people on. Hockey is not like soccer or rugby games which draw bigger crowds; it is perceived as a side sport in Fiji, with less spectators and fan following. The national selectors all settled in their snug seats with eyes glued to the hockey turf. A few food stalls were visible, selling hot dogs, sandwiches and juice at very cheap prices.

Coach Mike walks through the line sprinkling powerful words like diamond dust to his girls before the girls jog on to the pitch. The male Panthers team members deliver their high fives to the girls, wishing them luck. Dipika starts off in her usual position, the back line. The umpire blows the whistle and the battle of the giants begins. Dipika quickly gets into the game and marks the backline; she poses her hockey stick as if it were *Hanuman's gada* marking her opponents closely, and stopping the puck from hitting the net. The girls reciprocate in action to Coach Mike's desperate calls from the sidelines and do substantial damage on the scoreboard.

Dipika fully immerses herself into the match; puck after puck she sends flying away and often dribbles the biscuit and sensibly passes it to a team member on time to allow for potential goals. As she dances around, the blood in her body heats up like oil in a wok ready to fry off *puris*. The Panthers are comfortably in the lead, and just before the game comes to a conclusion, Matilda from the Panthers strikes a beauty and the biscuit kisses the net. The girls run to the middle of the court embracing each other in a circle to celebrate this barnburner; a 10-point margin win in the semis was a big deal.

Dipika finds a secluded spot at the back of the podium and sends Arti a message enquiring about the pre-wedding events. Sudden feelings of nostalgia engulf her and she wipes off a few tears; a warm hand touches her shoulder.

‘Are you ok Dipz?’ A compassionate male voice enquires.

She looks around and sees Viliame, the vice captain of the men’s Panthers Team, who has also been playing for the national team for three years now. Vili and Dipika had known each other for two years now and had hung out a few times after their training. Friendships between *iTaukei* boys and Indo-Fijian girls are a rare sight in Fiji, but this duo enjoyed each other’s company – and Vili was strong and sweet. Dipika quickly relays her saga and Vili calmly smiles and suggests a solution.

‘Why don’t you catch a *running cab*<sup>67</sup> right after the game Dipz; I have a contact who drives to the West; he can pick you from here.’

‘Hey! That could actually work Vili!’

‘I am headed to the change room, I’ll make a few calls and let you know,’ Vili adds.

‘Oh Vili, thank you so much! I might just make it to the wedding ceremony,’ Dipika responds tearfully.

‘Now cheer up and let’s get both the division trophies,’ Vili adds playfully.

The girls have a light lunch and move to the side arena of the hockey turf to stretch and practice. The Panthers club had had several wins in tournaments and had been ranked in the top three like forever. In this year’s league, they had been placed as the second seed after the Dragons – the team that they were facing in the finals. The girls appeared a little nervous but Coach Mike reminded them that going in as the underdog had them at an advantage as they had nothing to lose and should give their best.

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<sup>67</sup> Shared taxis that run from Suva to the western division and back at cheap rates.

The finals kickstart in style with cheering squads dancing to groovy beats and screaming their hearts out for their beloved teams. The Panthers and Dragons form their circles and say their prayers. Dipika closes her eyes and seeks strength and stamina from *Hanuman*; she feels divine power and sets her eyes on the puck and the backline. Dipika firmly grips her *gada* and flies from end to end marking her territory. The Dragons weave their way every now and then to harass the Panthers' goalie and by half time the scores stand neck and neck.

The second half begins with Coach Mike sending in some reserve players. He maintains Dipika as he had never seen her play at this excellent level before. He pats her shoulder and whispers,

‘You are doing an amazing job Dipz, keep at it!’

The sounds of the clashing hockey sticks, the thumping of the players' feet, the hard hitting of the puck, the screaming podium and the coaches' desperate calls, advance the second half into a fiery ambience. The two teams all tied up in scores with mere minutes remaining in the game, Ana – Panthers captain – steals the puck from an enthusiastic Dragons player and sends it flying towards Dipika who quickly stops and positions the biscuit near her feet; she scans around feeling like *Hanuman* – all geared up to set *Ravana's Lanka*<sup>68</sup> on fire. She steps forward and dribbles past one Dragons player, then two, then three...

Vili hysterically screams from the sidelines:

‘Go Dipz! Go, strike!’

As soon as Dipika positions herself to strike, the captain of the Dragons team elbows her and she heavily crashes on the turf – blood oozes out from her left knee and the umpire calls out a foul. The first aid team and Vili rush to transport Dipika off the field as Panthers captain Ana positions herself

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<sup>68</sup> Island fortress capital of king Ravana in the epics of the Ramayana.

to take the penalty shot. The crowd are on their feet now, and their jumps on the podium are like drumbeats – woven craftily with Ana’s name, almost sounding like a patriotic war cry.

‘Ana! Ana! *Boom Boom Boom!* Ana! Ana! *Boom Boom Boom...*’

Ana was very sharp and having to score a goal without any opposition apart from the goalie was as easy as ABC for her. She strikes the biscuit hard and it smashes the net. The Panthers go ballistic as the umpire blows the whistle marking the end of the game. The girls continue their celebration as Dipika sneaks out and gets in the taxi.

An hour later, sitting in the taxi she thinks about Vili’s sweet gestures – felt like soothing balm on her hurting knee; she gingerly smiles. Dipika’s train of thought is broken as her phone rings; she answers and finds Coach Mike’s excited voice at the other end.

‘Good game Dipz, you were on fire.’

Dipika’s heart swells with pride and a warm smile lights up her face.

‘Thank you, Coach... I gave it my all.’

‘And by the way Dipz, you have been selected for the national team,’ Coach Mike proudly reveals.

Tears of joy trickle down Dipika’s face; she sobs a little before calming herself and thanking her coach again. Flashes of her hard training and sacrifices comfort her – it was all worth it and she would do it all over again. Being the first Indo-Fijian girl to be selected into the national hockey team was a real BIG deal.

The taxi pulls outside of Dipika’s house in the middle of the hubbub. The groom’s procession had just arrived and there were some rituals happening outside. Dipika steps out of the car and a few heads turn to stare – her hockey uniform and the huge duffle bag with her valiant *gada* stand out like bones in a burger. She quickly rushes in to Arti’s room and embraces her sister. Dad, mum and her

eldest (already married) sister rush inside the room as well to greet her. Half tearfully she embraces her dad and utters the golden words...

‘Dad I have been selected in the national team.’

Mr. Prakash didn’t have any boys and sometimes wondered if his athleticism would ever be passed on to the next generation – his expression and smile said it all. He was so proud of Dipika’s achievement and there were no words to fully express it. Dipika’s mum hugs her and tells her how proud they are of her.

Dipika ducks into the bathroom to shower and change for the wedding. She takes her phone with her and types a message, blushes whilst she sends it off...

‘Thank you for being my superhero today Vili. Maybe we should grab a coffee sometime next week. Yes! I am asking you out on a date. 😊 ’

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### **6.3 Screenplay – Research Context**

I produced the screenplay *The Serevi MaGiC* for a (probable) 6- to-8-minute short film inspired by the data from the interviews, (participant written) free verse and observations of 18-year-old Meena. The screenplay is about an Indo-Fijian young woman who is not only comfortable but also passionate to play rugby – a sport which her kindred love but merely as spectators. *The Serevi MaGiC* is a slice of life – an evening in a Fijian neighbourhood playground, which is located approximately 15 kilometres outside of Central Suva. Meena was in Year 12 when I interviewed her and she played netball in school and was in the school’s under 19 team. Meena also played soccer and rugby for leisure. Meena had netball training at school twice a week, which focused on netball skills, body weight training and running.

Meena's mother motivated her to do well in her schoolwork as she was attempting the Year 12 national exams for a second time. Her mother particularly forbade her from making male friends and playing soccer with boys; playing netball and being in the school's Under 19 team was appreciated.

Meena watched YouTube videos of *Roy Krishna* to learn soccer skills; she also devoted her time to watching videos of Rugby Sevens' maestro *Waisale Serevi*<sup>69</sup> and her favourite player – *Jerry Tuwai* – to improve her rugby prowess. I was fortunate to be invited to three of Meena's weekend casual rugby games in her neighbourhood. During these games, I had the chance to observe the *iTaukei* youths that Meena played with; after their game Meena taught me a few rugby passing and kicking techniques which I really enjoyed.

The language (dialogue) used in the screenplay is simple and everyday lingo in the Fijian context, with some *iTaukei* and Fiji-Hindi words mixed with English, reflecting the way Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* youths communicate. The font used to write the screenplay has been kept to the traditional style of Courier font, 12-point size; single-spaced. Courier is a monospaced font, which means that each character and space is exactly the same width (Lucia, 2018). This is necessary in writing screenplays as Courier is highly predictable and allows for a more precise read time wise – that is, a page which is approximately 55 lines translates into one minute of screen time (Lucia, 2020).

The plot, incidents/events, characters and settings are factual; apart from pseudonyms no other aspect has been fabricated. Several jargon terms are used in the screenplay, namely: **INT** (interior), which means the scene is set inside a location, like a house or classroom. **EXT** (exterior), which means that the scene is set in an outside environment, such as a playground or park.

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<sup>69</sup> All time best Fijian rugby player, famous for his sidestepping and gooseteps.

**CLOSE ON** is a close-up on some object, action, or person's expressive body part such as face, eyes, and feet. **LONG SHOT** is a view of a scene that is shot from a significant distance, so that people appear as indistinct shapes. **EXTREME LONG SHOT** is a view from an even greater distance, in which people appear as small dots in the landscape if at all. **FADE IN** is the first text on the first line of a script which marks the beginning and **FADE OUT** is the last text for the end of the script.

*The Serevi MaGiC* is a celebration of the resilience and determination of an athletic Indo-Fijian girl who has acquired great rugby skills by watching legends like *Waisale Serevi* and other Fijian players. The screenplay depicts one of Meena's usual weekends where she bravely puts her body on the line to experience the pleasures of sports with other *iTaukei* teenagers in the neighbourhood defying gender, ethnic/racial, class based and cultural norms.

### **6.3.1 The Serevi MaGiC (A short film)**

FADE IN

EXT. FIJIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAYGROUND - EVENING

A slim and toned looking Indo-Fijian girl stands in the field intently gazing ahead with a rugby ball in her hands- poised to kick the ball - this is 18-year-old MEENA LAL.

She drops the ball gently to the ground and keenly waits for it to bounce slightly before she gives it a hard kick. The ball hurls in mid-air and she shoots like a missile chasing it to the other side of the ground. Her team members - MERE (*iTaukei* girl - 17, and TIMOCI (TIM) (*iTaukei* boy - 15) also run alongside her.

On the other side of the field the opposing team players TOMASI (*iTaukei* boy - 16), EMA (*iTaukei* girl - 18) and LITIA (*iTaukei* girl - 16) run towards the hovering ball.

Tomasi jumps high and catches the ball - runs forward with it, Tim boldly lunges forward in an attempt to tackle him but misses and falls awkwardly on the dry turf. Tomasi ducks a second player (Meena) and passes the ball to Ema.

TOMASI

Ema! Go, go!

Ema covers around 10 metres but her glorious moment is shattered when Mere runs and taps her feet sending Ema on the ground, and knocking the ball forward. Mere's team gets the ball. She taps the ball on her left foot and slowly runs, each time looks backwards to check for support from her teammates.

Litia runs like a hungry bull towards Mere.

LITIA

Someone's going to get it today!

MERE

Dream on...



Mere takes a sidestep from Litia and laughs teasingly; she then quickly passes the ball to Meena who had been running alongside her. Meena confidently catches the ball and runs ahead feeling the brunt of the hard breeze on her face, she increases her pace and beckons Tim to run with her.

MEENA

Tim! *Mai, mai*<sup>70</sup> Stay close, stay close.

TIM

Hurry, pass! Pass *mada*<sup>71</sup>!

Meena runs a few more metres and Tomasi runs straight towards her, she passes the ball to Tim just before Tomasi tackles her; Meena crashes helplessly on the ground.

FLASHBACK - INT. (2 YEARS AGO - MEENA SITTING AT HER STUDY DESK)

Meena is sitting at her study desk doing her homework. Her mother - MRS.LAL opens the door and walks in; she appears angry. Meena senses her mother's mood and pretends to focus on the book that is open in front of her.

MRS. Lal

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<sup>70</sup> Come, come.

<sup>71</sup> Just pass.

How many times have I  
told you not to play with  
boys?

MEENA

I haven't for so long  
mum.

MRS. LAL

Aunty Pushpa's  
daughter - Rekha was  
telling me that you were  
playing soccer in your  
uniform after school with  
those good for nothing  
boys.

MEENA

They are in the same  
class as me; I know them.

MRS. LAL

You will stop that.  
Netball is ok - sounds  
good and it's good that  
Reema and Mira play in the

team too.

MEENA

But mum...

MRS. LAL

Don't talk back Meena  
and focus on your studies,  
you are not doing well  
with your schoolwork.

EXT. FIJIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAYGROUND - EVENING - BACK TO PRESENT

Meena quickly shakes off her mother's taunts and gets herself up, rubs her thighs to get that alien pain off her quads. Tim runs ahead with the ball nearing the 20-metre line. Tomasi and Litia both religiously chase Tim and pull him down. The ball casually rolls backwards and Meena is there in time to scoop it with one hand. Mere tries to keep up with the pace and runs behind Meena in support.

TIMOCI

*Lako*<sup>72</sup> Meena, *lako*!

Right side... run! Run!

Don't stop.

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<sup>72</sup> Go.

Meena halts...looks at the try line and the two obstacles standing in between- Ema and Tomasi who slowly move towards her to snatch the ball.

FLASHBACK - INT. SOME 12 YEARS AGO IN MEENA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) - NIGHT

Meena (6 years old) sitting with her late father MR. LAL (in his early 30s), mother MRS.LAL (in her late 20s) and younger brother BABLU (5 years old) in front of the TV watching a Rugby Sevens match between Fiji and New Zealand - her parents are screaming and jumping as Serevi gets the ball and side steps a few players enhancing towards the try line. Serevi conns his final opponent by doing his famous goose step; with ball in one hand he touches the try line in style. Little Meena's eyes all glued to the TV - mesmerised by this magician - WAISALE SEREVI.

MR. LAL

No one can play like

Serevi - such a maestro

Little Meena in awe and in deep thought, all fascinated and loudly declares.

MEENA

When I grow up I want

to play just like Serevi.

Mr. and Mrs. Lal burst out laughing at Meena's innocence. Mr. Lal moves closer and warmly pats the child on her head.

EXT. FIJIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAYGROUND - EVENING - BACK TO PRESENT

Meena smiles at the beautiful memories; she takes a deep gasp and feels she is in the shoes of her much followed player JERRY TUWAI- for the past few years she has been practising his Serevi-inspired moves. With the ball carefully tucked under her right elbow she takes a sidestep to the left dodging big Tomasi who misreads her moves and races ahead. Now only Ema stood as a mountain in her way - Meena swiftly gets closer to Ema and then does a sharp goose step, conning Ema who wastes her jump in the opposite direction in an attempt to tackle Meena. Meena runs ahead scoring a try - her teammates run towards her and surround her.

MERE

(Embracing Meena)

You did it *Lewa*<sup>73</sup> - *bahut julum*<sup>74</sup> - our very own Serevi.

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<sup>73</sup> Girl.

<sup>74</sup> Absolutely fabulous/great.

Meena feels a sense of contentment which glows on her face - she straightens her body and looks up to the skies as if looking for something or someone - (CLOSE UP of face) the sun's rays hit Meena's face showing her brown eyes and the deep emotions that they harbour. Tim joins the group and pats Meena's head. They all walk together in excitement - talking about the game.

TOMASI

(Loudly to Timoci)

Boy! You saw that. This girl can move man. Meena should play for the *Fijianas*<sup>75</sup>.

TIMOCI

*Eyo*<sup>76</sup>! Very strong and fast this one.

MERE

I still remember the time when this skinny Indian girl sat on the side looking at us play; and then the way she drop kicked the ball back to us when it went off the field. Remember that time MESU<sup>77</sup> used to play with us? He almost had a heart attack seeing an

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<sup>75</sup> Fiji women's National Rugby Union Team.

<sup>76</sup> Yes.

<sup>77</sup> Name of an *iTaukei* boy.

Indian girl kick like that.

MEENA (laughingly)

Oh! I miss Mesu - well I am grateful to him as he was the one who invited me to play... if not you guys would never do it, and I would be sitting there and watching all my life.

TOMASI

(Jokingly to Meena)

Eyo, true man - I always thought that Indian girls only like make-up and fancy dress and they are very thin - Meena is thin but has a strong body and mind - not afraid.

LITIA (jokingly)

(Draws closer to Meena and pokes her in the stomach)

That's why Indian boys are scared to play soccer with her.

MEENA (a little embarrassed now with all the attention)

(to her friends)

Stop it guys ... it was a fun game; I

better get home fast before my mum  
discovers I am kicking balls with you  
all and kills me.

The group laughs out loud at the intended pun. The sun is a soft orange glow, setting in its home, the gentle rays touch Meena's face (CLOSE UP), sweat still trickling from her forehead, a full smile of satisfaction on her face.

MEENA

(softly to her friends)

Dad would have loved seeing me  
goosestep like SEREVI.

Mere puts her arms quite tightly around Meena - the two girls tag along slowly matching the pace and mood of the setting sun. A swift melody creeps in Song - *Ziddi Dil*<sup>78</sup> - (singer: Vishal Dadlani; Composer: Shashi Suman & lyricist: Prashant Ingole) from movie *Mary Kom*<sup>79</sup>.

*Ye aa aayi yaayi ye ye aa*

*Aayi yaayi ye ye ya.*

*Aayi yaayi ye ye ya.*

*Oh ho*<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Resilient heart.

<sup>79</sup> A movie on the journey of the Indian eponymous boxer Mary Kom to winning the 2008 World Boxing Championships in Ningbo.

<sup>80</sup> Powerful (melodious) voice variations.



**WIDE SHOT**- The group of six stroll on the footpath in threes and the neighbourhood now visible; a few tin shacks with families sitting on their balconies and kids playing in the front yard. The shot gets **LONGER** and the melody now combines with powerful lyrics.

*Bas khud ki hi sunta baatein, yea yea yeah*

*Nadaani se hai naate, yea yea yeah*

*Ghurrata aate jaate, yea yea yeah*

*Din ko kehta yeh raatein, yea yea yeah*

*Ho dekhe hai aankhon mein*

*Kismat ki aankhein daale. Hey!*

*Hawaa ke kaanon mein jaake kahe*

*Kismat pidhi hai...<sup>81</sup>*

**(EXTREME LONG SHOT)** - The youth appear mere dots from a great distance and slowly merge with the landscape (The song continues) with the name of the cast on the screen.

*Tum bahut ziddi hai*

*Dil ye ziddi hai*

*Dil ye ziddi hai*

*Dil ye ziddi hai ziddi hai*

*Dil ye ziddi hai...<sup>82</sup>*

FADE OUT

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<sup>81</sup> It listens to just its own self. It's related to immaturity, simplicity. Now and then it keeps roaring. Its calls days as nights; its looks fearlessly into eyes of destiny; It goes and whispers in the ears of the wind that; destiny is powerless.

<sup>82</sup> You are resilient; this heart is very resilient (x4).

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#### 6.4 Song – Research Context

I produced this song, *Big Sister – small sister*, from Ariel (16 years old) and Sania's (15 years old) data. The song goes back to the childhood of these girls and reveals their deep roots in badminton. During the time of our interview (2019) the girls lived approximately 15 kilometres out of central Suva and attended an Indo-Fijian managed (Hindu), multiracial/ethnic high school, which had approximately 80% of Indo-Fijians, and 20% of *iTaukeis* and mixed-race students. Ariel was in Year 11 and her favourite subject was Physics, and Sania in Year 10 and enjoyed the subject Agriculture. Both Ariel and Sania love Sevens Rugby and watch live telecasted games with their parents.

The girls described their parents as modern, thus they had freedom to go to movies with friends, be on social media and have mobile phones. The sisters were also allowed to have male friends, but no boyfriends (dating) as Sania specifically stated that this would make her father 'very angry'. Their parents were encouraging and supportive towards the girls' schoolwork, sports and also dancing and modelling, which Sania took an interest in. The participants were interviewed at their home; they were excited to talk to me and show me their racquets and backyard where they played badminton. I have had great experience playing badminton with my sisters whilst growing up so during the interviews I shared some of my stories as well; this was great for rapport building.

*Big Sister – small sister* is a celebration of the bond between two sisters, which roots in sharing time and moments playing badminton. The girls were moderately active and played badminton at least once a week; they also participated in the school's PE lessons where Sania played netball and sometimes soccer with other girls (Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*), and Ariel participated in volleyball with (few) Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* girls. Ariel mentioned that she regretted not getting a

proper chance to try out rugby (which intrigued her), as her school did not offer rugby for girls. Relatedly, there were no official soccer teams for girls (like there was for netball). The girls did not represent the school in any sport, nor did they seriously train for selection – they played badminton for leisure and mentioned that it kept them fit and healthy and de-stressed them. The sisters played badminton during weekends and school holidays; sometimes their parents played with them as well. During the school holidays, their female cousins would come to stay over and they would sometimes play badminton.

The song is narrated from Sania’s perspective as during the interview she stressed a lot on her bond with her elder sister, and how she was her best friend. *Big Sister – small sister* is written using simple everyday (Fijian) English; this gives the song a realistic Fijian feel and would appeal to an audience beyond academia. The song has four parts and each part focuses on different aspects/experiences (badminton, soccer, Agriculture, Physics, Bollywood, songs, Fiji-Hindi) of the girls’ (sporting) lives.

The song begins with an intro, which is meant to set the tone and sets the listener/reader up for what comes next; the intro in this song is repeated and meant to last about 15 seconds ‘*Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah*’. Each part of the song has a main verse, where the gist of the story about the girls is narrated. Each segment also has a pre-chorus, which is meant to keep the listener/reader interested as the song transitions from the verse to the chorus. The song has a chorus of four lines, which defines the feelings Sania has for her (big/elder) sister. The repeating of the chorus in every part of the song emphasises the message/emotion of the song, allowing it to remain in the listener’s/reader’s head long after the music and lines have ended.

#### **6.4.1 Big Sister – small sister**

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

We do many things together – my Big sister and me  
From childhood our racquets – the roots of our family tree  
She is Big and warm – a year older and twice my size  
Playing badminton has given us both – super strong thighs

She hits hard  
I run fast  
Mum and dad sometimes also play  
Happy and healthy we are, feeling at bay

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...  
My big sister is special and everyone says we are lovey-dovey  
She is special... so very special...She is my best friend without any levy  
Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

\*\*\*\*\*

When exams are near we study like no one's business  
Our beloved racquets relax in a corner making friends with dust  
By the time school breaks we get very stressed  
Embracing the powerful sound of the flying shuttlecock we NEVER get depressed

She hits hard  
I run fast  
Mum and dad sometimes also play

Happy and healthy we are, feeling at bay

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

My big sister is special and everyone says we are lovey-dovey

She is special... so very special...She is my best friend without any levy

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

\*\*\*\*

She and me – we are quite similar yet very different

I like Bollywood dancing and modelling – love looking after our garden in the front

She loves Hindi songs and dreams that Physics be taught in Fiji-Hindi

Plays volleyball and smashes the net, even when it's windy

She hits hard

I run fast

Mum and dad sometimes also play

Happy and healthy we are, feeling at bay

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

My big sister is special and everyone says we are lovey-dovey

She is special... so very special...She is my best friend without any levy

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

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I like Cinderella's golden shoes, but Krishna's<sup>83</sup> soccer boots I like more  
Rosi the top scorer and I became friends when I scored – the boys' catcalling I could ignore  
Ariel once played rugby in Year 8 – the girls had formed their own team  
With her now robust frame she dreams to tackle any 'her' or 'him'

She hits hard

I run fast

Mum and dad sometimes also play

Happy and healthy we are, feeling at bay

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

My big sister is special and everyone says we are lovey-dovey

She is special... so very special...She is my best friend without any levy

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

Oh-lah-lah-lahlah- lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...Oh-lah-lah-lahlah-lah...

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## 6.5 Reflection and Analysis

### 6.5.1 Athletic Indo-Fijian Women: Gendered and Racial Subversiveness in the Fijian context

'Her five feet four inches well-toned frame proudly arches as she gasps for air. Not only was Dipika the lone Indo-Fijian girl in the Panthers Hockey Club but also at club level hockey in Fiji. Dipika was a rare sight amongst *iTaukei* and mixed-race girls and she enjoyed it.' (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

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<sup>83</sup> Reference to Fiji's number one soccer player – Roy Krishna.

Dipika having the physicality and prowess to play hockey, and being the lone Indo-Fijian woman in the Panthers hockey club, is an unusual sight in Fiji as Indo-Fijian women's subservience, which is an important tenet of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, is the traditional ideal/norm (Balram, 2019; Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016; Sugden et al., 2020). Therefore, athletic Indo-Fijian women (like Dipika) have to hurdle gender norms and racial impediments (racism) in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020) in order to perform their gender in subversive and unexpected ways (Butler, 1990). However, Butler (1990) comprehends subversion more precisely as 'subversive resignification' and suggests that resignification of norms is not necessarily subversive, and can take conservative forms. For example, Dipika merely being a toned Indo-Fijian (woman), and playing hockey is not an act of subversion – these could be perceived as re-enactment of the strength of women in her community, like her female *girmitiya* ancestors in a conservative way (Lata 2009). However, Dipika's (sporting) agency in the Fijian sporting space – that is being the ONLY Indo-Fijian girl in her club, fighting hard to be selected in the national team and being amongst the very few athletic Indo-Fijian women in the country (Kanemasu, 2018), reflects the tendency of lack of sports participation amongst her kindred. Therefore, her sporting agency in this particular space (where Indo-Fijian women are scarce) indeed signifies the act of subversion.

Many Indo-Fijian girls fall in the societal subservient traditional ideal/norm and do not participate in sports for leisure, let alone at competition level, as sporting activities are seen to violate norms of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). In contrast, Dipika is not limited to performing her gender fluidly in sports only – she enacts her gender fluidly in her daily agency as well (Butler, 1990). For example:

'She started doing certain things, which people said girls couldn't or weren't supposed to do – like cleaning the car, climbing a ladder and doing mechanical and building repairs with her dad.' (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

Not only did Dipika enter the sporting arena (netball and hockey), and a male-dominated work field, she also indulged in chores traditionally associated with men. Dipika plays netball and hockey – sports that are not associated with Fijian hegemonic masculinity and not considered as highly physical in Fiji. There are apparent culturally gendered hurdles (placed by society) that judge both Dipika’s sporting agency and her off-sport masculine chores (like doing mechanical and building repairs), which she was told that girls could not or were not supposed to do – these agencies evidence her subversive nature. However, Dipika is not totally marginalised, because despite the disapproval and demotivation from Indo-Fijian women (society) around her, Dipika does receive support and encouragement from her nuclear family towards her sporting and other off field so-called ‘masculine’ agencies.

Furthermore, apart from the gendered hurdles that Dipika encounters, she also experiences (subtle) racial and religious discrimination such as having to do Christian prayers and being nudged to learn the *iTaukei* language. It is notable that Dipika is not bullied or totally unaccepted in the team, but racism is definitely systemic as Critical Race Theorists (CRT) believe that each day brings proof that systemic racism exists (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). In relation to the aforementioned, CRT can be particularly helpful to understand the inclusion issues that Dipika initially faces in the Panthers hockey team. As a woman of colour and from the minority (marginalised) group, Dipika is silenced on many occasions and chooses not to raise her voice by questioning the (dominant) other brown race as she deems that she needs to compromise and adapt, in order to be accepted. For example, Dipika compromises and takes part in the Christian prayers, despite being from the second highest caste of Hinduism (Kshatriyas) and a strong devotee of Lord *Hanuman*; she learns the *iTaukei* language as well to fit in. Therefore, CRT gives voice to, and also illuminates Dipika’s sporting experiences and allows her to represent herself in the process of making her agency known to other marginalised groups of women for motivation, to the dominant brown natives for a fair go,



and to those privileged in the Global North for awareness.

Dipika's agency is subversive in twofold – first she performs her gender fluidly by hurdling societal gender norms in sports and at work. For example, Dipika is the only woman in her department, works late nights, climbs a ladder and does mechanical and building repairs – tasks, which are associated with men and masculinity in the Fijian society. By performing these acts repetitively, Dipika erases the lines that define the gender binary and her female body does all the tasks (Butler, 1990), which is culturally gender non-conformative (Kanemasu, 2018). Secondly, Dipika subverts racial divides/segregation by asking Vili out on a date – her agency outrightly violates racial/cultural norms associated with being an Indo-Fijian girl/woman. Not only is there a great difference in religion and culture, but the racial rift amongst *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians has been large and dating/intermarriage, especially with an Indo-Fijian girl and *iTaukei* boy, is highly uncommon (Richmond, 2009). Dipika dating an *iTaukei* boy is as rare as Dipika (Indo-Fijian girl) being selected in the national hockey team. On this occasion, Dipika's race intersects with her gender, language and religion to illuminate her degree of subversiveness off field – in her personal life as well. The aforementioned clearly indicates that Dipika's sports involvement has given her the opportunity to embolden herself in order to challenge all these barriers (race, gender, religion, language, etc.) circumscribing dating and (interracial) marriage in Fijian society. However, there are also occasions where Dipika chooses not to subvert, especially against her religious beliefs. For example:

‘From childhood Dipika remained vegetarian on Tuesdays and prayed to Lord *Hanuman*... Dipika also did not eat beef and pork and at times felt left out during team functions, where beef and pork were predominant on the menu.’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

Despite the inconvenience with food whilst being with the hockey team, Dipika still chooses to adhere to Hindu religious norms and not eat beef and pork and stay vegetarian on Tuesdays. These religious agencies have been instilled (by modelling and observation) from birth and she performs them religiously, even if they could lead to her being unaccepted by her teammates. Vegetarianism has been integral to Hinduism and is based on the concept of *ahimsa*<sup>84</sup> (Fischer, 2016). Hinduism amongst indentured labourers was a response to their new physical setting and the encounter with the *iTaukeis*; the structure of the Hindu community that was formed was totally new and defined in terms of the locally relevant social categories (Younger, 2010). Therefore, most Hindus instead of maintaining strict vegetarianism selected particular days to stay vegetarian, which were associated with particular gods/deities to whom they prayed; for example, Dipika stayed vegetarian on Tuesdays to pray to *Hanuman*. Interestingly, Dipika chooses a male bachelor god (*Hanuman*), who is an epitome of power, strength and stamina as her source of strength and inspiration. Being a staunch devotee of *Hanuman* also reveals that Dipika is not doing her gender as expected – praying to a god to whom mostly men pray, further depicts Dipika performing her gender fluidly (Butler, 1990).

‘... She often wondered why she couldn’t have a Hindu prayer added. No one thought about these LITTLE things and Dipika didn’t want to question and encourage further gaps between her and the others...’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

The above extract reveals that Dipika, instead of furthering the racial rifts (in mixed racial teams), is focused on narrowing and/or erasing the gap through her compromised agencies (on and off the hockey pitch). For instance, Dipika learns the *iTaukei* language and participates in Christian prayers. She does these despite longing to speak in Fiji-Hindi and perform her Hindu prayers when in the training camp. Dipika chooses not to subvert in this case in fear of discrimination and

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<sup>84</sup> Non-injury to all living creatures.

exclusion from mixed racial team sports as not only is Dipika the only Indo-Fijian woman, she is also the only Hindu in the Panthers hockey team.

‘This didn’t stop Dipika from wondering how it would be if the girls spoke to her in Fiji-Hindi; she missed speaking Fiji-Hindi; they say you express yourself best in your mother tongue.’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

Dipika adapts to the *iTaukei* language; she makes these concessions so that she can be a part of the team. On the one hand, this seems like a ‘regular’ kind of thing done, but on the other hand it is also evident that there is a common language (English) that *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians both speak fluently, but the *iTaukei* girls STILL choose to communicate in their mother tongue around Dipika. Therefore, to some extent Dipika is compelled to learn the native language. The act of the *iTaukei* girls on this occasion is subtly racist, they want to make evident who has the power by speaking their own language; this is mostly absorbed from the *iTaukei* cultural heritage (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). The aforementioned links back to explicit racism during (and after) the 1987 coup where many *iTaukeis* (especially from the Methodist Church) demanded Fiji be declared a Christian state (Newland, 2013) despite most Indo-Fijians being Hindus. Thus, often it is seen in Fiji’s context how race, language and religion intersect to emphasise indigenous dominance and resonate that ‘others’ MUST adapt, to fit in.

Dipika’s adaptation of the *iTaukei* language (coined with English) somewhat reduces Dipika’s subversiveness (in a cultural sense) in the continuum of subversiveness as she adapts to the dominant. This reveals that Dipika is subversive (many times) merely towards Indo-Fijian cultural gendered norms as when the race factor emerges Dipika compromises, adapts and accepts existing Fijian power dynamics in the sporting realm. In performing the aforementioned agency, Dipika fails to voice the language and religious concerns that she has. Meena’s subversiveness in the sporting

realm is somewhat similar to Dipika and at times also quite different. As the excerpt below reveals:

MRS. LAL:

Aunty Pushpa's daughter - Rekha was  
telling me that you were playing  
soccer in your uniform after school  
with those good for nothing boys...  
You will stop that. Netball is ok -  
sounds good and it's good that  
Reema and Mira play in the team too.

**(The Serevi MaGiC)**

The above excerpt shows Meena's mother's disapproval of her playing soccer with Indo-Fijian boys after school in her uniform – she appreciates Meena playing netball with girls in the confined space of the school. In Meena's scenario, her netball agency does not disrupt cultural gendered norms (according to her mother) thus she does not have to navigate gendered hurdles in this sport. Additionally, netball is a popular sport for girls in school; although dominated by *iTaukei* girls, a few Indo-Fijian girls also play. Meena (unlike Dipika), is not the only Indo-Fijian girl in the (mixed racial) netball team, therefore her netball agency is placed somewhere in the middle of the 'continuum of subversions'. This is so, as Meena still breaks some gendered and ethnic based norms by playing (an acceptable) sport as some Indo-Fijian girls are not allowed to play any sports or have an athletic/toned body (Kanemasu, 2018).

In contrast, Meena's rugby agency is highly subversive (Butler, 1990) and placed right on the top of the 'continuum of subversions,' as rugby is considered a dangerous sport and is associated with *iTaukei* men, with *iTaukei* women also slowly entering the scene (Kanemasu, Johnson &

Molnar, 2018; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). Rugby defines hegemonic masculinity in Fiji and is not associated with Indo-Fijian women even remotely (apart from being spectators via televised coverage) as they sit at the bottom of the Fijian gender and physicality hierarchy in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Teawai, 2005). Unlike her netball agency, Meena has to hide from her mother and play rugby (with *iTaukeis*) and soccer (with Indo-Fijian boys). Her mother is aware of her soccer agencies with Indo-Fijian boys after school and restricts Meena from playing, let alone allowing Meena to play rugby with *iTaukeis* had she been aware. The idea of an Indo-Fijian girl playing with the big, strong *iTaukei* boys and sustaining tackles is unimaginable. This resilience and agency turns Meena in to a subject and what Butler (2009) refers to as subversive bodies – bodies that cause gender disorder and shatters hegemony in sports, which is based on racial lines and gendered binary divides.

Moreover, Meena's mother's restrictions (towards rugby) reflect the expectations of Indo-Fijian girls to adhere to gendered and racial norms of the Indo-Fijian society. By continuing to secretly play rugby, despite the family restrictions, Meena defies societal gender orders and re-defines Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009) by practising her gender fluidly (Butler, 1990). In doing so, she constructs an abject body – one that intimidates the realm of the compliant bodies (Butler, 1990). Therefore, Meena's rugby (and soccer) agencies are traditionally considered as masculine, which is unimaginable for an Indo-Fijian woman to embody, thus is not acceptable by her mother and kindred, and (initially) even by her *iTaukei* rugby teammates. Meena's agency is in line with Connell's perception of the body being a social construct and akin to Butler's (1990) notion that gender is performative – that is, the body is (cap)able to perform different genders across the gender continuum and both masculinity and femininity can be fluid and change according to their environment and agency (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Meena's body begins to transform from the perceived 'abject' body into an independent body, which subversively sustains tackles made by *iTaukei* boys who are considered most masculine and physical and placed right at the top of the Fijian gender continuum. Meena drives the contended borders of the acknowledged and generally

tolerable bodies (*iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijian men) who were/are placed above Indo-Fijian women on the gender continuum, thus expanding the Fijian gender norms (Butler, 2011).

Moreover, Meena runs fast, does ‘goose steps’, and scores a try – Meena’s performativity on the rugby field reflects ‘collaboration’ with *iTaukeis* (her team), and also a response to the performances of *iTaukeis* (opposing team). Whilst performing the aforementioned agencies, Meena’s gender intersects with her race, thus Meena ultimately cracks both gender and racial barriers whilst fulfilling her passion for rugby. In doing so, Meena challenges the racial stereotypes in Fiji about Indo-Fijian girls and their (lack of) physicality, and the power imbalances in Fijian sports scenes, which heavily depend on gender and race. This is in line with CRT’s commitment to social justice, offering elements of liberation and transformation in response to racial, gender and class subordination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and ensures the imbalance of power and resources distribution lies at the centre of any interrogation (Hylton, 2005). Moreover, in Meena’s case, she is the only Indo-Fijian girl playing rugby (socially); however, her subversive sporting agency is not merely an individual act – Meena, Dipika, Sania and Ariel have been visible in many different Fijian sporting platforms (rugby, hockey, volleyball, soccer and netball). Relatedly, Dipika may be the lone Indo-Fijian girl in club (and national) hockey teams in Fiji, but she has played other sports such as netball and her athletic identity translates in more than one field and agency – she plays netball and hockey, works in a male-dominated field and does mechanical repairs – thus practices her gender fluidly (Butler, 1990). Therefore, although athletic Indo-Fijian women (like Meena and Dipika) are very few (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020), by using the ‘counter-storytelling’ tenet of CRT, their sporting experience and voices get recognised (and accentuated) as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analysing and improving racial subordination (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) experienced in the sporting platforms of Fiji. These athletic Indo-Fijian women’s agencies can be relative to other Indo-Fijian women (marginalised women) hence promote a ‘notion’ of collective

struggle and subversion, which is in line with Butler's (1990) notion of collective subversiveness being the only effective subversion as opposed to merely individual efforts.

'Meena runs a few more metres and Tomasi runs straight towards her, she passes the ball to Tim just before Tomasi tackles her; Meena crashes helplessly on the ground... Meena quickly shakes off her mother's taunts and gets herself up, rubs her thighs to get that alien pain off her quads.' (**The Serevi MaGiC**)

The above excerpt shows Meena's complex experiences and performances as a form of resistance to her mother's restrictions, based on societal gendered and racial norms in the Fijian context. Young, athletic Indo-Fijian women like Meena (Kanemasu, 2018) shatter norms associated with acceptable body image and performativity, which would align her with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Butler, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). In hindsight Meena's athletic body escapes ordinary examination as an 'object of thought' and her body becomes resistant to restraint (Butler, 2011, p. xiii). Meena is comfortable in (and actually enjoys) putting her body on the line to perform the necessary agencies of rugby – tackled by *iTaukei* boys and girls. Meena is proud to occupy a strong Indo-Fijian female body, which is not limited to her biological sex or her ethnicity, which are socially constructed (Butler, 1990; Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). Relatedly, Dipika is proud to occupy her toned and strong Indo-Fijian woman's body; she obliviously lifts her tee shirt to wipe her face revealing some skin. These athletic Indo-Fijian women's gender intersects with their race, ethnicity, religiosity and also geographical location of residency (urban area) to illuminate their sporting trajectories and their defiance to traditional gender norms and race and (subtle) racism. According to CRT's realist point, race and racism is more complex than merely unfavourable impressions of members of other groups – it is a means by

which society allocates power, privilege and status to one (dominant) group whilst marginalising other groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Donnor, 2006; Milner, 2007; Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). Therefore, using intersectionality as a multifocused lens has allowed for an investigation of how intersecting power relations influence social relations across the diverse Fijian society, and also the individual experiences of Indo-Fijian girls in their sporting lives (Collins & Bilge, 2020) such as Meena and Dipika who are able to rise beyond their assumed position at the bottom of the gender and race continuum in the Fijian sporting realms. However, unlike Dipika and Meena who play sports at competitive levels, Sania and Ariel play for leisure and participation, but they too enjoy their sporting agency:

‘I like Cinderella’s golden shoes, but Krishna’s soccer boots I like more’

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‘Ariel once played rugby in Year 8 – the girls had formed their own team

With her now robust frame she dreams to tackle any “her” or “him.”’

*(Big Sister – small sister)*

On one hand Sania adores (but is not limited to) modelling and Bollywood dancing, and on the other hand, she enjoys playing soccer and scoring goals. Ariel and Sania do not mention any restrictions from their parents in playing with boys – but the girls do not seem to be interested in doing so anyway. The sisters are merely restricted from dating. The absence of restrictions in playing a sport associated with boys/men gives Ariel the freedom to dream of playing rugby and her only limitation is resources – her school does not have rugby for girls. Playing rugby is considered (as in Meena’s case) a violation to Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity thus ‘un-lady-like’ – it also has potential for injuries (Kanemasu, 2018). Unlike Sania and Ariel’s parents, Meena’s mother restricts



her playing with boys as revealed in the excerpt below:

MRS. LAL:

How many times have I told you not to play with boys? (**The Serevi MaGiC**)

Moreover, Meena's mother maintains her disapproval of Meena playing soccer with boys after school despite Meena reassuring her that the boys were from her class and she felt comfortable and safe around them. Meena's mother's failure of acceptance of Meena's soccer agency reflects failure in Meena being recognised as a subject (Butler, 2009). Her mother's lack of acceptance draws Meena towards subversive gender (and racial) performativity (Butler, 2009) – playing rugby in secrecy with (boys) *iTaukeis*. Meena is restricted not only because her sporting agency violates Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, but also because she is independently making decisions on her body and agency – like choosing to play soccer with Indo-Fijian boys. Meena's subversive acts scare her mother, who prefers gender segregation in sports in a confined space (Meena merely playing netball with girls in school). Meena is constantly reminded that her schoolwork is more important than playing with 'those good for nothing boys'. Indo-Fijians are governed by patriarchal structures; Butler talks about bodies escaping all our efforts to hold their substance because they already come with 'pre-matter': they come in genders (Butler, 2011). Akin to Butler's (1990) notion, many Indo-Fijian girls and women train their bodies to perform in line with traditional gendered norms, emulating their biological sex. Therefore, in Meena's mother's view, Meena is an Indo-Fijian girl and clearly race and gender intersect with education (preference by Indo-Fijian parents) and class (Meena comes from a poor family), to discourage Meena from playing sports associated with males (and playing with boys) – these acts are perceived as violating traditional (Indo-Fijian) gender norms.

MERE:

I still remember the time when this skinny Indian girl sat on the side looking at us play; and then the way she drop kicked the ball back to us when it went off the field. Remember that time MESU used to play with us? He almost had a heart attack seeing an Indian girl kick like that. **(The Serevi MaGiC)**

The above excerpt shows that both Mere and Mesu had preconceived ideas about Meena's athleticism and strength, like the Asian American sportswomen who have been categorised as non-athletic and stereotyped as small and delicate (Pitetta, 2020). It is evident that Meena's race and gender (Indo-Fijian girl) had intersected to oppress Meena and deny her a fair go at playing rugby until Meena proves/rises beyond this intersectionality. Meena being able to kick the estranged ball back into the field reveals her physicality and prowess and her team members (*iTaukeis*) include Meena in their play based on her performance and not her gender and/or race. This is in contrast to Sugden's (2021) discovery of *iTaukei* (male) rugby players laughing at the idea of an Indo-Fijian sportswoman.

Tomasi: (Loudly to Timoci)

Boy! You saw that. This girl can move man. Meena should play for the *Fijianas*. **(The Serevi MaGiC)**

Tomasi is in awe of Meena's rugby skills and deems that Meena is good enough to be in the Fiji women's Rugby Sevens national team. In saying this, it is also evident that Tomasi advocates gender and racial fluidity as he acknowledges that women (both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian) have

bodies that are capable of playing rugby, and the sport need not be merely *iTaukei* and male in characteristics.

The restrictions and hurdles that Meena faces in her soccer and rugby agencies are not directly triggered from the groups that she plays with (soccer – Indo-Fijian boys and rugby – *iTaukeis*). It rather stems from Indo-Fijian patriarchal (and matriarchal) controls, which not only promote Indo-Fijian women to be submissive, but also are based on social class (parents' employment type, educational levels and family's poverty level), and a submissive view of race (internalisations that Indo-Fijian women lack physicality and re-producing these stereotypical views). Meena's mother's restrictions appear to fuel Meena's subversiveness, but from Meena's perspective, she is merely enjoying the physicality associated with playing rugby – and at the same time exercising her human rights subscribed by Fiji in the CEDAW. Like Meena, Ariel is also attracted to power, strength and physicality in sports – she hits the volleyball ball very hard, and smashes the net and aspires to play rugby. Both girls are huge rugby fans and feel the urge/need to move away from the agency of merely spectating to actually performing (playing rugby). They feel the urge to build and live within new bodies that do not conform to the gendered/racialised order of their communities – subversive bodies that are already invading arenas that were not built purposely for them.

Athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women perform their gender, race, ethnicity, language and social class fluidly. For example, Dipika carefreely lifts her tee shirt to wipe her face, and asks an *iTaukei* boy out on a date; she also adapts to the *iTaukei* language coined with English. Moreover, Dipika's agency reveals that social class can be performed fluidly – although she is a network engineer, highly educated and might have a good wage, she is still one among the others in the field – therefore, it is evident that in the field there is a sudden 'suspension' of social class and everyone is 'equal'. On the hockey turf, all the *iTaukei* girls and mixed raced girls and Dipika – despite their ethnicity (and race), gender that they identify with, phenotype, language, body size and shape, education level,

occupation and ownership of material things – are all merely hockey players with different levels of physicality and prowess which is based on their effort and performance.

Similarly, Meena recovers from a hard tackle from an *iTaukei* boy and scores a try. Meena's body too as it performs on the rugby pitch is NOT a Hindu, poor, Indo-Fijian girl, who is repeating Year 12 – she is merely a rugby player with sound rugby skills and strength. Leisure is an important gendered, racial, religious and class based space and place that Meena occupies wherein she not only encounters risk and danger to herself by being on the receiving end of a tackle but also engages in risk-taking behaviour (Green & Singleton, 2016), such as enduring to run across the try line despite the physical hurdles (tackles) and also hiding her rugby agency from her mother.

Relatedly, Sania scores a goal in soccer and becomes friends with an *iTaukei* girl and Ariel 'plays volleyball and smashes the net and dreams of playing rugby and tackling boys and girls'. Thus, for each of these athletic Indo-Fijian women, there is a 'suspension' of social class and everyone is 'equal', even those previously considered the weakest and those considered the most powerful: Indo-Fijian women = *iTaukei* men. One can clearly state that this momentary suspension of the social order that happens on the sporting fields stays there, and does not impact in the 'real world' social order; however, my research shows that these suspensions bring also ruptures that can leverage a new social order to be built, or at least the current one to be clearly questioned, opening new cracks in the gender-race-class-sporting order in Fiji.

Therefore, an intersectional approach has effectively shared all (unique) nuances (Collins & Bilge, 2020) of the counter-narratives of Indo-Fijian women – a notion of unique voice of colour (which has not been researched before) (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) – by interrogating the reproduction of inequality (and oppression) at family, community, national, and policy levels (Grabham, 2008). Intersectionality in this case has accounted for these athletic girls'/women's gender, race, religiosity, caste, patriarchy and matriarchy, language, economic class, ethnicity, education level, place of birth and place of residence (geography). Thus, intersectionality has aided

in supporting the work of CRT allowing for a nuanced analysis, acknowledging the unique perspectives, experiences and voices of the marginalised ‘other’ as legitimate, apt and critical to understanding, analysing and improving racial (and gender and class) subordination (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002).

The potential of an athletic Indo-Fijian woman destabilising Fijian norms surrounding athleticism, physicality and lack of representation (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020; Teawai, 2005) depends on their inhabiting a (sporting) context with other athletic Indo-Fijian women thus forming collectively subversive coalitions (Butler, 1990). Therefore, collectively (even if they are few), these athletic Indo-Fijian women have become subversive bodies and voices – their participation (in some aspects at least) in serious sports discourses (at competition level or playing with/against *iTaukeis*), and also their counter-narratives (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) disrupt both Indo-Fijian and the *iTaukei* gender, ethnicity and race orders. Their collective subversiveness (Athletic Indo-Fijian women’s sporting agencies) (Butler, 1990) challenge previous reported and perceived stereotypes of their lack of physicality and prowess (Kanemasu, 2018; Teawai, 2005), and position as the ‘other’ in relation to *iTaukei* women in the Fijian sporting platforms. Also, these counter-narratives create disorder and disrupt voices of the dominant *iTaukei* group, and raise the voices of the ‘others’ who have been silenced and marginalised (Milner, 2007).

The next segment looks into the sporting spaces that athletic Indo-Fijian women invade (un)consciously whilst exercising their basic human rights to sports and physical activities.

### **6.5.2 Athletic Indo-Fijian Women as Space Invaders**

Mere:

I still remember the time when this skinny Indian girl sat on the side looking at us play... Mesu almost had a

heart attack seeing an Indian girl kick like that. (**The**

**Serevi MaGiC)**

In the above excerpt it is evident that Meena experiences this lived space passively (Lefebvre, 1991) as she sits on the sidelines watching *iTaukei* youths play rugby. The excerpt further confirms that sporting spaces in Fiji are where racial, gendered and class-based politics meet, are reproduced and also 're-hegemonised', privileging the *iTaukei* bodies whilst oppressing others (Indo-Fijian women in this case) (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2020). This is akin to Fijian farmland ownership, where *iTaukeis* are landowners and Indo-Fijian farmers merely are tenants (Karan & Sharma, 2021; Kurer, 2001; Munasinghe, 2001). Indo-Fijians are seen as *vulangis* (foreigners or visitors) (Ravuvu, 1991), and the land, sports and military remain *iTaukei* spaces (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2021). Relatedly Lefebvre (1991) argues that power is expressed in the production and control of space and as a result those with less power in society are often consigned to less desirable environments. For example, Fijian sports are performed by *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians (especially women) are merely spectators (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2021) sitting on the sidelines (like Meena) and/or watching televised rugby (like Meena and her family).

Moreover, Lefebvre (1991) states that representations of space are the most dominant form of space. For example, rugby in this case holds a prominent presence in the Fijian imagination. The symbolic importance of rugby reveals the ways in which this conceived sporting space functions and how power is defined, produced and re-produced via norms of cultural/Fijian representations (hegemonic masculinity, *iTaukei* men, privileged natives, nationalistic, heterosexual and Christian) that epitomise the social space of rugby in Fiji. Therefore, when athletic Indo-Fijian women like Meena enter into this space (both a literal and imaginary place) the Fijian sporting space becomes even more complex as it shatters *iTaukei* preconceived ideas about Indo-Fijian women's lack of physicality and sporting prowess. However, it is important to recognise that lived space is both oppressive (where marginalisation is produced and enforced) and encouraging (yet also produces

important counterspaces of diversity, liberation and resistance) (Lefebvre, 1991). For example, Mere employs words such as ‘skinny,’ ‘Indian girl,’ ‘sat,’ ‘looking’ – stereotypes from which many (athletic) Indo-Fijian girls/women struggle to break out. However, Meena’s rugby prowess (kick) impresses Mesu and Meena progresses from the sidelines to the main field of play. On this occasion, Meena experiences this sporting space (rugby field) initially in an oppressing way and eventually in an empowering way. Akin to Dipika, Meena too has actually found a space to perform her sporting (rugby) agency – that is, in the neighbourhood playground and with *iTaukei* youths. This is in line with Pavlidis’ (2018) notion that sports materialise in some physical space. However, in Meena’s case the Fijian sporting space goes beyond the physical objects or material places that bodies occupy (Pavlidis, 2018) – it is a combination of the physical (sporting locations), cultural, emotional, historical (colonial experiences), political, and the imaginary (dreaming of playing like Serevi from childhood), and includes individuals’ everyday routines as well (Lefebvre, 1991). For instance, Meena getting tackled in rugby, scoring goals and tries, and Deepika stopping the puck from hitting the net are all forms of spatial practice that create social space. Both Meena and Dipika display some form of resistance to dominant cultural norms and forms of structural oppression in the sporting spaces that they invade. Ultimately via their sporting agencies, these young women are able to transform communal spaces into those in which they feel they belong and where they feel comfortable with the other bodies (*iTaukeis* and mixed-race groups) within that space (Van Ingen, 2003).

Relatedly, Indo-Fijians have dominated the spaces of education, career development and thus finance despite facing historical exclusion across Fijian society (Dakuidreketi, 2014; Otsuka, 2006; Sugden, 2021). However, in the educational and financial spaces, policies and opportunities have been designed in the interest of *iTaukeis* to neutralise Indo-Fijian dominance (Naidu, 2008). The same pathways are not paved for Indo-Fijians in the sporting spaces, where they remain unaccepted, and the way in which physical education is delivered disadvantages Indo-Fijians who end up de-

prioritising sport (Sugden, 2021). This is in line with CRT's tenet that racism is a normal feature of society and is embedded within systems and institutions – from policies of land ownership, to legal and educational systems that replicate racial inequality (Magdaleno & Bell, 2021). Thus, fuelled by a sense of insecurity about their socio-political vulnerability (Fraenkel, Firth, & Lal, 2009), and the fact that sporting platforms in Fiji are racially inequitable and gender discriminatory, Indo-Fijian parents (like Meena's mother) encourage their children to perform well academically, have well paid skilled jobs and/or immigrate to a developed country (Balram, 2019; Narsey, 2002).

Moreover, the everyday and sporting space(s) occupied by Indo-Fijian women are sites of gender, racial and class-based challenge and struggle (Kanemasu, 2018) – however, Meena and Dipika playing in mixed racial teams reveal that Fijian sporting spaces (despite the segregation of natives and Indo-Fijians during colonial times) have potential for social justice to materialise where young Indo-Fijian women can experience transformation and freely exercise their sporting agency (Pavlidis, 2018). Puwar (2004) employs the concept of space invaders in her case studies explaining the dominance of privileged White men in different British institutional spaces and suggests that the entry of minority groups in such spaces, makes them space invaders. Similarly, white men have/had dominated sports spaces in the world and when women and/or ethnic/racial minority groups start entering this space they are perceived as imposters (Brown, 2015; Wheaton, 2017) or sporting space invaders (Puwar, 2004). Relatedly, Pavlidis' (2018) speaks of (geographical and physical) spatiality in sports, relating it to gender-based discrimination. Van Ingen (2003) furthers this notion impressing that spatial inquiry does not merely focus on 'place' but is a correlation concerning identity and the spaces through which identity is fashioned and conveyed. The latter perception is particularly helpful in understanding how relations of gender, class/caste, religion, ethnicity, sexuality and race are produced, negotiated and contested in social spaces where which athletic Indo-Fijian women invade/occupy.



Therefore, I have borrowed Puwar's concept, and here I call Meena and Dipika space invaders; by participating in national level of sports (Dipika) and playing a highly physical sport (Meena), both these young women enter and shake racialised, class based, religious based and gendered spaces they have been previously excluded from; therefore these women fashion disorder in the Fijian status quo (Puwar, 2004). Furthermore, it is important to note here that the concept of sporting space that Meena and Dipika invade and occupy is neither homogenous and nor straightforward (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Dipika plays hockey with *iTaukei* and other mixed raced young women and Meena plays rugby with young *iTaukei* men and women – therefore Meena and Dipika's experiences (despite both being Indo-Fijian women and invading Fijian sporting spaces) are not homogenous. However, in invading their respective spaces, both young women have had to surpass some form of approval – for example, Dipika progressed to the national team as she is selected by national selectors, also during the tournament she is allowed to play in all the matches and full time too by Coach Mike. Relatedly, Meena is given the green light by Mesu to join the team. Therefore, despite Dipika's hockey pitch (and hockey experiences) being different from Meena's rugby field (and rugby experiences) and the two spaces unable to be compared in a straight and limited way (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992), both these women invade their respective sporting spaces based on their sporting physicality and prowess which, even if infused by race, gender, class and religion, can also go beyond them. The narratives of these two space invaders provides an insight into young Indo-Fijian women's modes of resistance to dominant cultural norms and forms of structural oppression. Therefore, it is important for me to entwine and expand Lefebvre's (1991), Pavlidis' (2018) and Van Ingen's (2003) notions of 'spatiality' and include discussions on race, class and other intersectionalities such as religiosity which interplay, illuminating the local and more nuanced insights of the unique and complex sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women in Fijian sports spaces.

Moreover, Puwar (2004) notes that sporting spaces have been perceived mostly as a domain for white men, and when men of colour and women step into these spaces they are perceived as invaders. Puwar furthers this notion and speaks of the concept of somatic norm in sporting spaces where whiteness is the default. Puwar's (2004) concept is not directly applicable in the Fijian sporting spaces as Puwar's (2004) subjects are – white men vs. men of colour and white men vs. women. However, Puwar's (2004) notion can be applied to the Fijian dominant sports discourse (spaces) where being *iTaukei* and male is the norm, but also *iTaukei* women dominate the women's sporting categories (Kanemasu, 2018; Teawai, 2005). Therefore, in Fiji's case the invasion and dominance of sporting spaces is a battle of brown vs. brown – that is, *iTaukei* men vs. all other men and women, and *iTaukei* women vs. Indo-Fijian women. The aforementioned clearly shows that being an Indo-Fijian man and playing soccer or an *iTaukei* women and playing netball and/or rugby – one still must deal with their share of negotiation with gender, race and sexuality (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017). However, as for Indo-Fijian women, they fall way below in the hierarchy of Fijian gender and physicality, thus are near invisible in sporting spaces. Tomasi reconfirms this:

I always thought that Indian girls only like make-up and fancy dress and they are very thin - Meena is thin but has a strong body and mind - not afraid. (**The Serevi MaGiC**)

Tomasi's and Van Ingen's (2003) views are aligned; representations of conceived space are the kinds of social spaces that we engage in through our thoughts, ideas, plans, codes and memories. Relatedly Tomasi reveals his stereotypes about Indo-Fijian girls – on the same note he appreciates Meena's sporting physicality and prowess. The epitome of a strong Indo-Fijian woman rugby player becomes problematic as it challenges the national (cultural) image of the *iTaukei* male rugby player who has long been (and still is) the ONLY cultural epitome of a warrior interlaced over time as

essence of muscular Christianity (Sugden, 2017). Here, clearly rugby is a representation of a (sporting) space that is the most dominant Fijian form of (sporting) space which goes beyond the physical, geographical, gendered (Pavlidis, 2018), racial, sexual (heteronormative) (Van Ingen, 2003), material places that bodies occupy, individuals' everyday routines (Lefebvre, 1991), and ALSO includes the spiritual combined with the religious (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2017; Teawai, 2005). Therefore, not only has Meena invaded a space (Puwar, 2004) that is physical (Pavlidis, 2018) and hegemonic in terms of gender (men), class (from the line of indentured labourers) and race (*iTaukei*) but religion (Christianity) and spirituality as well – like Dipika, Meena is the only Hindu amongst the Christians in the *iTaukei*-dominated rugby teams. The concept of space in the Fijian context is beyond the geographical (and physical) (Lefebvre, 1991; Pavlidis, 2018; Van Ingen, 2003), and beyond the literal and imaginary (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992) – in Meena and Dipika's case, it also accommodates the mindsets of the (Fijian) society, the unwritten gendered and racialised rules, preconceived ideas and gendered and racial based stereotypes. Both these young women are seen to mimic at least some aspect of the somatic norm in the Fijian sporting space (such as using the *iTaukei* language), thus offering alternative readings about themselves in relation to the occupied space (Puwar, 2004). Both women do not tick any of the ideal boxes, which typically qualify one to play (mixed racial) team sports in Fiji – therefore it is evident that these young women invade several tiers (gender, class, race and religion) of Fijian sporting spaces.

MEENA (lightly) :

Oh! I miss Mesu - well I am grateful to him as he was the one who invited me to play... if not you guys would never do it and I would be sitting there and watching all my life. **(The Serevi MaGiC)**

The above excerpt shows that Meena shatters racial stereotypes through her ‘effortful’ dropkick, which results in Mesu’s invitation for her to play rugby – therefore avoiding sitting on the sideline ‘all her life’. Here it can be seen that the sporting space is divided into two – the actual rugby field where the *iTaukei* male and female Christian privileged bodies are playing, and the sideline, which clearly is *a space of exclusion* – a space that is denoted by those who are considered least physical – Indo-Fijian Hindu women (Meena). This is in line with Lefebvre’s (1991) notion that power is expressed in the production and control of space and as a result those with less power in society (sporting spaces) are usually related to insignificant spaces – like the sidelines in Meena’s case. Therefore, the centre of the rugby field is dominated by *iTaukeis* who are the performers and Indo-Fijians (women) are assumed and expected to be spectators either in front of the television (TV), at the stadiums or the sidelines – affirming Pavlidis’ (2018) notion that sports happens in numerous physical spaces. In Meena’s case, from childhood, rugby has been a spectacle on TV or from the sidelines – spaces that her Indo-Fijian Hindu female body is stereotyped to occupy.

Therefore, Meena’s rugby agency reflects that gender, class and race (and racism) are fluid and socially/culturally constructed (Butler, 1990; Stefancic & Delgado, 2010). Thus, neither are masculinity and physicality limited to a gender (men) nor a race (*iTaukeis*), nor a religion (Christianity) or a particular (social/economic) class. Meena’s resilient lower class (socio-economically) Indo-Fijian female Hindu body that she performs her rugby agency with is as capable as the male *iTaukei* and female *iTaukei* privileged Christian bodies. Based upon Meena’s physicality, prowess and a strong mind, she is ultimately accepted by the *iTaukei* rugby performers to enter a very delimited, racialised and gendered space. Meena indeed is a space invader and moves through the hurdles of this gendered and racialised sporting field. Meena plays rugby secretly, defying Indo-Fijian (and Fijian) unwritten gendered (and racial) rules to enter this space. Moreover, whilst playing rugby she is not in adversity with other *iTaukei* players – they are friends even if they play on opposite teams. And by performing acts such as getting her Indo-Fijian female Hindu body

up after a hard tackle and also by crossing the try line (space exclusive to *iTaukei*, male, Christian, heterosexual, abled and privileged bodies), Meena really is re-writing Fijian gendered and racial rules in the sporting spaces – she is INVADING the dominant Fijian sporting space and disturbing the social order. Meena proves that sporting physicality and prowess is not limited to a gender or natural to a race nor is it limited to a class or religion – she is a good Indo-Fijian woman Hindu rugby player who comes from an economically deprived background. In hindsight, Meena via her sporting agency (like Dipika playing hockey, Sania playing soccer in school and Ariel playing volleyball) has been able to create, negotiate and maintain ‘safe’ spaces for social and competitive sports and leisure offering her (and the other girls) secure and appropriate platforms to develop her (their) own identities and also networks of belonging and friendship (Green & Singleton, 2016).

However, in both Meena and Dipika’s cases in the initial phase, there is some form of resistance from the dominant group(s) (even if subtly) towards the invaders (Meena and Dipika). Whilst invading these spaces, it is evident that both girls have had to constantly reposition themselves within these spaces through embodied rituals (Puwar, 2004). For example, Dipika speaks the *iTaukei* language and has similar etiquette as Titilia – she uses her tee shirt to wipe off the sweat from her forehead. On this occasion Dipika has to struggle more in order to establish her spatial positioning (Van Ingen, 2003) – she has to learn the *iTaukei* language whereas the *iTaukei* women continue to speak in their mother tongue – revealing that they have more support, confidence and power than Indo-Fijian women whilst entering the Fijian hockey space. As for Meena, she too has adapted to her teammates’ language (and they have reciprocated this) and has become more tolerant and understanding towards the language and cultural dynamics of *iTaukeis* towards her kindred in Fiji. For example, when Meena is referred to as ‘thin’ and ‘strong’ by her *iTaukei* teammates, she does not perceive this oxymoron as derogatory, and it does not affect her play – she continues to exercise and enjoy her rugby agency. Therefore in both the young women’s cases easy access and flow in sporting spaces is subject to constant negotiation and contestation and is embedded in

relations of power (Aitchison, 2003; Scraton & Watson, 1998; Skeggs, 1999). For example, when Dipika had learnt the *iTaukei* language and when Meena had satisfyingly kicked the ball, sustained tackles and scored tries – they were better accepted in *iTaukei* and mixed racial/gender groups. The aforementioned examples also reveal that whilst sport has been appropriated by *iTaukei* men in Fiji as a key tool to construct race, social and gender hegemony, the same sport space opens potential for tolerance, cultural plurality and understanding which athletic Indo-Fijian women like Meena and Dipika (subtly) promote via their tolerance and adaptation in mixed racial teams.

Moreover, despite not playing rugby at club or national level, Meena's participation and passion for the sport separates her from the (sporting) labels placed on her and her kindred, as she subtly invades the *iTaukei* (male) Christian sporting space. The other three (*iTaukei*) girls (Mere, Litia and Ema) who play with Meena also invade this *iTaukei* male space and can be classified as 'light' invaders as they do not cause (much) social trouble – they are mostly (only) navigating Fijian gendered hurdles. Unlike Meena, these young *iTaukei* women are supported by the *iTaukei* young men in the group, secondly, they are not hiding their playing from their parents, and finally having other *iTaukei* women in the team adds to these women's solidarity, empowerment and support. As for Meena, she is a 'super' invader – there is no other Indo-Fijian playing rugby with her and she has to hide her rugby agency from her mother. Meena's agency is in contrast to South Asian women who in defining safe and risky community leisure spaces impress the need for inclusion of parental acceptance, and women-only space where discrimination can be evaded and religion and cultural identities can be fully expressed (Green & Singleton's 2016). Meena's rugby agency triply challenges social rules as when it comes to females and sports in Fiji, the sporting platform is highly dominated by *iTaukei* females who are Christians (Sugden, 2017; Sugden, 2020; Tomlinson, 2015). Furthermore, political conflicts between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians are mostly based on religiosity (Christians vs. Hindus and Muslims) where *iTaukeis* have stereotypical perceptions of Indo-Fijians lacking physicality and the moral quality to play rugby – making rugby in Fiji an exclusive *iTaukei*

domain (Schieder, 2008). Rugby is a part of Fiji's colonial heritage and was exclusively linked to the British who were perceived as the divine leaders of the chiefs and Christianity – both of which *iTaukeis* embraced pre-colonial takeover (Schieder, 2008). In Fiji, akin to rugby, the military and Fijian politics, Christianity has also been indigenised and today is called/perceived as Fijian Christianity (Hashimoto, 2002); *iTaukeis* have the same passion for rugby and Christianity, which makes up their holistic Fijian identity – one which Indo-Fijians are perceived to lack (Kanemasu, 2018; Presterudstuen, 2010).

Moreover, in the early twentieth century rugby was an important part of elite school curriculums in Fiji, for example in schools such as Queen Victoria School, which embodied the concept of muscular Christianity (Schieder, 2008). Also, teaching about rugby and Christianity aimed at securing 'the ideological continuity of the Fijian administration under the concept of indirect rule' (Presterudstuen, 2010, p. 245). Therefore, it was during the early years of British colonial rule that the explicit link between being 'true Fijian', militarism, Christianity and rugby was concreted (Schieder, 2008). In contemporary times, the relationship and importance of Christianity and rugby remains powerful – this is evident via the common practice of Christian prayers by *iTaukei* (Fijian) players before and after games; moreover, some players also display Bible verses on their extended bodies.

In contrast, soccer is perceived as inferior to rugby and seen as an Indo-Fijian sport that does not fit the dominant Fijian sports discourse (Sugden, 2020). Therefore, in this context, Meena playing soccer with Indo-Fijian classmates (boys) may not appear as space invasion to *iTaukeis*, but will appear as such to Indo-Fijians who perceive soccer as a physical sport, thus a masculine space (Sugden, 2021). Therefore, the aforementioned reveals that the concept of 'space invasion' (Puwar, 2004) in the Fijian sporting context is culturally determined by the gender continuum, but also by ethnicity, religiosity and social class. It's a plural concept that can apply to different circumstances, but all marked by a range of intersectionalities, as in the case of Meena and her different sporting

pursuits.

Litia: (jokingly) .

That's why Indian boys are scared to play soccer with her

**(The Serevi MaGiC)**

Relatedly, Litia's comment on Indo-Fijian boys being scared to play (soccer) with Meena shows that she perceives Meena as stronger than the Indo-Fijian boys that she plays with – this is another space that Meena invades, a sport that is denoted to Indo-Fijian men but also played by *iTaukei* men at club and national level (Sugden, 2021). Litia's perception of an Indo-Fijian girl being stronger than her male counterparts in the soccer space challenges the hierarchy of Fijian masculinities (Kanemasu, 2018; Teawai, 2005). Meena's participation in soccer not only invades spaces of gender (with Indo-Fijian boys) but also of race – as the Fijian women's national and club level soccer teams are dominated by *iTaukei* women (Sugden, 2020). On this occasion Meena yet again appears as a 'heavy' space invader where she hurdles at least two tiers of racial and gendered hurdles to feature in the Fijian soccer space – there are no other (Indo-Fijian) females playing with her and she also hides her soccer agency from her mother.

Furthermore, Meena playing netball in school can be easily constituted as her sharing this space with other Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* girls, like shared space in soccer for Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* men at elite level (Sugden, 2020). However, despite Meena's school being highly populated with Indo-Fijians, about 70% of the netball teams are comprised of *iTaukeis*. Therefore, Meena being selected to play for the school team alongside two other Indo-Fijian girls reflects that the three girls (out of the 10 players selected) have entered and somewhat invaded (Puwar, 2004) a competitive sporting space – one which is mostly represented by *iTaukei* girls – Meena here can be seen at least as a 'light' space invader. Clark's (2012) study suggests that team selection expectations, and



consistent athletic performance outputs and prowess, are influenced by girls' sporting identities and participation both in and out of school. This is evident in Meena's case – participating in traditionally male denoted sports (rugby and soccer) and playing consistently have shaped her fitness and therefore influenced her performance and led to her selection in the school's under 19 netball team.

Fijian sporting spaces for athletic Indo-Fijian women involve the different locations (fields and courts) they play on, intersecting with systems that govern their play (school, club, national team), the people they play and mingle with and the support of family and friends. Moreover, space intersects with gender, race, religion and social class and other social/cultural factors, giving more nuanced understandings of the relationship between sport spaces and marginalised (Indo-Fijian) women. The two highly athletic Indo-Fijian women (Dipika and Meena) invade spaces (Puwar, 2004) that were not originally meant for them, as they enter different sporting zones and disrupt gender orders, racial stereotypes, religious privileges, cultural norms and societal and racial power hierarchies. However, in invading sporting spaces in Fiji athletic Indo-Fijian women embrace some form of compromise – such as learning the language, and behaviour of the dominant group (*iTaukeis*) – to be accepted. Therefore, this 'invasion' can be perceived more as a 'crack' in the race/gender/religious/class wall of Fijian sports, rather than the entire wall being demolished. Nonetheless, despite these compromises, athletic Indo-Fijian women find spaces for sporting agency, self-reflection and regain some power in their own representation and narratives.

The next section looks into what motivates athletic Indo-Fijian women towards sports, and the positive benefits that sports have in the lives of these women.

### **6.5.3 The Benefits and Pleasures of Doing Sports: Indo-Fijian Women's Positive Experiences in Invading Fijian Sport Spaces**

#### **6.5.3.1 Motivations towards Sports Participation**

‘When she was in Year 3 the sight of senior girls playing netball really excited her, and she approached the teachers to join, but was told that she was too young. Despite being turned down, she went out of her way to make friends with the senior girls, and started playing netball from Year 3.’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

The above excerpt reveals that Dipika had been passionate about sports from Year 3 and had even approached senior girls in school to join their netball team. The physical/sporting activities that individuals do in the early years have the greatest impact on the achievement of expertise later in life (Hallal, Victora, Azevedo, & Wells, 2006). Relatedly, Dipika played sports from a very young age and continues to play (at club and national level). Despite her work, family and other commitments, she is able to find the time and motivation for sports and physical activity.

Similarly, when she was only six years old Meena declared that ‘when she grows up, she will play like *Serevi*’. Relatedly, Sania and Ariel are introduced to badminton in childhood and they continue to play in their teens – the sisters also play other sports during PE. All four of the girls are exposed to sports in some way in childhood, even if it is via the television (in Meena’s case). Generally, sporting activities for Indo-Fijian girls are doubly problematic – first they are perceived (by Indo-Fijians) to violate Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009; Kanemasu, 2018), but in the case of these four athletic Indo-Fijian girls, their nuclear families support them playing netball, hockey and badminton – as these are not considered as masculine/physical sports (Dorovoloma, 2010; Sugden, 2021). Secondly, societal perception and stereotyping (both by *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians) of sport as a normatively indigenous space translates to actual policy dictating government-funded outreach programs (Sugden et al., 2020). Premised on the aforementioned racism and racist policies, initiatives to make pathways for rugby teams in school for interested Indo-Fijian girls (like Meena and Ariel) and introducing (minor) racquet sports like badminton for Indo-Fijian girls who

are very familiar with the sport from childhood (like Sania and Ariel), are overlooked (Dorovoloma, 2010).

However, these four young athletic Indo-Fijian women are intrinsically motivated to play sports – be it at grassroots level (Ariel, Sania and Meena), school team level (Meena) or at club and national level (Dipika). Dipika is very passionate about hockey, but she receives no support and encouragement from her extended family, friends and work colleagues:

‘Most of the Indo-Fijian women that Dipika encountered in her extended family, university and work perceived playing sports in a somewhat negative light – this was quite demotivating but she rose beyond these petty things and focused on the bigger picture – HOCKEY.’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

Moreover, even Dipika’s workmates are merely in awe of her hockey agency and not necessarily encouraging. In Meena’s case, rugby is her passion and apart from the team members she plays with, she receives zero encouragement and support from anywhere else. These two highly athletic women’s experiences are similar to women (*iTaukei*) rugby players who face a lack of institutional, community and family support – but get support from friends (and team mates) who play rugby, providing them with sense of togetherness (Kanemasu, Molnar & Johnson, 2018). Athletic Indo-Fijian women are not able to get such support from their own kindred, as there are very few of them playing (Kanemasu, 2018). For example, Dipika’s family lived far away and there was no one from her (Indo-Fijian) friends’ circle who came to support her during crucial matches as Dipika had no athletic Indo-Fijian (woman) friends. The only support on the field that Dipika got was from her coach, manager, Vili and fellow hockey team members. Similarly, Meena’s rugby teammates are quite encouraging and motivate her to keep playing. Sania is also supported by her *iTaukei* teammate (Rosi):

‘Rosi the top scorer and I became friends when I scored

The boys' teasing I could ignore.' (*Big Sister – small sister*)

Sania and Rosi (the top goal scorer) becoming friends helped Sania to focus on soccer, and she was also able to ignore the catcalling from boys who watched her play. A study carried out by Coleman, Cox and Roker (2008) in the United Kingdom with 75 young women aged 15 to 19 explored the leading influences upon levels of physical activity participation – it revealed the friendship group as the primary influence over all other factors considered. Relatedly, Sania and Ariel (sisters) are best friends and not only are they each other's motivators but also because of each other's presence, their sporting agency can be materialised. This is unlike Ariel's rugby dream, which she is not able to materialise due to lack of access and resources.

Nonetheless, despite the lack of friends' and community support, Dipika makes it to club and national level of hockey based on her motivation and passion. Her father and family have been supportive as well; they go to the extent of encouraging her to play the tournament on the weekend of her sister's wedding. This scenario is near impossible to imagine in Indo-Fijian families, which do not favour sports – especially for girls (Kanemasu, 2018), let alone playing on a weekend when one's sister is getting married. Dipika is ready to make sacrifices and juggle between work, family and domestic chores – even if it meant that she did her washing at midnight.

On a similar note, Sania and Ariel are motivated to play badminton – in school the girls play volleyball (Ariel) and soccer (Sania) and experience the pleasures and benefits that sports have to offer such as good physical and mental health and friendships. Badminton (their favourite and most familiar sport) is not offered in school so these moderately athletic Indo-Fijian girls continue playing badminton on the weekends on their own. The sisters also play volleyball and soccer but this is limited to the school's PE lessons as there are no school teams (for volleyball) and no girls' teams in soccer. The two girls have each other to play badminton with, unlike the many athletic Indo-Fijian girls who do not get the opportunity (or do not have access) to play in team sports and opt for solo

sports or train alone in order to exercise their sporting agency and health and fitness (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Raj, 2019).

The four participants in this chapter have different sporting trajectories, however their motivation towards sports participation is intrinsic with (at least some) support at the micro level (family and team members). However, at the macro level (schools, community, policy makers) support is lacking, thus depriving Indo-Fijian girls of equal opportunities and access to sport (Sugden et al., 2020). This consequently produces and reproduces (racial) stereotypes that shape and constrain impressions about a group's capabilities in terms of physical activity (Burden, Hodge & Harrison, 2004). In hindsight, the aforementioned racial stereotypes continue to inform (sports) policies at school, club and national levels – this affects Indo-Fijian women's human rights narrative in relation to CEDAW – as the lack of human rights in this sphere tends to create divisive and not gender-inclusive societies and communities. Moreover, this racialised sport discourse is deeply internalised by Indo-Fijian girls/women, strongly demotivates them from sports participation, and promotes their near invisibility in the sporting platforms of Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018).

The next segment discusses how sports can be employed as a means not only for individual physical and mental well-being, but also as an inclusive community tool to narrow the racialised gap (and racism) between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians.

### **6.5.3.2 Sports as a Tool for Physical & Mental Health & Fitness and Building Racial Gaps**

'From childhood our racquets – the roots of our family tree

She is Big and warm – a year older and twice my size

Playing badminton has given us both – super strong thighs.' (*Big Sister – small sister*)

In trying to understand the lack of sports (physical activity) participation of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, Sugden et al. (2020) emphasise that for some cultural groups it is not necessary that sportive activities, such as western-invented competitive sport or tangential forms of human movement (like cycling or gym sessions) be of interest. In the case of Indo-Fijian women such as Sania and Ariel, badminton was introduced in childhood; it is described as ‘the roots’ of their ‘family tree’.

Badminton is a sport of familiarity and one which roots back to the girls’ Indian ancestry, as ball badminton is an indigenous fast paced game of India which demands skill, quick reflexes, good judgement, agility, and the ability to control the ball with one’s wrist (Gulia & Dhauta, 2019).

Badminton in Fiji is not an *iTaukei* sport and the national squad mostly comprises Chinese and mixed-race people, with few Indo-Fijians (Ahmed Ali and Chloe Kumar) ([www.fijitimes.com](http://www.fijitimes.com)).

Furthermore, the success of Indian women (badminton players) like Saina Nehwal (world number one in 2015) and P.V. Sindhu (current world number seven) not only serve as great inspiration for Indian background women, but also reveals that badminton is a sport that is widely played by Indian women in the homeland and the diaspora.

Playing badminton consistently from childhood has resulted in Sania and Ariel strengthening their bond and becoming strong – Sania can ‘run fast’ and Ariel can ‘hit hard’. These skills are translated into the other sports that the girls play in school – Sania plays soccer and is able to ‘run fast’ and score goals and Ariel plays volleyball and ‘smashes the net even when it’s windy’.

Childhood and adolescent sports participation is a significant predictor of young adults’ participation in sports and physical fitness activities (Perkins, Jacobs, Barber & Eccles, 2004).

‘When exams are near we study like no one’s business

Our beloved racquets relax in a corner making friends with dust

By the time school breaks we get very stressed

Embracing the powerful sound of the flying shuttlecock we NEVER get depressed.’

*(Big Sister – small sister)*

Studies have shown the benefits and effectiveness of physical activities and sports during all stages of life in managing and avoiding non-communicable diseases and mitigating mental health issues (Bailey, Cope & Parnell, 2015; Richards & Foster, 2013; Schwartz, Guwatudde, Nugent & Kiiza, 2014). For Sania and Ariel, playing badminton is not merely about physical fitness and bonding – it is also about their mental health. For example, during exams the girls give their racquets a rest, as they need to focus on the exams, however, as soon as exams are over, the girls play badminton to relieve their stress. Although there are generalisations that Indo-Fijians are merely good academically, are business minded and lack interest and performance in physical leisure (sporting) activities (Balram, 2019; Domolovo, 2005; Kanemasu, 2018; Narsey, 2002; Sugden, 2020), some (athletic) Indo-Fijian women are able to excel in both (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Raj, 2019). For example, Sania and Ariel are able to balance their time and effort with studies and badminton, and Dipika successfully works as a network engineer and plays hockey at club and national levels.

‘She was not shy or reluctant to illuminate her hockey trajectory – her Facebook and Instagram pages were colourfully bedecked with pictures and articles of herself and team members playing hockey and attending sports events; she enjoyed the numerous likes and positive comments her social media posts received.’ *(The Girl with the Valiant Gada)*

Furthermore, beyond the approach of sports being a positive influence for the holistic and healthy development of individuals, sports have been used to create safe spaces and build social assets for young women in developing countries (Brady, 2005; Mitra, 2009) and also young women with an immigrant background (Walseth, 2008). Relatedly, not only is hockey a platform for Dipika

to keep healthy and fit, but it also provides her with an avenue to socialise with other races and genders and make friendships, learn the *iTaukei* language and become a (Indo-Fijian) role model and advocate for sports, and health and fitness in her own community. Playing hockey also strengthens the special bond that Dipika and her father share:

‘Mr. Prakash didn’t have any boys and sometimes wondered if his athleticism would ever be passed on to the next generation – his expression and smile said it all – he was so proud of Dipika’s achievement and there were no words to fully express it.’ (*The Girl with the Valiant Gada*)

Dipika continues her father’s sporting legacy (and even goes beyond) by playing hockey at club and (inter) national level. In hindsight this platform boosts her self confidence and betters her performance on the field and at work, and she gains more respect and appreciation from her family and hockey team – her ‘heart swells with pride and a warm smile lights up her face’ when her coach compliments her on her play. Similarly, Meena who is otherwise a quiet and shy girl, is very expressive on the rugby pitch.

Meena feels a sense of content which glows on her face - she straightens her body and looks up to the skies as if looking for something or someone - (CLOSE UP of face) the sun’s rays hit Meena’s face showing her brown eyes and the deep emotions that they harbour. Tim joins the group and pats Meena’s head. They all walk together in excitement... (**The Serevi MaGiC**)

Having lost her father, Meena tries to mimic his favourite player (Waisale Serevi) and does so brilliantly. For Meena, rugby is not merely a physical performance but a platform of emotional outlet as well. Coleman, Cox and Roker’s (2008) study shows that girls who always participate in sports, in comparison to those who never participate, report more positive images of ‘sport’, better



self-esteem, low self-consciousness, personal motivations and choice to participate in sports and the support of friends and family. Meena's rugby agency has given her some good friends (*iTaukei* girls and boys) who encourage and motivate her. Similarly, Dipika's hockey agency gave her an avenue to make friends with *iTaukei* and mixed-race girls and boys – she goes a step further and confidently asks Vili on a date.

Relatedly, Walseth (2008) notes that sports clubs are well-suited arenas for bridging social capital among (women) immigrants from various ethnic minority backgrounds. Moreover, sports have also been used as a tool for development, national identity and nation building by nations such as Kyrgyzstan (Kim & Molchanova, 2018), Sri Lanka (Schulenkorf, 2010) and other developing nations (Dimeo & Kay, 2004). However, despite not being associated with any sports club Ariel and Sania have a great bond (friendship) with each other; the girls' parents also sometimes join to play badminton, and this strengthens the relationships within the family. Sania performing well (scoring a goal) in soccer connects her with Rosi (*iTaukei* girl) and the girls become friends as they are passionate about soccer and have some sort of admiration for each other's soccer prowess. Moreover, despite some elements of Fijian sports maintaining unequal power relations, between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2021), sport serves as an influential cultural commodity in Fiji where rugby sevens fandom and soccer participation serve as a pivotal point of unity (Sugden, 2017).

As for Dipika and Meena – the girls found safe spaces to play within mixed racial groups – the girls learnt the *iTaukei* language and this helped bridge the racial gap to some extent on the playing field between them and their *iTaukei* (and mixed-race) team members. Furthermore, Dipika's romantic interest in an *iTaukei* hockey player (who reciprocates the feelings) is an indication of racial assimilation. In Fiji the idea of Indo-Fijians and *iTaukei* intermarriage/romantic relationships is rare, and an Indo-Fijian female and *iTaukei* male even rarer – only two cases were recorded during the indenture period of Indian males marrying *iTaukei* women (Mamak, 1978; Ali,

1979; Richmond, 2009). The structural legacy of colonialism and separation along lines of cultural and religious differences has had a huge impact on the meaningful interaction between the two races, thus the phenomenon of *iTaukei*-Indo-Fijian intermarriage has been discouraged (Richmond, 2009). Richmond (2009) notes that sites of education, modernisation and urbanisation have provided some opportunities for social interaction between the *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians and possibilities for intermarriage have increased. For Dipika (and Vili), their hockey agency and the hockey space provided an avenue for them to socialise and develop friendship. Thus, it is evident that athletic Indo-Fijian girls as ‘sporting space invaders’ is a social concept and their collective agencies of invading Fijian sporting spaces are a social conquest. Therefore, this dissertation by giving a voice to these space invaders’ sporting quests, also pushes for the CEDAW to be achieved on sporting fields in Fiji, for everyone – including the Indo-Fijian girls/women. Therefore, policy makers at school, club and national level sports need to fulfil the tenets of CEDAW which would enable the opening of more sporting spaces for Indo-Fijian girls/women – this would also expand their educational and social opportunities.

Moreover, akin to racial assumptions that sporting prowess and physicality are alien to Indo-Fijian women – assumptions that Indo-Fijian girls and *iTaukei* boys cannot have friendships, relationships and marriage (Mamak, 1978) are proven wrong by Dipika and Vili’s case. Thus, these silenced voices (and experiences) need to be illuminated as the ‘counter-storytelling’ tenet of CRT accentuates the recognition of the experiences and voices of the ‘others’ (in this case Dipika and Vili) as legitimate, appropriate, and critical in eradicating racism (or at least narrowing the racial gaps) in Fiji (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). It is also important to note that my (hybrid) positionality in this research – that is, being an Indo-Fijian woman who has occupied similar spaces, having a passion for sports and physical activities like these athletic women, and also my Australian academic achievements (which Indo-Fijians value) – had created a great rapport and safe space where the young women fluidly shared experiences that they might not have with a total outsider. For example,

for Dipika to reveal her romantic relationship with an *iTaukei* boy, and for Meena to reveal and invite me to watch her rugby agency (which she hid from her mother), were not only special to witness (or listen to) but also revealed that in order to tap into deeply veiled nuanced hurdles that influence (marginalised groups) Indo-Fijian women's athletic quests, the perspective of no white voices or western interference is necessary.

## 6.6 Key Findings of the Chapter

In this section, I summarise the key findings and critical analysis of this chapter. The findings reveal that:

- Athletic Indo-Fijian women subvert traditional gender orders, racial and social structures and stereotypes differently (and sometimes in similar ways) whilst navigating and invading *iTaukei* (sporting) spaces in Fiji. However, their invasion in to *iTaukei* sporting spaces can be perceived more as a 'crack' in the race/gender/religious/class wall of Fijian sports, rather than the entire wall being demolished.
- In order to fit in to *iTaukei*-dominated team sports, athletic Indo-Fijian women practice some form of compromise – such as learning the language and behaviour of the dominant group (*iTaukeis*) in order to be accepted and be seen as 'one of them'. In making the aforementioned compromises, athletic Indo-Fijian women are able to find a space for their sporting agencies, self-reflection and regain some power in their own representation and narratives.
- The young women's narratives reflect that their sporting agencies fall on different levels of the 'subversive continuum'. For example, being the only Indo-Fijian young woman playing good rugby in a mixed racial group and being the lone Indo-Fijian woman playing hockey at club and national levels fall on the top of this continuum whilst playing netball in the school mixed racial team can be placed somewhat in the middle and playing badminton at home for leisure right at the bottom.

- Athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women are intrinsically motivated to play sports, thus despite external inhibiting factors, they still continue some form of sporting activity.
- Athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women experience (some form of) benefits and pleasures of doing sports/physical activities – they have a positive image of sports, better self-esteem and low self-consciousness (when they play). Sports involvement of Indo-Fijian women not only creates platforms for friendships with *iTaukeis*, but also emboldens these young women to challenge barriers of race, gender, and religion circumscribing friendships and dating *iTaukeis*.
- There is support for young athletic Indo-Fijian women by the family especially if they play feminine sports and/or play in a girls' team, however those young women who choose to play sports associated with *iTaukeis* and masculinity do not get family support.
- The lack of support for athletic Indo-Fijian women's sporting pursuits at the macro level (policy and institutional) leads to lack of sporting access, resources and opportunities for Indo-Fijian women.
- Young athletic Indo-Fijian women as 'sporting space invaders' is a social concept and their collective agencies of invading Fijian sporting spaces are a social conquest. Therefore, this dissertation, by giving voice to these space invaders' sporting quests, also pushes for the CEDAW to be achieved on sporting fields in Fiji, for everyone – including the Indo-Fijian girls/women.
- Whilst sport has been appropriated by *iTaukei* men in Fiji as a key tool to construct race, social and gender hegemony, it can also be a space for tolerance, cultural plurality and understanding promoted by the space invaders.

# **Chapter 7 Intersectional Implications: A Holistic Approach to Indo-Fijian Women's Challenges and Paradoxes in the Fijian Sports Arena**

## **7.1 Introduction**

Before embarking on this research journey, I had a great interest in minority and marginalised groups of people in sporting platforms in the Global South. Also, being athletic and having interest in middle distance running, weightlifting, martial arts, badminton and tennis, I could not find other athletic Indo-Fijian girls (including my sisters and cousins) to share my athletic pursuit with. Thus, the overarching questions that shaped this research, that is – ‘How do Indo-Fijian women perceive physicality and why are they near invisible in Fiji’s sporting scenes?’ – occupied my mind long before starting my doctoral journey. In order to respond to the (research) questions that I had in my mind, it was apt for me to carry out ethnographic research with young Indo-Fijian women who were at different stages of their lives, so I could employ an intersectional lens and unveil all possible nuances of their sporting trajectories.

Moreover, being born in Fiji, and having lived there up till the age of 29, and also previously being a high school English teacher in a Fijian school, I had a good understanding about Indo-Fijian girls’ culture of embracing art and also being fond of the songs and plots of Bollywood films. Thus, I choose an arts-based method for a holistic (and culturally appropriate) approach to unveil all possible nuances of the challenges and paradoxes that Indo-Fijian women face in the Fijian sports arena.

I have used in-depth semi-structured interviews via photo elicitation, poetry workshops, participant written poems, and field observations to help capture the multiplicity of the voices of young Indo-Fijian women and illuminate the intersectionalities (Collins & Bilge, 2020) involved in these women’s sporting trajectories. Using intersectionality as a multifaceted lens was necessary to

understand the several sociocultural and economic factors that interact in the everyday sporting agency of the young Indo-Fijian women of this research, as they each have a unique story/experience, and do not represent problematic portrayals of Indo-Fijian women as a homogenous group (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Therefore, this chapter provides a holistic discussion about the findings of my dissertation through my Global South voice, unveiling the gendered, racial and class-based (athletic) obstacles that young Indo-Fijian women encounter, which marginalise them on the sporting platforms in Fiji. It also ponders the human rights issues and violations that such rigid gendered and racialised orders produce in Fiji.

I have organised the discussion that follows, by amalgamating the key findings from my discussion chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). In order to do this, I revisited Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and copied findings (noted in point form at the end of each of these chapters) on to a separate MS Word document. I then employed thematic analysis and manually analysed the key findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006) into broad categories and then sub-categories by taking the following steps:

1. I read and re-read the findings summaries from Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and familiarised myself with them.
2. I then generated some codes for each paragraph by using different colours for different subject matters – sometimes more than one paragraph would be on the same topic, so I continued to use that same colour to keep the same subject matter together.
3. Next, I started searching for themes, and put the relevant theme for each colour in the MS Word document.
4. After this, I constructed a table in a new MS word document (refer to Table 2) and picked out the four different broad themes (Institutional barriers and responses, Resistance, Education and social class, and Compliance to hegemonic binary gender/racial status quo) that were conspicuous from my coloured coding.

5. I then re-read the categorised (colour coded) findings/sub-theme in the table under the broader themes and discussed each sub-theme in detail (Sections 7.2 to 7.5).

The aforementioned steps not only allowed me to put different findings under the same thematic umbrella, but also made it possible to holistically discuss each category and sub-category (associated within each category) that came up from this new layer (meso level) (Sherry, 2017) of coding and data analysis.

**Table 2 Themes and sub-themes arising from the thesis' findings**

Theme	Amalgamated (sub) topics of discussion
1 – Compliance to hegemonic binary gender/racial status quo – implications to sports participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Fijian physicality and hegemonic masculinity continuum</li> <li>- Orthodox perceptions of gender – a social construct</li> <li>- Patriarchy vs. Matriarchy</li> <li>- Indo-Fijian teachers – keeping the patriarchal flame burning</li> <li>- Gendered and racial stereotypes associated with Indo-Fijian women and sports attire</li> <li>- Face-off – Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity vs. tenets of athleticism</li> <li>- No room for ‘<i>vulangis</i>’ in ‘mixed’ racial school teams</li> </ul>
2 – Education and social class: boundaries for sports participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beyond patriarchy and matriarchy – the role of social (and economic) class and mother worship</li> <li>- Bridging gaps of Fijian social class via sporting agencies of athletic Indo-Fijian women</li> <li>- Poverty – the extra hurdle for athletic Indo-Fijian women</li> </ul>
3 – Institutional Barriers and Responses to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of support at institutional level by teachers</li> <li>- Institutionalised gender and racial biases resulting from <i>iTaukei</i> (PE)</li> </ul>

Women's participation in Sports	teachers' cultural heritage - Scarce avenues to access sports and physical activities - Lack of ethno-culturally inclusive PE lessons - Silent trajectories of athletic Indo-Fijian women – lack of sporting role models
4 – Resistance to intersectional barriers to sports participation	- Athletic Indo-Fijian women as space invaders – a social conquest - Athletic Indo-Fijian women – disordering the Fijian gender and physicality continuum - Embodied pleasure and pain in Indo-Fijian women's sporting agency

## 7.2 Compliance to Hegemonic Binary Gender/Racial Status Quo

### 7.2.1 The Fijian Physicality and Hegemonic Masculinity Continuum

This category of findings reveals that in the Fijian context, the intersectionality of gender and race with the type of physical activity (sports) that one performs determines an individual's physicality. Moreover, the findings disclose that one's cultural heritage is the social force that basically 'constructs' and is behind the mainstream notions of 'physicality' and hegemonic masculinity in Fiji. Therefore, both *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians contribute (in different and sometimes similar ways) in shaping the preconceived physicality ideals in the Fijian society. Consequently, in the Fijian hegemonic masculinity and physicality continuum, it is the *iTaukei* men (who play rugby) who epitomise hegemonic physicality (placed right on the top in an unshared zone) – linked to higher status quo, political and economic power. In Fiji, Indo-Fijian women's bodies are seen as unfit not merely for rugby, but also for other sports and physical activities (in general), and thus are placed right at the bottom as sedentary bodies on the Fijian gender/masculinity and physicality continuum.



Moreover, Indo-Fijian women themselves sometimes perceive *iTaukei* women as more physical than Indo-Fijian men, however, not quite TOTALLY as physical as *iTaukei* men – therefore, showing compliance to Fijian hegemonic masculinity and gender orders, and also maintaining the societal status quos. The findings also show that Indo-Fijian women, who maintain Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, perceive other athletic (Indo-Fijian) women’s bodies as abnormal and abject – incapable of embodying physicality for sports, let alone for the ‘MIGHTY’ rugby.

Thus, based on their Indo-Fijian cultural heritage, some Indo-Fijian women believe that hegemonic physicality (and masculinity) is based on race and gender, and is associated with *i-Taukei* men – a zone which is not fluid and cannot be shared with women or with Indo-Fijian men.

However, the findings in the same sub-category also reveal that, despite one’s cultural heritage and ubiquitous societal gendered and racial stereotypes, some (athletic) Fijian men and women with unorthodox perceptions (not aligned to their own cultural heritage), have fluid perceptions about physicality and masculinity – that masculinity can occupy a marginalised (Indo-Fijian) woman’s body, and also a privileged (*iTaukei*) woman’s body as much as it can occupy the typical epitomes of hegemonic masculinity (*iTaukei* men). Thus, employing an intersectional lens made visible the complexities involved in determining the perceptions of physicality that Fijians have in relation to Indo-Fijian women.

### **7.2.2 Orthodox Perceptions of Gender – A Social Construct**

The study also confirmed former evidence that many Indo-Fijian people not only hold some form of orthodox perception of gender, but also actively try to maintain and model traditional gender order thus gender normative behaviour (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016). The aforementioned (Indo-Fijian) individuals do not perceive gender as fluid and thus that masculinity

can occupy a female, Indo-Fijian body as much it can occupy an Indo-Fijian male body, an *iTaukei* female body and the *iTaukei* 'MIGHTY' male body.

Moreover, the findings disclose that the older generation (gatekeepers) instil and maintain traditional gender orders in young girls and therefore these societal unwritten rules begin to shape the way Indo-Fijian women live their own lives and judge other Indo-Fijian women around them. Relatedly, at times, even (some) athletic Indo-Fijian women who themselves play sports associated with girls (like netball), based on this cultural heritage, perceive that those sports that are played by (or associated with) boys are too dangerous for Indo-Fijian girls to play. The aforementioned young women embody ambivalence – that is, sometime they rise beyond traditional gender norms to rebel and play a female associated sport, and at other times they comply with the traditional societal gender orders and accept gendered rules impressed on to them, thus conforming to orthodox perceptions that masculinity and physicality cannot occupy an Indo-Fijian women's body and the (Indo-Fijian) woman's body is limited to her biological sex (Butler, 1990).

Thus, (un)consciously these young women play an important role in becoming custodians of maintaining traditional gender orders and re-producing the orthodox perception that (certain) sports are for men as they promote masculine tenets. Clearly here these women, akin to their cultural heritage from (grand) parents, perceive that one's gender is to be mirrored by their biological sex and vice versa, therefore a boy cannot play netball and a girl cannot play rugby – this supposedly violates not only gender, but racial/ethnic and class structures of the Indo-Fijian society. Unfortunately, those women who do not adhere to this set of unwritten societal gender rules receive derogative titles – such as tomboy or just a boy.

### **7.2.3 Patriarchy vs. Matriarchy**

In this sub-category, the findings disclose that within the Indo-Fijian community, it is not only the males of the family (patriarchs), but older females like grandmothers (matriarchs) who hold

power and authority to ensure that the status quo of the traditional (Indo-Fijian) gender ideology is maintained. In order to maintain the aforementioned status quos, patriarchs and matriarchs police the bodies and demeanour of Indo-Fijian girls and women. Policing in this case comprises segregation from boys, decently clothing the female body, not talking back to or questioning elders and also not performing inappropriate body movements like running, jumping, and playing sports. These orthodox gender norms are akin to Hindu wedding rituals, which, as previous research has pointed out, emphasise that women should be submissive and subordinate to their husbands (Lata, 2009; Shandil, 2016). Relatedly, wedding folklore goes on to remind the bride that her playful teenage years with girlfriends are over, and womanhood and management of her family and marital life must be her focus (Shandil, 2016).

The reproduction of gender is always a negotiation with power – before marriage, Indo-Fijian women’s agency and body are controlled by patriarchal (sometimes matriarchal too) structures in the home, and after marriage, the husband and in-laws take control of obligatory gender and social norms which force her to perform the agencies of a married woman (Shandil, 2016). My findings support the notion that these controls limit Indo-Fijian women’s body movements and thus sporting agency.

Additionally, the findings disclose that married Indo-Fijian women, divorcees and women with children are less likely to participate in sports or physical leisure activities due to (at times) stricter gender-based restrictions, more responsibilities, time constraints or ceasing to have interest in playing sports. Moreover, religiosity and caste, when intersected with gender and race, are shown to warrant stricter patriarchal (and matriarchal) controls on the body and agency of Indo-Fijian women. Also, the findings further revealed that those women who live with grandparents experience more policing and gender-based restrictions on their (extended) body and (sporting) agency. Thus, young Indo-Fijian women are further discouraged from sports participation and gender non-conformative acts – confirming that the family is the ground on which the heterosexual patriarchal ideal and

traditional gender constructs are produced, sustained and reproduced (Bidwai, 2013; Martin, 1998; Shandil, 2016).

#### **7.2.4 Indo-Fijian Teachers – Keeping the Patriarchal Flame Burning**

Despite the content in this sub-section being about teachers/schooling, it connects better to this category as Indo-Fijian teachers (who in this case are a generation older than the students) add to the compliance to the hegemonic binary gender/racial status quo of the Indo-Fijian community, together with the patriarchs and matriarchs discussed in the previous sub-segment. The findings further disclose that when Indo-Fijian girls step into the space of the school – their Indo-Fijian teachers continue to concrete the traditional gender orders instilled in them from home. In many cases, Indo-Fijian teachers impress on the girls to stay away from boys and on some occasions even accuse girls (who mingle with boys) of having romantic interests or relationships with the boys that they are friendly with. Thus, these Indo-Fijian teachers further concrete gender segregation in co-ed schools, which has previously been imposed on these girls by their parents or grandparents at home. Therefore, the collective efforts of these Indo-Fijian elders compel Indo-Fijian girls/women to stay within the rigid walls of traditional gender norms – where the aforementioned custodians continue to police and maintain Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity. In hindsight, not only do such restrictions limit Indo-Fijian women from having a fair go in sports and physical activities, but they also create in these women a fear of judgement by their own family and community if they practise anything other than the prescribed Indo-Fijian gender, racial/ethnic and class rules.

#### **7.2.5 Gendered and Racial Stereotypes Associated with Indo-Fijian Women and Sports**

##### **Attire**

Furthermore, the study reveals that athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women themselves are comfortable in wearing the sports attire associated with the sports they play – from netball dresses to

(ripped) shorts (for social soccer and rugby), to wearing body hugging attire for weightlifting at the gym. However, (occasionally) some parents (and elders) have objections towards their daughters' sports uniforms – finding them too revealing and having potential for unwarranted attention from strange boys (men). This finding is in contrast to Sugden et al. (2020) reporting a senior government official's (*iTaukei* woman involved with Sports Outreach) complaints that Indo-Fijian women are difficult to engage in sport because of their unwillingness to wear sporting attire. However, no background or further information is provided to validate where this resistance roots from – the parents, the girls themselves (or both), or the society?

Therefore, my stories unveil for the first time the complex gendered social realities where all these issues unfold; there are many more tiers than just 'Indo-Fijian women being difficult to engage', and it is crucial to understand these realities in order to figure out new strategies to bring Indo-Fijian women on board to a healthier and happier life through sports practices.

#### **7.2.6 Face-off – Indo-Fijian Emphasized Femininity vs. Tenets of Athleticism**

The findings in this 'Compliance to hegemonic binary gender/racial status quo' category also disclose that athletic Indo-Fijian women have to maintain two separate identities. They are compelled to manage societal expectations of conforming to traditional (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity whilst claiming Indo-Fijian female athleticism. Indo-Fijian women who participate in sports which in the Fijian context are considered for boys (such as those women who lift weights or play rugby and soccer), situate them to use standards of traditional male athleticism such as individualism, competitiveness, aggressiveness and power (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). These qualities contradict the norms of (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity, and there are occasions when some athletic women succumb to the pressures of traditional gender and femininity paradigms, despite being ambivalent in their agency most of the time. For example, my findings clearly demonstrate that, to avoid labels like 'tomboy', some athletic women compel themselves to agencies that are

against their will and make them uncomfortable – like wearing more feminine clothes, or wearing clothes that conceal the body and having a demeanour (walking and talking) which aligns with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity.

Findings in this category, further reveal that (most) athletic Indo-Fijian girls who play ‘feminine’ sports and/or play in a girls’ team receive some sort of support from (some) family members. However, as Raj (2019) has also shown to some extent, those girls who play sports associated with *iTaukeis* and/or masculinity, like rugby or soccer, and even solo sports (physical activity) like bodybuilding (a sport associated with building muscles), receive no support, but instead receive backlash from some (extended) family members and the community as well.

### **7.2.7 No Room for *Vulangis* in ‘Mixed Racial’ School Sports Teams**

In this sub-category of findings, it is evident that sometimes movement in geography adds an extra layer of challenge for (athletic) Indo-Fijian women to gain acceptance and a safe space in mixed racial teams in school. For girls who move from rural settings to schools located in urban areas (Suva), it is rather difficult to make friends with other *iTaukei* girls, and be accepted freely in mixed racial team sports. Indo-Fijians, whose ancestral background (Indian) has a long-established history of literacy and schooling, resulted in Indian children grasping the teachings of the colonisers eagerly. In contrast, the indigenous people hail from a traditional culture that depended on oral tradition, thus schooling seemed foreign and alienating (Nabobo & Teasdale, 1995). The stories from my participants and their related findings, corroborated the struggle that they had had to be accepted in the sports arena, as in Fiji, *iTaukeis* are considered natural (and most physical) in sports; thus, *iTaukei* girls’ circles in high school do not accept Indo-Fijian girls into team sports – teams which according to the country’s racial composition were supposed to be ‘mixed racial’. However, in the classroom, Indo-Fijians work in mixed racial groups (Dakuidreketi, 2014; Otsuka, 2006) in Fijian multicultural schools (both urban and city areas); working in groups in the classroom promotes the

facilitation from Indo-Fijians towards *iTaukei* groups. However, my findings evidence that the same is not reciprocated on the sporting fields; for Indo-Fijians sports discourse in Fiji is an *iTaukei* zone and there is no room for inclusion (Sugden, 2021). Indo-Fijians are still referred to as *vulangis* (Ravuvu, 1991) and not being ‘proper Fijians’ (lacking robustness, both physically and spiritually) (Presterudstuen, 2010) for playing rugby and other physical sports. Therefore, there is ‘no room’, ‘no space’ in Fijian sporting realms for Indo-Fijians (women) – they have to invade and conquer it. Such racist perceptions and practices rob Indo-Fijian women of a fair go to exercise their basic human rights to sports participation. This is a type of counter colonial movement, where *iTaukeis* try to appropriate to themselves the cultural tools (rugby, sport) of the initial colonisers/invaders, the British colonisers. Therefore, an intersectional approach in this study has effectively shared all (unique) nuances of the counter-narratives of Indo-Fijian women – notions of unique voices of colour, which have not been researched before.

### **7.3 Education and Social Class**

#### **7.3.1 Beyond Patriarchy (and Matriarchy) – The Role of Social (and Economic) Class and Mother Worship**

The findings disclose that both social and economic class (age and experience, caste, education, material wealth and employability), apart from gender (patriarchy and matriarchy) and race have potential to also (re)produce and maintain the status quo of the traditional (Indo-Fijian) gender ideology. Younger women who are educated and/or have well paid jobs or are actively involved in business, which generates money, have more authority in disciplining their daughters (and sons) together with patriarchs and matriarchs in the household. On the other hand, uneducated and unemployed women who do not financially provide for the family, and have less social agency have greater potential to remain voiceless and powerless in extended Indo-Fijian families.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that, together with the aforementioned intersectionalities, some tenets of the Hindu theory/practice of mother worship (Lata, 2009; Uma & Alladi, 1989) intersect to determine gender order performativity in Indo-Fijian Hindu households. The study confirms findings from Shandil's (2016) research, that men (brothers and fathers) must protect their (especially unmarried) daughters and sisters, as their woman's virginity in marriage is the marker of integrity of the men in the household. Thus, Indo-Fijian men are expected to display, perform, and maintain Indo-Fijian hegemonic masculinity by confronting other men to prevent any disrepute to their sisters, mothers and other females of the family.

### **7.3.2 Bridging Gaps of Fijian Social Class via Sporting Agencies of Athletic Indo-Fijian Women**

The findings unveil that in order to fit into *iTaukei*-dominated team sports, athletic Indo-Fijian women make compromises such as learning the dominant group's language and social/cultural demeanour to fit into and be accepted by the *iTaukei* women – to be seen as 'one of them'. Therefore, an athletic Indo-Fijian girl/woman can bend Indo-Fijian gender normative behaviour and mimic the demeanour of other *iTaukei* and mixed racial background girls/women, and do things like lift up their top to wipe off sweat. Sports thus becomes an arena where race/ethnicity and class can be shattered and not only can Indo-Fijian women make friends with *iTaukei* women and men, but also date *iTaukei* men and have intermarriages – thus further narrowing racial rifts between Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*. This study confirms findings of previous studies (Richmond, 2009) that Indo-Fijian women being in romantic relationships and/or marrying *iTaukei* men are rare sights. Thus, sports involvement of Indo-Fijian women not only creates platforms for friendships with *iTaukeis*, but also emboldens these young women to challenge barriers of race, gender, and religion circumscribing dating (and marriage) norms in Fiji. Consequently, the findings reveal that whilst sport has been appropriated by *iTaukei* men in Fiji as a key tool to construct race, social and gender



hegemony, it can also be a space for tolerance, cultural plurality and understanding promoted by the space invaders. These Indo-Fijian women space invaders (especially those stepping in to a no-go zone such as rugby) invade space which goes beyond the physical, geographical, gendered (Pavlidis, 2018), racial, sexual (heteronormative) (Van Ingen, 2003), material places that bodies occupy, individuals' everyday routines (Lefebvre, 1991), and also includes the immaterial worlds of spirituality (and religiosity) as well (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2017; Teawai, 2005). Therefore, race, gender, religion, phenotype and class do not deter athletic Indo-Fijian women from finding a space for their sporting agency (even in most dominant *iTaukei* male sporting spaces such as rugby) and self-reflection, and thus these women regain some power in their own representation and narratives.

### **7.3.3 Poverty – The Extra Hurdle for Athletic Indo-Fijian Women**

The findings reveal that (athletic) Indo-Fijian girls/women from impoverished families and lower social/economic classes face an added layer of challenge in their sporting pursuits. Some of these young women live in the squatter settlements in Suva, in small overcrowded dwellings with limited access to sports grounds and resources to play sports, or to train for a sport that they play. It is also evident via the findings that Indo-Fijian (grand) parents of girls from lower social/economic classes favour educational pursuits rather than sports, and push girls (and boys) to perform well academically – and discourage them (especially girls) from sporting activities. Therefore, there is emphasis on the development of the mind and not a physically strong and athletically skilled body. The stories of the participants clearly revealed that Indo-Fijian families also encourage educational accomplishments to the detriment of any physical/sporting achievement, as they feel insecure (due to racial based coups in the past in Fiji), and education is perceived as a way out of poverty (good jobs) and to a fair go (migration), as reported in previous studies (Balram, 2019; Naidu, 2008). Secondly, the findings show that together with cooking, home and family maintenance skills and adhering to patriarchy and Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity, an educated woman with a good job makes a

complete package and an ideal marriage prospect. In hindsight, with progress, education also advocates liberation where young Indo-Fijian women learn to gain/raise their voices (speak out to (grand) parents), which is against the Indo-Fijian norm.

## **7.4 Institutional Barriers and Responses**

### **7.4.1 Lack of Support at Institutional Level by Teachers**

The findings reveal that in Fijian schools, (PE/sports) teachers (regardless of their race and gender), based on their cultural heritage and socially constructed racial stereotypes of Indo-Fijian girls' lack of physicality, do not take these girls' sporting interests and agencies seriously. Thus, Indo-Fijian girls get minimal if any support from their (PE) teachers towards their sporting agencies and pursuits, and are deprived from exercising their basic human rights (in accordance with CEDAW's Article 10 (g)) on physical and leisure activity (meaningful) participation in school.

In hindsight, these racial and gendered biases at institutional levels place Indo-Fijian girls in a helpless position and influence Indo-Fijian parents (who already mostly perceive sports for girls as violation of traditional gender normative behaviour) to pull their children away from sports and push them to pursue academic excellence. Thus, the (PE) teachers, and the Fijian society continue to maintain *iTaukei* interests in sports like the colonisers exercised under colonial rule (1874–1970) (Durutalo, 1986) – resulting in Indo-Fijian women's (near) invisibility in the country's sports arena.

### **7.4.2 Institutionalised Gender and Racial Biases Resulting from *iTaukei* (PE) Teachers'**

#### **Cultural Heritage**

Moreover, based on their own cultural heritage, and also based on stereotypical perceptions that Indo-Fijian girls have 'butterfingers' and are incapable of playing sports, or that sports are dangerous for Indo-Fijian women, *iTaukei* (PE) teachers end up blocking potential sporting pathways for Indo-Fijian girls. Confirming previous research findings (Sugden et al, 2020), my research

demonstrated that both Indo-Fijian and *iTaukei* teachers (sometimes consciously and at other times unconsciously), end up discouraging Indo-Fijian girls who aspire to step out of the norm and try a new/different sport (like throw javelin, for example), or play a sport traditionally associated with men and masculinity. Thus, in such a situation, Indo-Fijian women are robbed of a fair go to experience the pleasures and positive benefits of physical activities and sports. Consequently, (some) Indo-Fijian athletic girls end up looking for access outside the school space to practise their sporting agency – free from institutionalised gender and racial based restrictions, whilst (some) other Indo-Fijian girls totally give up on sports and skew towards other physical activities which they have access to, such as dancing. Similar research findings – in a previous study by Kanemasu (2018) on athletic Indo-Fijian women – noted that those women, who did not get access and acceptance to team sports, ended up training alone.

#### **7.4.3 Scarce Avenues to Access Sports and Physical Activities**

The findings reveal that there are scarce avenues for (athletic) Indo-Fijian women to access other athletic (Indo-Fijian) women and/or to play sports. Therefore, these young women look for alternatives and/or respond in different ways to exercise their sporting agency. Most of these athletic women either opt for solo sports – such as bodybuilding as also found in a previous study by Kanemasu (2018) – or exercise at home in their backyards; but my findings also reveal that, in addition, a few play sports such as badminton with their siblings at home. Moreover, there are a few athletic Indo-Fijian women with diverse sporting passions who negotiate triple barriers of gender, race and class in order to continue with their sporting agency. The findings also reveal that some (other) athletic Indo-Fijian women who aspire to play sports but do not find access or are not able to negotiate barriers sometime totally stop playing sports and doing physical activity for health and fitness.

Furthermore, the findings also unveil that (interested) Indo-Fijian girls do not get a fair go

towards pathways for sporting careers like PE/sports teacher, as they do not have access to sports agencies in (high) school, and also there is lack of information on pathways towards a career in teaching PE. The aforementioned thus decreases, and to some extent shuts, opportunities for interested women to pursue sporting careers to enable a fair representation of the number of Indo-Fijian women PE teachers. In hindsight, this would not only encourage sports participation of Indo-Fijian girls, but also shatter (to some extent) the preconceived stereotypes that exist about Indo-Fijian women and their lack of physicality in the Fijian (sporting) context, which have also been noted in previous studies (Balram, 2019; Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020; Teawai, 2005).

#### **7.4.4 Lack of Ethno-culturally Inclusive PE Lessons**

The findings disclose, on the one hand, that athletic Indo-Fijian girls/women are intrinsically motivated to play sports and despite external inhibiting factors, they still continue some form of sporting activities to experience the positive benefits and pleasures of doing sports/physical activities. On the other hand, the PE lessons in Fijian schools are merely focused on dominant (and popular) team sports (rugby, soccer and netball) practices; the research unveiled that PE lessons are gendered and racialised, and competition is prioritised rather than promoting participation by being ethno-culturally inclusive and equitable. For example, in (high) school *iTaukei* boys are encouraged towards playing rugby; Indo-Fijian boys towards soccer and *iTaukei* girls play netball (Sugden, 2020), whereas Indo-Fijian girls are left totally outside, without any choice of physical activity or sport. Thus, come Athletic/Sports Day, the groups that participate in PE lessons throughout the year are more confident in translating their sporting prowess and fitness into track and field events. These students then do not fear much judgement and are less likely to internalise racial and gender-based stereotypes in comparison to Indo-Fijian women. Not having the opportunity in school to play the sport that some Indo-Fijian girls desire, shatters their confidence and concretises internalisations of racial (and gender) based stereotypes. This exclusion is based on previous gendered and racial

prejudices (cultural heritage) – thus several layers of exclusionary practices are interwoven here to discriminate against these girls in their school sporting lives.

Moreover, the findings unveil that PE lessons are not ethno-culturally sensitive and inclusive, and the passions, interests and sporting development of marginalised and minority groups who do not make an impact at schools' sports competition level, are neglected. Often the sports (such as badminton and soccer) that Indo-Fijian girls are familiar with from childhood are not part of the girls' PE lessons. Thus, PE teachers (and PE departments) and school management, by designing PE lessons that are not ethno-culturally sensitive and inclusive, question Fiji's ratification of the CEDAW – where Article 10 (g) clearly states that all women must be 'given the same OPPORTUNITIES to participate actively in sports and physical education'. The findings in this category further reveal that PE teachers do not think outside the box to cater for the unique/diverse needs of Indo-Fijian girls in school sports. Therefore, institutional agencies not only exclude all other potential (culturally relative) minor sports and new team sports for (Indo-Fijian) girls, but also sustain and reproduce racial and gender-based stereotypes.

#### **7.4.5 Silent Trajectories of Athletic Indo-Fijian Women – Lack of Sporting Role Models**

The study confirms Kanemasu's (2018) findings that Indo-Fijian young women have a lack of sporting archetypes whom they could relate to and follow, as there are very few athletic Indo-Fijian women and successful athletes. Adding on to this, my research reveals that Indo-Fijian girls (and all Fijians) also lack awareness of Indo-Fijian (and Indian) sporting women role models that they could relate to and the participants' stories reveal that Fijian television and newspapers place more focus on dominant Fijian sports (rugby, soccer and netball). There are a few sports such as bodybuilding, hockey, and pistol shooting where Indo-Fijian women are represented but of which the common Indo-Fijian woman is unaware. The aforementioned reveals some shades of CRT's claims that racism is systemic, and not just demonstrated by individual people with prejudices (Magdaleno

& Bell, 2021). It is evident that via the findings of this dissertation, and also based on previous research (Kanemasu, 2018), athletic Indo-Fijian women are scarce, and Indo-Fijian women are near invisible in all aspects of the Fijian sporting arena (PE teachers, sports coaches, managers and leadership roles). Additionally, as a result of Indo-Fijian sportswomen not being illuminated by institutions (and to some extent by the media), the larger population of Indo-Fijian women are unaware of the existence of these Indo-Fijian sportswomen and do not have relatable sporting archetypes. Moreover, the findings disclose that the *iTaukeis* also lack awareness of Indo-Fijian (and Indian) sportswomen. This lack of awareness on the part of *iTaukeis* further concretises their preconceived views of Indo-Fijian women as lacking physicality and leads to PE teachers blocking opportunities for those Indo-Fijian girls who dare to try an innovative sport such as javelin.

## **7.5 Resistance**

### **7.5.1 Athletic Indo-Fijian Women as Space Invaders – A Social Conquest**

Whilst looking in to studies of sports intertwined with gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, caste and other sociocultural factors, it is crucial to recognise the role of ‘space’ thus allowing for further nuanced inquiries into the aforementioned intersections. The concept of sporting space in the Fijian context is not straightforward. It comprises of a literal and imaginary place (Lefebvre, 1991; Pavlidis, 2018), racial, sexual (heteronormative) (Van Ingen, 2003), the physical, geographical, gendered (Pavlidis, 2018), everyday routines (Lefebvre, 1991), and also the spiritual and religious (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden, 2017; Teawai, 2005). Therefore Indo-Fijian women (who are of the same race, gender, religion, or speak the same language(s)) DO NOT necessarily experience a (sporting) space homogeneously – these women embody different experiences and influences and have occupied several different (sometimes similar) spaces and oppressions and encouragements in their athletic quests. This study unveiled that athletic Indo-Fijian women have the potential and often actually subvert traditional gender and racial orders, social structures and stereotypes to invade *iTaukei* sporting spaces – a place (physical, spiritual and social, also both literal and imagined as

places of political power) where racial, gendered and class-based politics are reproduced and also 're-hegemonised'. These space invaders via their sporting agencies are able to transform exclusionary and oppressive spaces into spaces in which they feel a sense of belonging and where they feel comfortable with the other bodies (males, *iTaukeis*, mixed-race groups) (Van Ingen, 2003).

The study reveals that although Fijian sporting spaces have typically been sites of gender, racial and class-based challenge and struggle for athletic Indo-Fijian women, they also provide space and opportunities for them to perform their sporting agency, and therefore experience some form of liberation and transformation. Therefore, tensions and paradoxes arise when they negotiate many social, cultural and spatial hurdles and enter the Fijian sporting platforms that are exclusive to *iTaukeis*; there, athletic Indo-Fijian women experience a social conquest which allows them to put into practice their basic human rights as equal citizens of Fiji, as articulated in CEDAW.

The aforementioned invasion can be perceived more as a 'crack' in the race/gender/religious/class wall of Fijian sports: it clearly disturbs the hegemonic social order. 'Athletic Indo-Fijian women as sporting space invaders' is a social concept, which is constructed by the collective agencies of these women. The incursion by space invaders into Fijian sporting platforms gives rise to a different gendered power hierarchy and makes the Fijian gender continuum/hierarchy more complex: the space invaders also embody forms of (new type of) masculinity, which surpasses the marginalised masculinity of Indo-Fijian men. Consequently, this dissertation by giving a voice to these space invaders' sporting quests, also pushes for the CEDAW to be implemented in sporting fields in Fiji, for everyone – including the Indo-Fijian girls/women. Therefore, policy makers at school, club and national level sports need to fulfil the tenets of CEDAW, which would enable the opening of more sporting spaces for Indo-Fijian girls/women – this would also expand their educational and social opportunities.

## 7.5.2 Athletic Indo-Fijian Women – Disordering the Fijian Physicality and Gender

### Continuum

The findings disclose that in performing their different sporting agencies, athletic Indo-Fijian women reflect their diverse ways of (un)doing and redoing their gender and reveal the construction of a range of different femininities in the (Indo) Fijian context. This challenges the traditional male vs. female binary and offers a few ‘in-between’ alternatives. Therefore, those athletic Indo-Fijian women who play sports (or engage in physical activity), which are related to men, portray (a different kind of) protest femininity (Connell, 1995) – one that is culturally least desirable in the Indo-Fijian culture/community. In hindsight, Indo-Fijian woman who perform traditionally male deemed sporting agencies, not only resist compliance to (Indo-Fijian) emphasized femininity, but also simultaneously, these young women challenge Fijian hegemonic masculinity – they are women who can ‘undermine’ men’s sporting prowess. Moreover, in their sporting agencies, women who participate in sports associated with men (rugby, bodybuilding, power lifting) employ qualities such as independence, strength and assertiveness which are tenets of hegemonic masculinity – thus athletic (Indo-Fijian) women embodying such qualities can both challenge the status quo of Fijian hegemony, as well as cause disorder to Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Connell, 2009). The aforementioned sporting agencies stand totally opposite to agencies such as walking and doing yoga for cosmetic fitness, which align with flowery images of dainty Bollywood actresses, and also with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity norms, thus being most valued in the Indo-Fijian community.

Moreover, the findings reveal that athletic Indo-Fijian women’s sporting agencies fall on different levels of the ‘subversive continuum’. For example, being the only Indo-Fijian woman playing good rugby in a mixed racial group, or being the lone Indo-Fijian woman playing hockey at club and national levels, fall on the top of this continuum. Playing netball in the school’s mixed racial team can be placed somewhat in the middle and playing badminton at home for leisure, below the aforementioned. Activities like walking for cosmetic fitness and weight loss (Kanemasu, 2018)



fall right at the bottom of the ‘subversive continuum’ as the latter aligns with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity. The degree of subversiveness of sports and physical activities performed by Indo-Fijian women can be comprehended in light of Butler’s (1990) notion of ‘subversive resignification’, suggesting that resignification of norms is not necessarily subversive, and can take conservative forms.

Furthermore, the findings corroborate prior research on this matter (e.g. Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020), as they disclose that highly athletic Indo-Fijian women perceive their physicality and athletic toned body as ‘capable’, ‘powerful’ and comprising of sound sporting prowess, and shatter the racial and gender-based stereotypes of Indo-Fijian women as lacking physicality. For example, young Indo-Fijian women like Meena who play contact sports (rugby), question the power and privileges of *iTaukeis* – like their *girit*<sup>85</sup> ancestors, who toiled the land – these athletic women too have the physicality to play rugby with and against *iTaukeis*. Therefore, athletic Indo-Fijian women who participate in masculine deemed sports and have the skills and physicality to play the hegemonic rugby with *iTaukeis* not only embody resistance but also place their bodies beyond the abject bodies of non-athletic Indo-Fijian women, and also past ambivalent bodies of those athletic women who resist yet sometimes comply with Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity; they even surpass the bodies of those Indo-Fijian men (and *iTaukei* women) who do not play sports or merely play soccer. Although Indo-Fijian women space invaders might not share the same position as the mighty *iTaukei* men, they at least make enough cracks to invade spaces previously occupied by *iTaukei* women in sports.

### **7.5.3 Embodied Pleasure and Pain in Indo-Fijian Women’s Sporting Agencies**

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<sup>85</sup> Indian pronunciation of the term ‘agreement’, referring to the indenture agreement of the British Government with Indian labourers.

The study discloses that embodied pleasure experienced through contact/physical sports like rugby is fluid and not exclusive to any gender or race, therefore, the Indo-Fijian woman's body is capable of sustaining tackles by an *iTaukei* male body, and has the physicality and prowess to play contact sports in mixed racial and mixed gender teams. Athletic Indo-Fijian women like Meena enjoy the body contact when tackled on the rugby field – even by an *iTaukei* boy – a rare revelation from a socially athletic Indo-Fijian girl. Such versatile Indo-Fijian female bodies are revealed to be proud of their highly physical sporting pursuits and are resilient – able to get up after a hard tackle and still score tries – an epitome of a strong Indo-Fijian woman rugby player. Therefore, the findings show that having gender-neutral sports lessons in school for boys and girls will not only break established gender rules/behaviour, but will also promote a shift from the orthodox views of masculinities and femininities.

# Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

## 8.1 Introduction

In this research project, I have employed a theoretical intersectional lens amalgamated with arts-based methods from the stage of data collection to data coding, to present the participants' data (weaved into non-fiction creative pieces); I then employed intersectionality to analyse the data. The marriage of a theoretical intersectional approach with arts-based methods has doubly benefited this dissertation. Firstly, it has provided me with an avenue to collect rich data via innovative means and then holistically present the data. Secondly, data presented holistically and then using an intersectional lens to analyse it, has allowed me to discuss all possible nuances – that many/different tiers work together to impact the sporting experiences, opportunities, and thus participation of young Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. Therefore, in this segment, I will first discuss how important my theoretical intersectional approach together with the arts-based methods that have I used (to collect and present data) have been in holistically illuminating young Indo-Fijian women's sporting experiences in Fiji.

Subsequently, I will provide recommendations that can potentially improve sports participation and visibility of Indo-Fijian women (and also women of other marginalised and/or minority groups) in the Fijian sporting platforms (and in the diaspora). The recommendations aim to promote in schools, institutions, communities and countries, the opportunity for every (marginalised) woman to experience their full sporting potential, thus exercise their basic human rights in relation to CEDAW Article 10 (g).

## 8.2 Theoretical Implications for Intersectional Research in the Global South

Findings in this thesis provided support for the fusion of poststructuralist and critical theories in exploring gender, racial and ethnic, and class identities (and perceptions) of Indo-Fijian women in

relation to sports and physical activity. Moreover, the aforementioned theoretical combination has also helped raise the voices of young Indo-Fijian women, where an intersectional approach in this study has effectively shared all nuances (Collins & Bilge, 2020) of the counter-narratives of Indo-Fijian women's unique voice of colour, which has not been researched before.

In this dissertation, gender is intersected (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) with race, ethnicity, physicality, dominant sports discourse, social/economic class, caste, education level, historical indenture identities and positionalities, religiosity, geographical location (in Fiji), age (and order of siblings), and marital status, to make meaning about the sporting experiences and trajectories of Indo-Fijian women and their (lack of) sports participation. The use of an intersectional perspective has offered this research a rich conceptual framework and enabled me to make visible and understand the different social and cultural layers of Indo-Fijian women (Gines, 2011; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) in their everyday and also sporting contexts.

The dissertation maintains a non-binary view of gender where Butler's conceptualisation of gender – being socially constructed, gender being fluid, and gender being performative (1990; 2011), were employed. Butler's (1990; 2011) aforementioned concepts were particularly helpful in discussing the rigid orthodox mindsets (and practices) of gender in the Indo-Fijian society, and also the newly emergent (different kind of) femininities and masculinities (Knijnik, Horton & Cruz, 2010) which cause disorder (some cracks) via the (sporting) agencies of athletic Indo-Fijian women in Fiji.

Moreover, Connell's (1987; 1995) masculinities and femininities schemas were accommodating in studying the different gender relations within the Fijian community. These included gender relations within the Indo-Fijian community, gender relations within the *iTaukei* community, and then gender relations within the Fijian context (both Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*), to determine the power relations and gender (in)equity in Fiji (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Specifically, Connell's (1987) notions of hegemonic masculinity, marginalized masculinity,

emphasized femininity, ambivalent femininity and protest femininity were useful in exploring the different (sometimes similar) everyday (and sporting) agencies of young Indo-Fijian women. The aforementioned enabled me to look into social justice in relation to Indo-Fijian women's (lack of) participation in sports.

It was impossible to explore gender as a stand-alone factor whilst studying the young Indo-Fijian women and their (sporting) lives in a country with two major races with racial tension – race consistently intersected gender. Before embarking on the actual data collection journey, my initial idea was to look at 'gender' alone. However, whilst collecting data in the field, I realised that looking at gender issues alone was not only impossible, but also rather unreal as although gender issues seemed most important and even more visible for me, it was not a 'stand alone' issue in the (Fijian) sporting fields. 'No wo/man is an island' – individuals constantly interact with family members, social networks, institutions, communities (social) media and so forth. Therefore, as the journey went on, each step was showing me that, as gender was (and is) traversed by several other social circumstances, they all interact and push each other in order to build multiple layered oppressions onto Indo-Fijian women's bodies – but also to point out ways to invade the oppressive walls around them, to build cracks in them. Thus, I had to do justice by unveiling the multiple (emerging) intersecting layers to make visible all (possible) nuances of the young Indo-Fijian women and their sporting experiences in Fiji.

Relatedly, CRT aided in unveiling historical and (currently) existing racial tensions between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians in political fronts (Naidu, 2008), sporting realms (Sugden, 2021) and educational arenas (Naidu, 2008). CRT provided a platform to understand the race relations (Stefancic & Delgado, 2010), the diverse nature of (political, institutional and structural) oppression of Indo-Fijians (Naidu, 2008; Ratuva, 2003) and the nuanced power dynamics in the Fijian context (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001); factors that continue to shape the (sporting) lives of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. Furthermore, CRT has been particularly useful in understanding inclusion issues in my

dissertation – that is, how schools and society, in maintaining native Fijian privilege (akin to White privilege), play an active role in blocking Indo-Fijian women from a fair go in sporting realms and PE.

Furthermore, the tenet of counter-storytelling of CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006) allowed me to present a unique voice of colour – that is, (disadvantaged) Brown settlers vs. (privileged) Brown natives, which is beyond and more complex than the usual Black vs. White binary. CRT's notion of 'other' voices being silenced within a framework of Whiteness (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) was adapted to the Fijian context, and especially helpful in showing how the dominance of *iTaukeis* in sports (at different levels) silences other minority sporting bodies like Indo-Fijian women, who are considered least physical in Fiji (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020). Therefore, using poststructuralist theories and CRT helped me illustrate how class and race intersect with gender to triply disadvantage those (athletic) Indo-Fijian women who live on the poverty line (in squatter settlements). The aforementioned women's marginalisation is threefold – they have to negotiate gender (in the (Indo) Fijian context), race (with *iTaukeis*) and class (with physically championed *iTaukeis* and economically privileged Indo-Fijian women) to feature in Fijian sporting spaces.

Also, Butler's (1990) notion of subversive bodies as a theoretical lens was apt in examining and understanding the Fijian gender order and how athletic Indo-Fijian women in performing their sporting agencies become real gender order troublemakers and shakers. Moreover, by continuing to claim Indo-Fijian female physicality, these women persistently assert that physical power is neither masculine, nor repressive, thereby disrupt the gender binaries/orders of their society (Kanemasu, 2018; Tagg, 2008).

Furthermore, Lefebvre's discussions of the production of social space (1991) and Puwar's (2004) notion of space invaders infused with a few other case studies on perception on sporting/leisure 'space(s)', such as Gupta & Ferguson (1992), Pavlidis (2018) and Van Ingen (2003)

allowed me to present the different layers of hurdles that (athletic) Indo-Fijian women have to negotiate when entering the Fijian sporting spaces that are exclusive to *iTaukeis*. Puwar's (2004) concept was particularly helpful in illuminating how (and when) these athletic Indo-Fijian women constantly reposition themselves within these spaces through embodied rituals, such as mimicking the language and behaviour of the dominant culture (*iTaukeis*) in order to survive in the (invaded) space (Puwar, 2004). Moreover, in my discussion I have expanded Pavlidis' (2018) notion of spatiality (which relates mostly to gender-based discrimination), to make clear that gender intersects with race, ethnicity, religiosity and social class when Indo-Fijian women invade the otherwise sacred sports spaces of Fiji. My intersectional lens can better illuminate the local and more nuanced insights of the unique and complex sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women. In this regard, CRT has been interwoven to accentuate the silenced voices and experiences of Indo-Fijian women in the (different) sporting spaces of Fiji.

### **8.3 The Paradoxes and Tensions of the Intersectional Oppressions and Social Constructs in the Sporting Lives of the Indo-Fijian Women in Fiji**

This dissertation has brought to the centre – the hidden sporting experiences of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji, through their complex and often paradoxical stories of resilience to traditional gender orders (Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity) – but also compliance to some unwritten gender rules. My findings furthered some early findings of the scholarly literature on this topic: the racial stereotypes of Indo-Fijians lacking physicality (Kanemasu, 2018; Sugden et al., 2020; Teaiwa, 2005) and not being proper Fijians (Munasinghe, 2001), when both Indo-Fijian men and women indentured labourers had toiled the land and contributed greatly towards the sugar industry, which became Fiji's economic backbone before farming land lease renewal issues (Munasinghe, 2001; Narsey, 2002). Therefore, using a theoretical intersectional lens together with arts-based methods of data collection and presentation have aided in analysing all possible nuances that are included in the history of

indenture experience in Fiji, the challenges faced (by Indo-Fijians) with agricultural land lease renewal by *iTaukei* landowners, and ultimately the displacement of Indo-Fijian farmers. The aforementioned is impossible to separate from gender and racial issues of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji's sporting arena. It is important to acknowledge the historical and political experiences of Indo-Fijians as this has shaped the current racial rift between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians, and the political and social oppression of Indo-Fijians. Therefore, in response to this lower positioning of Indo-Fijians, parents encourage their children towards education for better jobs and migration, and discourage sports, which is an *iTaukei* zone, and an almost impossible arena for Indo-Fijians (especially women) to penetrate.

In order to discuss the gendered identities of Indo-Fijian women, both my extensive literature review (Balram, 2019; Brison, 2011; Kanemasu, 2018; Naidu, 2008; Ratuva, 2003; Sugden, 2021), as well as my findings showed that race is a crucial component, as racial tension(s) exists between *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians. Thus, adding the CRT framework (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic & Delgado, 2010) helped in understanding the diverse nature of (political, institutional and structural) oppression of Indo-Fijian women; factors that continue to shape the (sporting) lives of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji. In Chapter 5, by using intersectionality as a conceptual framework, I weaved a short story (arts-based methods) to put together the participants' narratives, to present the tensions of intersectional oppressions and social constructs in the sporting (and daily) life of Dipika. For example, despite being a staunch Hindu, Dipika is subtly compelled to participate in Christian team prayers because all others – hockey teammates, coaches and managers – were Christians. Moreover, Dipika's mother tongue is Fiji-Hindi, but her *iTaukei* hockey mates encourage her to speak in the *iTaukei* language to them, when both groups can speak a common language – English. The aforementioned reveals a double tension. Firstly, Dipika does not relate to Christian prayers, and forces herself to do it, as she does not want to encourage further gaps between her and the others. Secondly, by exercising the religion and language of the dominant group yet again the voice and



agency of the other (Dipika) is marginalised, and the dominant power of the *iTaukeis* – Brown privileged natives vs. Brown marginalised settlers, in and off the sporting field, is reproduced and concreted. Thus, it is evident that athletic Indo-Fijian women like Dipika have to jump multiple gendered, racial and class-based fences where these young women's complex sporting agencies reveal different forms of resistance to societal gender and racial normative practices.

Moreover, employing an intersectional lens helped illuminate the gender paradoxes and tensions that are present within Indo-Fijian families and in their society. Gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005); patriarchal orders rule Ashriya's household, however, in the same family there is an ongoing gender struggle for supremacy, as matriarchal structure (the older women) like Ashriya's grandmother also hold power and authority to ensure gender norms (particularly Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity) (Connell, 1995) are maintained. Similarly, my findings show that tension arises, for example, when in the same family Meena's father's patriarchal gaze polices and disapproves of Meena's short netball dress but her mother (and Meena) have no issues with it. Moreover, Sapna's grandmother continues to impress societal conventions on Sapna in order to maintain both gender and caste orders – however, Sapna's father is shifting from orthodox views and has started to accept who Sapna is.

Furthermore, there are gender-based tensions at community level; for example, Dipika's father's gender intersects with his age, education (retired teacher) and also his previous sporting (played soccer and hockey) experiences/agency, to shape his unorthodox views on newly emergent Indo-Fijian femininity. However, in the same community, Master Gopal who is a PE teacher and Master Sathish who is a soccer coach, are younger than Dipika's father, yet still hold orthodox views – that girls cannot play soccer and there should not be a soccer team for girls (in school).

This dissertation also stumbles across an interesting and repetitive paradox – 'the 'tomboy', the 'temptress' and the 'butter fingers' in Chapter 5. Based on how much Indo-Fijian women absorb and internalise from their cultural heritage and policing of gender norms (by their family), Indo-

Fijian women's perceptions are sometimes shaped similarly and often quite differently from each other. For example, for Razia, her gender, race, religion (Islam), being a single mother, living with her parents and being a divorcee, determine how she perceives marriage, traditional gender norms and Khushi's body. Razia tells Khushi that she will HAVE to get married despite herself being divorced, she also tells Khushi that 'you can't get a domestic cat to plough the land, you need a bull' (thus supporting traditional gendered and racial norms) – when she herself had stepped out of her marriage, defying traditional norms. Also, there is great paradox in the definition of Khushi's body image by Razia; at the wedding Razia describes Khushi as 'tall' and 'gorgeous' thus a 'temptress', when Khushi is bedecked with traditional attire and jewellery. However, Khushi's same body in 'ripped shorts' and performing soccer agency fetches her the 'tomboy' label from Razia. On these occasions, Razia overlooks the fact that Khushi's body was performing different acts at different times – and makes judgements based on how Khushi's material body is clothed and presented on the two separate occasions. Therefore, it is evident that traditional (Indo-Fijian) gender binary constructs root in ultimate notions of male vs. female and any gender in-betweens in the (Indo-Fijian) gender continuum are not understood. Therefore, many Indo-Fijians reject epitomes that do not conform to the male vs. female binary, and give them undesirable labels such as tomboy.

Relatedly, the gym (in Fiji) is a site of masculinity – where 'boys play with their toys' and parade muscles. Therefore, Khushi faces layers of gendered tensions as an Indo-Fijian woman training in the gym is a rare sight and 'inappropriate' according to orthodox standards (Balram, 2019; Shandil, 2016). The boys assume that Khushi's body is incapable of lifting heavy weights and she is offered unsolicited help. This frustrates Khushi and she feels that her space has been invaded. In contrast, despite participating in different sports and practising martial arts from primary school, traditional gender roles are still so deeply embedded in Jasmine that she internalises the lack of physicality as a common 'female trait' (Kanemasu, 2018; Teaiwa, 2005). Gender-based tensions arise when Indo-Fijian women like Jasmine take on their traditional feminine role in a traditionally

masculine space and seek help from boys who display traditional masculinity (strength) (McCreary et al., 2005), whilst others like Khushi strongly claim that her gender and biological make-up do not define strength and physicality.

Moreover, some of my findings show that sports are considered culturally inappropriate for Indo-Fijian women, and the lack of empowerment and support for Indo-Fijian girls by their own community influences their participation. However, married women, divorcees and mothers are likely to have more gender-based restrictions towards participation in comparison to their counterparts who are single. Nonetheless, complexity arises when single young women like Ashriya actually face stricter restrictions, and patriarchal and matriarchal controls at home based on their race, gender and socio-economic class. Comparatively, Sapna receives backlash – from her grandmother, mother and other Indo-Fijian women (at work) as lifting weights gives Sapna a visibly toned body – her mother tells her that she is ‘too thin’. This is a paradox, as in the Indo-Fijian community slim, dainty images of Bollywood actresses are embraced (Lata, 2009) and such figures are also in high demand in the marriage market (Raj, 2019). Thus, the body image of an athletic Indo-Fijian woman (slim, strong and toned) clashes with the romanticised images of Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity – slim yet soft and graceful – a cosmetic fit body that can be achieved by dieting and walking (Kanemasu, 2018). The aforementioned becomes even more complex when in the same community, Indo-Fijian families like Dipika’s appreciate her sporting prowess, performance and athletic body. This is in line with Indo-Fijian body builder Komal Raj’s experiences – where her parents appreciated her performance on stage, and the body image she had – but she received backlash from extended family and the community that she was parading too much skin and it was culturally inappropriate (Raj, 2019). Inevitably, (Indo-Fijian) women’s sporting agencies result in them in having toned athletic bodies, resilience and strong will – features that are aloof from Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity (Kanemasu, 2018; Shandil, 2016; Steinfeldt et al., 2011), and tension arises in social settings where these athletic women are expected to be soft and graceful. In

such situations, Meena is compelled to wear clothes traditionally associated with women to hide the way she walks – like a boy. In having to maintain two separate identities, complex tensions emerge in the daily and sporting lives of athletic Indo-Fijian women, which these women have to navigate.

Often, the study reveals sites of domination by *iTaukeis* in the Fijian sporting arena, however, there are also occasions when *iTaukei* men promote a shift from these orthodox views of masculinities and femininities (Coleman, 2003). I gathered data showing that some *iTaukei* men believe that physicality and masculinity can occupy an Indo-Fijian woman's body; some schools also facilitate recreational opportunities for both boys who subscribe to hegemonic definitions of masculinity, and those who embrace more marginalized masculinities (Connell, 1995; Tagg, 2008). It is noteworthy that rigid gender norms promote tension, thus when orthodox (rigid) gender norms are broken, there are more opportunities for relaxation, recreation and laughing. These opportunities promote new types of socialisation in Fiji, such as friendships between Indo-Fijian women and *iTaukeis*, and occasionally, even romantic relationships with *iTaukei* men, which also problematises old racial stereotypes that (some) Indo-Fijian women like Khushi hold – such as '*iTaukei* boys aren't interested in Indo-Fijian girls in anyway'.

## **8.4 An Amalgamation of the Theoretical Intersectional Approach with Arts-based Methods**

### **8.4.1 Using Photo Elicitation: A Few Meta-reflections**

Using photos taken by the participants to carry out interviews, in order to reveal their experiences and perceptions on a particular topic, has been used widely to conduct various research all over the world (Pang, 2015; Pink, 2007; Pink, 2015; Schwartz, 1989; Torre & Murphy, 2015). However, to the best of my knowledge, photos have not previously been used to elicit data in interviews with young women in the (Indo-Fijian) Fijian and South Pacific context. Using photos to elicit interviews is in line with the thesis' main aim to raise the voices of Indo-Fijian women by their stories; their interpretation of the photos they took as opposed to the researcher analysing the photos.

It can be challenging to explain lived experiences, so photographs were used to sustain thoughts, memories, feelings on past, present, and future (Pink, 2009; Woodgate, et al., 2017). The novelty of this method, within this context, helped to augment the rapport – therefore the thickness of the data collected – between the participants and myself. Asking the participants to take photographs on ‘what sports and physicality meant to them’ was a great tool for this qualitative research for three reasons. First, since the interviewees themselves produced the photos, they felt like an important part of the project. Not only did this build strong rapport with me but also the participants started valuing their role in this research project. Secondly, the participants went to different spaces/locations to take the photographs, thus, the pictures that the participants brought to the interviews ranged from participants’ home environment, to school, work environment, sporting objects/infrastructure near to them, family, friends, televised sports and/or activities around them, which appealed to them in terms of sports, exercise, athleticism and physicality. Moreover, in some pictures there were multiple people – thus, in one single photograph there was potential to discuss many different nuances of the (sporting) lives of the participants. Thirdly, the use of photographs was an apt tool to question participants further on a topic of interest to the research, or to shift the focus of a discussion when it was derailed. In this way, I was able to collect rich data, which could have been missed out, had I used traditional ways of interviewing. For example, one of the participants had brought a picture of her family watching rugby sevens – a discussion on this picture led to discoveries that her father was no more (a very sensitive topic), and that he was a huge fan of Sevens’ rugby player Waisale Serevi. I learnt that she and her mother were also great rugby fans, and that she started watching rugby on TV as young as 6 years of age. I was a little surprised to learn that this participant watched YouTube videos of Rugby player Jerry Tuwai and practised his goosetstep and sidestep. Moreover, I was super flabbergasted when this girl revealed that she secretly played rugby with *iTaukei* neighbours. These revelations via photographs really shaped the findings of my study, as for the first time, I had encountered an Indo-Fijian woman who was beyond rugby fandom. Thus, that particular photo taken

in her lounge room inspired me to present her data in a holistic way (screen play) in Chapter 6, and made possible in my analysis to point out the shift in orthodox gender practices and the emergence of a different kind of Indo-Fijian femininity that this young woman's rugby agency shaped. Not only was I able to discuss the cracks caused in the Indo-Fijian emphasized femininity but also how such subversive sporting bodies of Indo-Fijian women are capable to rise from their bottom sedentary positions on the Fijian gender and physicality continuum, and co-exist/share a sporting space with Fijian perceptions of much more able bodies of *iTaukei* sporting women.

All of the 12 participants when asked about their experience with PEI mentioned that they were not aware that interviews could be conducted based on photos taken by the participants, let alone having participated in such an interview. All the participants used the word 'interesting' and 'new' (or a synonym) in their response to describe their experience with PEI in this research. Out of the five participants who were still at school, four thought that it would be a great idea to have such innovative tools in their teaching and learning process in school, so that they could fully, creatively express themselves using art and technology. PEI aided in nullifying disadvantages associated with traditional interviews with young participants (especially the high school students), allowing the participants to freely speak about the pictures without focusing on intellectual, social and language skills to understand particular questions and/or the ability to explain their understanding of certain experiences (Torre & Murphy, 2015). Furthermore, at least eight participants mentioned that taking photos helped them to de-stress from a hard day at work or school and many of them liked the idea of holding the power in what to discuss (relative to the photographs) in the interview. In this light, using PEI can have some drawbacks; some participants might perceive photographs as stand-alone devices that do not need to be explained or elaborated upon (Meo, 2010). However, when such a situation arose, I nudged participants with questions from time to time, encouraging them to talk more and open up to overcome becoming stranded on a certain topic area (Meo, 2010). Also, it can get a little challenging to explore aspects of interest of participants' lives, which they did not

photograph without disruption to their narratives (Meo, 2010). However, my hybrid positionality, particularly the ‘insider’ positionality, paved a platform (interview) for some identity sharing in my conversations with my participants. Thus, with a little bit of patience, timely nudging of questions to re-direct discussions (possible due to my knowledge as an insider) towards the research questions/aims was fruitful. In this regard, I was developing and furthering my ability (as a researcher) to interview, and particularly to listen to my participants. Furthermore, the remarkable thing about PEI is that as the second person seeing it, I had other questions based on what I saw – therefore, the parts that the participants did not reveal still got attention when I nudged them with a few questions every now and then. Relatedly, Pink (2007) concisely notes that the meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective, depending on who is looking. The same photographic image may have a variety of (perhaps conflicting) meanings as different eyes and audiences in diverse temporal historical, spatial and cultural contexts view it (Leonard & McKnight, 2015).

Moreover, it was also the first time I had carried out a PEI and it was equally exciting for me, and an innovative learning experience. Thus, in this case, PEI also helped reduce any potential power imbalance between the researcher and the participants. Also, I shared some identity commonalities with the participants because I had occupied similar childhood and schooling spaces (experiences) as an Indo-Fijian girl growing up in Fiji. Therefore, this insider position within my hybrid positionality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Pang, 2018) made it possible for me to look at, and to talk about, the issues that arose in the photographs in greater depth than someone who had NOT occupied similar spaces (experiences). Therefore, using PEI with my participants in the (Indo) Fijian context, created a window via which I could gaze into the participants’ lives in great depth.

#### **8.4.2 Writing Free Verses**

In the past two decades, poetry as means of data collection (Furman, 2004), and re/presentation (Stenhouse, 2014) has been used in diverse fields. However, poetry ethnographies being used in the (Indo) Fijian context with women to collect data was innovative, let alone

collecting data using poetry with young women in relation to sports. After interview 1, and the poetry workshop, participants were asked to write about any aspect(s) of their sporting experience, which they would have liked to emphasise, from interview 1, or something that they could not talk about freely during the first interview. Using this means to collect data proved particularly useful for my research project – it provided a safe space and platform to the participants to write about the most radical subjects or even issues that were somewhat taboo to speak about. For example, one of my participants in her free verse about her sporting trajectory mentioned her romantic interest in a boy who played the same sport. During the second interview (based on the free verse), when I nudged a few questions about this, she revealed to me the most unexpected – she was dating an *iTaukei* boy.

In Fiji, the idea of Indo-Fijians and *iTaukei* intermarriage/romantic relationships is rare; only two cases were recorded during the indenture period of Indian males marrying *iTaukei* women (Ali; 1979; Mamak, 1978; Richmond, 2009). This new data enabled me to discuss the historical structural legacy of colonialism and separation along racial, cultural and religious lines of Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis*, and how this impacts the meaningful interaction between contemporary Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis* (Richmond, 2009). Thus, due to this revelation via the free verses, I was able to tap into a new nuance of the Fijian sporting arena having potential to provide opportunities for social interaction between the *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians, and promote friendships, romantic relationships and intermarriages – possibly breaking or at least cracking racial segregation amongst the major racial groups in Fiji.

#### **8.4.3 Weaving Non-fiction Creative Pieces (Stories) from the Data**

Prendergast (2009) discusses different types of poetry, that is, researcher-voiced poetry, participant-voiced poetry, literature-voiced poetry and interpretive poetry. Different types of poetry have been used for data reduction and fresh insights by researchers (Furman & Shukraft, 2007; Langar & Furman, 2004; Unst, 2002). However, in the case of my research project, I have weaved two poems (*Only Female in the Room* and *Boo hoo! Woo hoo!*) out of three participants' data, where



the data has been sourced from collective means (interview 1, poetry workshop, interview 2, participant free verses and fieldwork observations). In constructing these poems, not only was I able to present the story/experiences of the participant(s), but also was able to include other familial, community and societal aspects associated with their everyday and sporting experiences. This allowed me to present an intersectionally holistic, realistic and in-depth presentation of my data – thus participants’ stories.

When conducting data analysis, the researcher becomes the instrument for analysis and interprets codes and themes by de/controlling the data (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The presentation of my participants’ data is not merely limited to poetry but has been weaved into a song (*Big Sister – small sister*), two short stories (*Unpermitted Passion; Girl with the Valiant Gada*), a one-act play (*Tomboy with Butterfingers*), and a screen play (*The Serevi MaGiC*). Story telling is done on a daily basis in the process of making sense of who we are and what we experience (Dowling et al., 2012). However, instead of writing about individual stories, I took the role of storyteller and amalgamated the participants’ data – that is, used their words/contents/themes to create new stories (seven non-fiction creative pieces). To the best of my knowledge, this is an innovative (and holistic) method of data (re)presentation in the field of education and the social sciences in Fiji, and the South Pacific. Presenting participants’ data via the aforementioned non-fiction creative pieces enabled me to present their voices (data) where their colloquial words and artistic writings could be weaved with other participants’, thus creating a space where the reader can literally hear their voices and experience what the participants have experienced too.

Additionally, this innovative act of weaving non-fiction creative pieces (such as the song, short stories, one-act play and screenplay) allowed me to situate participants in one platform, create dialogues between the characters/participants and present the intersectionalities (their similar and different compositions, views and experiences) (Collins & Bilge, 2020) in a holistic and free flowing

fashion. The lines and dialogue in the seven non-fiction creative pieces mimic how young Indo-Fijian women mingle and communicate in their circles and with *iTaukeis* and vice versa.

Furthermore, it was apt to holistically weave the stories of these marginalised women as pulling their stories apart would have done further injustice to them, as their sporting (and everyday) lives had already been ‘pulled apart’ by the gender, racial and class-based challenges in Fiji. The process of crafting the non-fiction creative pieces was complex, requiring me to patiently listen, and then delicately explore the many angles and experiences that the young women spoke about. This allowed me to capture nuanced, yet holistic and comprehensive accounts of the sporting trajectories of young Indo-Fijian women, which have not been explored before. To carry out the aforementioned task, I had to carefully apply the technicalities of each non-fiction creative genre and also illuminate the participants’ sporting (and everyday) trajectories. For example, in the one-act play (Chapter 5), I staged a wedding scene to bring characters/participants together in order to allow the reader to understand the complex interconnectedness of gender, race, culture, patriarchy, matriarchy, body image and class issues in the (Indo-Fijian) Fijian context.

Moreover, this new approach aims to create new spaces of power and new linguistic communities in the language that (young) Indo-Fijian women use to articulate their capacity to live in Fiji as social beings. Another reason for using non-fiction creative writing for data presentation is because Indo-Fijians and *iTaukeis* both have strong links to oral traditions and story telling (Dakuidreketi, 2012; Emeneau, 1958) and religious/traditional epics (Burkhart, 2003); thus telling participants’ stories via crafted stories with dimensions that need to be portrayed, fits well in this area of study and raises the voices of marginalised (Indo-Fijian) women.

## **8.5 Recommendations**

### **8.5.1 ‘One Size Does Not Fit All’ – Towards Inclusive and Equitable PE Lessons/Sports Programs**

It is necessary that the different layers of ethno-cultural factors (racial, ethnical, gender religion, historical/political oppression, and class), surrounding Indo-Fijian girls/women be accounted for by schools, PE teachers, sports coaches and clubs whilst planning, designing and conducting PE lessons and/or sports outreach programs/events. Therefore, more inclusive approaches are recommended – to create a sense of belonging for Indo-Fijian girls/women (minority groups) and those of different ethnic backgrounds than the natives, and support the process of social integration.

### **8.5.2 Minor Sports – The New Major for Minority/Marginalised Groups**

The study revealed that badminton was one of the first sports introduced in childhood to some of the Indo-Fijian girls, which they played with siblings, parents and family and friends at home. Therefore, it is necessary for policy makers at school level to design sports curriculums that minority groups can relate to, thus allowing Indo-Fijian women (who are so familiar with this sport) to play minor sports such as badminton during PE and/or at inter-schools' competitions and be physically active. Therefore, as previously pointed out by other researchers (e.g. Dorovolomo & Hammond, 2005; Sugden, 2020), this thesis endorses the idea of incorporating minor sports into Fiji schools' PE curriculum/lessons and also (racquet) sports that Indo-Fijian women can relate to culturally and/or have role models in. These minor sports might appeal to and accommodate the interests of minority groups and/or groups with different ethno-cultural backgrounds than the indigenous people and those who do not fit into the dominant Fijian sports discourse.

### **8.5.3 Dancing Away from Orthodox Perceptions**

The study reveals that most of the young Indo-Fijian women enjoyed dancing, especially in the contemporary Bollywood genre. Many of these girls practised dance from childhood and some even continued to dance after high school. One of the women even continued to dance after being separated from her husband and whilst pregnant. Thus, there is a need to shift from orthodox

perceptions of PE and physical activity in the Fijian context; such a shift in perception will enable (innovative) physical activities like dance, figure skating, acrobatics and gymnastics, which also require physicality, stamina, balance, agility and flexibility, to be included in Fijian schools' PE curriculum, thus creating pathways to tertiary level qualifications and potential careers. Policy makers need to be innovative when designing PE curriculums and need to include a wide range of physical activities – giving every girl/woman a fair go to experience the pleasures and benefits that sports and physical activities have to offer. Therefore, it is necessary for policies and PE lessons to be structured in such a way that they cater for the diverse and (sometimes specific) ethno-cultural needs and passions of marginalised groups (women) as previous research also shows (Sugden, 2021). In doing so, Indo-Fijian girls will get to realise their full (sporting) potential thus exercise their basic human rights in relation to CEDAW Article 10 (g).

#### **8.5.4 Accentuating Athletic Indo-Fijian Women as Role Models**

The study noted that Indo-Fijian women resonate with (some) Indian women sporting role models whose athletic trajectories have been accentuated by Bollywood films. According to the research, most Indo-Fijians (women) are unaware of the few athletic Indo-Fijian women in Fiji who play sports such as hockey, soccer, bodybuilding, archery and pistol shooting at club and national levels. Therefore, it is important that schools (management and other stakeholders), and community organisations invite athletic Indo-Fijian women to forums and events where they can advocate sports and physical activity as a co-curricular activity for Indo-Fijian (marginalised) girls/women in schools and other institutions.

#### **8.5.5 Introducing Physical/Contact Sports to All Students in Schools**

Physical (contact) sports such as rugby should not be limited to a particular gender, race and/or ethnic group merely based on racial and gendered stereotypes. The study reveals that on rare

occasions, Indo-Fijian women move beyond rugby fandom and actually socially play rugby, and enjoy the pleasures of being tackled, doing goose steps and scoring tries. However, these young women do not get the opportunity to experience the pleasures of contact sport at school and club levels. Therefore, it is important for schools and sporting bodies to safely introduce physical/contact sports (rugby) to students/individuals of all ethnic backgrounds and genders. Therefore, allowing every individual a fair go to enjoy one's body safely and without the gender and racial constraints and pressures imposed by inequitable school/organisational policies, politics and racial and gendered stereotypes, which privilege the *iTaukeis* and disadvantage other minority groups.

#### **8.5.6 Creating Pathways for Sporting Careers for Marginalised Groups**

There is a need for careers lessons (in school), and for teachers to create awareness of sporting career opportunities and pathways for marginalised women in high school – rather than students merely being exposed to academic and professional career information and pathways. The study revealed that some of the young Indo-Fijian women were athletic, and one even played sports at national level, and also there were Indo-Fijian girls who aspired for a career in teaching PE when in high school, but had no encouragement, awareness and/or pathways to materialise their aspirations.

Moreover, there is a need for tertiary institutions which provide training for sports (PE) teachers and coaches to cater for the needs of the diverse Fijian community by exploring and augmenting current student enrolments, and (PE) sports courses and programs to develop the capacity to attract and train (marginalised/minority groups) Indo-Fijian women as sports and/or PE teachers. More representations of Indo-Fijian women as PE teachers will act as role models for other young Indo-Fijian women, and girls in school, and will aid in shattering racial and gender-based stereotypes about Indo-Fijian women lacking physicality for sports – ‘seeing is believing’.

Moreover, there is a need for more/better media coverage of minority sports (groups). The

study shows that both Indo-Fijians and even *iTaukeis* continue to either internalise, and/or (re)produce ‘lack of physicality’ stereotypes about Indo-Fijian women. The study also reveals that Fijians are unaware of sporting Indo-Fijian and Indian archetypes, which in hindsight further concretises the aforementioned racial and gendered stereotypes. Thus, there needs to be more awareness created in Fiji, and this can be achieved by the media moving its focus from merely televising/broadcasting/reporting dominant sports coverage (and news), to other minor sports, where Indo-Fijian and/or Indian women are represented, such as cricket, hockey, badminton, table tennis, pistol shooting, darts, bodybuilding, javelin, wrestling and so forth. Moreover, Indo-Fijian women athletes themselves can enhance their use of social media channels (YouTube, TikTok, etc.) to create this awareness as well. By exercising the aforementioned, not only will Indo-Fijian women be more motivated towards participation, but it will also create awareness amongst all Fijians – that an individual’s race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, phenotype, etc. do not decide their physicality and sporting prowess; anyone who trains well (and hard) can play sports!

#### **8.5.7 Sports for Participation to be Championed over Sports for Competition**

The dominant (and most popular) sport for girls in Fijian schools is netball, which is highly populated by *iTaukei* girls at school and club level, and solely represented by *iTaukei* women at national level, despite Indo-Fijian women making up more than one third of the country’s female population. The study discloses that most Indo-Fijian girls play netball in school and some make it to the school’s team levels, and get to practise their netball agency. However, there are occasions where some Indo-Fijian girls are very passionate about netball but are placed merely as reserves, and do not get to fully exercise their netball prowess and passion; some of these girls end up losing interest altogether. Therefore, there is a need to shift the focus from ‘sports for competition’ to ‘sports for participation’ – allowing minority groups to have a fair go at sports and physical activity as well. For example, schools should at least have a second stream netball (and other sports as well) team (B

team), training and playing alongside the main selected team (A Team), which represents the school. In this way, more minority groups of girls (even those *iTaukei* girls who do not get selected for the main team) regardless of their ethnicity and race will have a fair go at netball (and other team sports). Also, this will provide a pathway for more girls to progress on to the A Team, based on prowess and performance. Thus, eliminating potential racial and physical discrimination, and focusing on girls' maximum participation – including girls of all races (and ethnicities), and girls with different levels of physicality and prowess. This will ensure the fulfilment of the equality and non-discriminatory goals of the CEDAW, in relation to sports participation for girls and women, as pointed out in the introduction to this dissertation,

## **8.6 Considerations for Future Research**

Further studies could potentially build on this current research by providing an even more holistic and comprehensive understanding of marginalised (Indo-Fijian) women in the Fijian (sporting) context, and also sporting agencies of marginalised women in the Global South and migrant women of colour (and minority groups) in the diaspora.

First, there is a need to include broader perspectives about Indo-Fijian women and sports; thus, it is important that future research endeavours seek the inclusion of Indo-Fijian women in rural (farming) areas in the western division of Viti Levu and from Vanua Levu. This will allow for further knowledge about how young Indo-Fijian women from other (secluded and rural) parts of Fiji, navigate their gender, race and class in order to participate in sports and physical activities. Furthermore, this would allow interesting parallels and comparisons of the impact of living in urban areas in Suva (like the participants in this research), against those Indo-Fijian women who dwell in rural/farming settings, in relation to young women's physical activity and sports involvement.

Secondly, it would be valuable to include the perspectives of the parents and relatives of young Indo-Fijian women in order to get their views firsthand in relation to their daughters' sports

and physical activity participation. Moreover, I believe that studying young Indo-Fijian women at their homes – with siblings and (grand) parents present – would be worthwhile as it would allow the researcher to observe the gendered and patriarchal (and matriarchal) practices present in young Indo-Fijian women's daily and sporting lives, relative to their family and community environments. Despite the ethical challenges that this type of research would pose within an Indo-Fijian context, in hindsight, it is also hoped that involving parents in this study will provide them a platform to reflect on their relationships with their daughter(s), and their daughters' (and their own) sports and physical activity participation to assist young Indo-Fijian women in realising and exercising their full (sporting) potential in relation to CEDAW.

Thirdly, a longitudinal study could achieve more information on young Indo-Fijian women's life and sporting trajectories. In doing so, we could discover (firsthand), how an Indo-Fijian woman's sporting interests, journey and involvements shape in school and when she leaves school for tertiary studies and/or the workforce.

Fourthly, I suggest that research be carried out in the school context, where PE lessons are observed together with the way PE teachers address and intermingle with girls and boys of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Not only will this provide a platform to observe racial and gendered practices amongst students, but it would also illuminate racial and gendered practices (and perceptions) of teachers in school, aiding in analysing how the aforementioned impact young Indo-Fijian women's sport involvement. Also, I suggest that PE teachers, sports coaches at school, tertiary, club and national levels and some *iTaukei* and mixed raced students be interviewed for a (more) nuanced view of their own sporting perceptions and their views on (and experiences with) Indo-Fijian women and sports.

Last, but not the least, since my dissertation mainly focuses on gender, I believe it is worthwhile to research young Indo-Fijian sports women's sexuality (a taboo topic in the Indo-Fijian society) – to discover how their sexuality shapes and/or influences their sporting experiences. This



study would add on to the intersectionalities that have been employed in this research and tap into nuances, which are unspoken of (but exist) in the (Indo) Fijian context.

## 8.7 Coda

The originality of my work is that, whilst other sporting (and physical activity) stories of women from other social contexts (Global North) have been described and are well known, the Indo-Fijian gendered and racialised context, is not. Therefore, my thesis can be useful for further comparisons between the Global South and the Global North gendered and racialised sporting realities.

Carrying out this research and aspiring to understand Indo-Fijian women and their sports/physical activity participation, and how they perceive gender and their own physical activities, has taught me the following. First, my findings challenge the stereotypes and previous constructions of Indo-Fijian girls/women being weak and lacking physicality for sports (in comparison to *iTaukei* women and generally), being difficult to engage in sports, having problems with sporting attire, and not having interest in sports. The findings reveal that the subject of Indo-Fijian women and sports is a complex one with several layers intersecting where Indo-Fijian women cannot be perceived as a homogenous group, let alone their sporting interests and experiences being uniform.

Secondly, I learnt through the stories of my participants – that some Indo-Fijian girls/women consistently and passionately play sports and participate in physical activities, ranging from (but not limited to) soccer, netball, hockey, badminton, bodybuilding and even rugby. In continuing to exercise their sporting agencies, these young athletic women resist traditional gender constructs, racism and Fijian hegemonic gender constructs, and disrupt gender/racial order by moving up from their preconceived and somehow socially desired passive sedentary bodies at the bottom of the Fijian gender/masculinity scale.

Moreover, I learnt that some of the young Indo-Fijian women were actively negotiating PE and physical activity opportunities. Some of these girls were passionate about sports like soccer and pushed for a girls' soccer team in school or wanted to try something new like javelin, but their requests could not penetrate the racial, gendered and orthodox perceptions of (PE) teachers and rigid practices within the set curriculum/lesson plan. Therefore, policy makers, PE teachers and school PE departments, need to value and act on the requests and passions of Indo-Fijian women so that Indo-Fijian women's epitomes are liberated from (old) racial and gendered stereotypes.

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# Appendices

## **Appendix 1. HREA/Recruitment note/Consent forms/Information Sheets/ Interview guides**

*Appendix 1a. HREA*

*Appendix 1b. Recruitment Note*

*Appendix 1c. Consent Form – Young Indo-Fijian women*

*Appendix 1d. Consent Form – Parent/Carer (Extended)*

*Appendix 1e. For Participant Information Sheet – Young Indo-Fijian women*

*Appendix 1f. Participant Information Sheet – Parent/Carer*

*Appendix 1g. Interview Guide – Semi-structured Interview and Photo Elicitation*

*Appendix 1h. Interview Guide – Semi-structured Interview via Ethnographic Poetics*

## **Appendix 2. Participant Demographics' Tables**

*Appendix 2a. Age, occupation, place of residence, place of birth, caste and religion*

*Appendix 2b. Mother tongue, spoken languages, language spoken at home and parents' occupation*

*Appendix 2c. Number (and order) of siblings, Mother tongue, spoken languages, language spoken at home and parents' occupation*

*Appendix 2d. Educational level, marital status, number of children, people participant resides with and current sports and physical activities*

## **Appendix 3. Poetry workshop plan/ Sample data coding sheet/ Participants' free verses**

*Appendix 3a. Poetry Workshop plan*

*Appendix 3b. Sample colour coding on Excel sheet*

*Appendix 3c. Participant written free verses*

## Appendix 1a. HREA Approval

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WESTERN SYDNEY  
UNIVERSITY



### HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

12 March 2019  
Doctor Jorge Knijnik  
School of Education

Dear Jorge,

Project Title: "Understanding Indo-Fijian women and sport: redoing gender in Fijian and in the Diaspora"

HREC Approval Number: H13113

Risk Rating: Low 2 - HREC

I am pleased to advise the above research project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee.

This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Approval of this project is valid from 12 March 2019 until 12 March 2022.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Jorge Knijnik, Rohini Balam, Bonnie Pang

#### Summary of Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.
6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.
7. Project specific conditions:  
There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au) as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely

Pr [REDACTED] ne  
Presiding Member,  
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee



## **Appendix 1.b Recruitment Note**

Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji's Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I write to invite you to assist in recruiting participants for a research study led by me (Rohini Balram) under the supervision of my principal supervisor (Ass. Prof. Jorge Knijnik) and co-supervisor (Dr Bonnie Pang) for the purpose of my PhD research which I am currently pursuing with Western Sydney University.

There is a lack of research based on understanding the relationship between sports and disadvantaged groups of women such as Indo-Fijian women. Indo-Fijian women are poorly represented in sports and athletic platforms in Fiji, therefore, it is necessary to explore factors that cause the invisibility of Indo-Fijian women from the sporting scenes of Fiji. This research project aims to build pathways that promote sports participation in this disadvantaged group. It also intends to give a platform to powerful/innovative and emerging voices, stories, thinkers and ideas from the South Pacific (Fiji). This research project will also create opportunities for critical thinkers of developing countries to connect with gender/racial issues in terms of sports sociology with further disadvantaged groups such as the Indo-Fijian women who live in the small island nation of Fiji. By doing this, it will add new knowledge of disadvantaged groups to the knowledge of women and sports in the world.

Please contact me at [19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au) or 5089227(mobile number) if you would like to discuss this study further.

Please disseminate this information to potential participants: young Indo-Fijian women. This is specifically defined as those who: (1) Identify as Indo-Fijian women; AND (2) Were born in Fiji and are currently staying in Fiji, AND (3) Are 15 to 25 years of age.

The study is an ethnographic research and includes two parts:

- Ethnographic research 1 (two Semi-structured interviews).
  - Interview 1 – Participation will involve a photo-voice interview activity
  - Interview 2 – Participation will involve ethnographic poetics, that is writing poems from the participant transcriptions from interview 1. Participants will also be requested to be part of a (approximately 60 minutes) to help them with basic poetry writing
  - Fieldwork – (45 to 60 minutes) observation of participant in their everyday leisure/sporting activities.

Participation is voluntary. The researcher will take every care to remove responses from any identifying material as early as possible. Likewise, individuals' responses will be kept confidential by the researcher and not be identified in the reporting of the research. Participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time, prior to publication, without penalty or affecting their relationship with the researcher. We will provide a \$35 voucher to participants who complete the two interviews and participate in the fieldwork in appreciation of your time and effort.

Please contact me at: [19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au)

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Rohini Balram

School of Education

Western Sydney University

## Appendix 1.c Consent Form – Young Indo-Fijian women

**Project Title:** Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji’s Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

I hereby consent to participate in the above named research project. I acknowledge that:

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s

- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to:

Participating in a 60-80 minutes’ photo-voice interview (including taking 6 to 8 photos two weeks before the interview).

Participate in a poetry workshop, which will prepare participants for the poetry writing activity for interview 2 (Approximately 60 minutes).

Participating in a 60-80 minutes’ interview based on poems written from transcripts of interview 1.

Being observed during a sport/leisure activity in which I am participating.

Having my interviews audio recorded and transcribed.

**I consent for my data and information provided to be used in this project and other related projects for an extended period of time. I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published and stored for other research use but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.**

**Signed:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Return address: Email:** 19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au

Postal Address: P.O.Box 3680, Samabula

The signed consent forms can be handed to me in person – to make arrangements, please call 5089227.

**This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is: H13113**

**What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



## **Appendix 1.d Consent Form – Parent/Carer (Extended)**

**Project Title:** Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji’s Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

I, \_\_\_\_\_, (Name of parent/carers printed) hereby consent for my child  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Print child’s name), to participate in the above named research project.

**I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child agrees to their participation in the project.**

### **I acknowledge that:**

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child’s involvement in the project with the researcher/s
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

### **I consent for my child to:**

- Participate in a 60-80 minutes’ photo-voice interview (including taking 6 to 8 photos two weeks before the interview).
- Participate in a poetry workshop, which will prepare participants for the poetry writing activity for interview 2 (Approximately 60 minutes).
- Participate in a 60-80 minutes’ interview based on poems written from transcripts of interview 1
- Being observed in a sport/leisure activity in her natural life/setting.
- Having her interviews audio recorded and transcribed.

**I consent for my child’s data and information provided to be used in this project and, as long as the data is non-identified, in other related projects for an extended period of time.**

**I understand that my child's involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published and stored for other research use but no information about them will be used in any way that reveals their identity.**

**I understand that I can withdraw my child, or my child can withdraw, from the study at any time without affecting their relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.**

**Signed:**

**Name:**

**Date:**

**Return address: Email:** 19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au

Postal Address: P.O.Box 3680, Samabula

The signed consent forms can be handed to me in person- to make arrangements, please call 5089227

**This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is: H13113**

**What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

## **Appendix 1.e Participant Information Sheet – Young Indo-Fijian women**

**Project Title:** Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji's Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

**Project Summary:** You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Rohini Balram under the supervision of: Ass.Prof. Jorge. Knijnik and Dr. Bonnie Pang from Western Sydney University

There is a lack of research based on understanding the relationship between sports and disadvantaged groups of women such as Indo-Fijian women. Indo-Fijian women are poorly represented in the sporting platforms in Fiji, therefore, it is necessary to explore factors that cause the invisibility of Indo-Fijian women in sports participation. This research project aims to build pathways that promote sports participation in this group and will serve as a platform for powerful/innovative and emerging voices, stories, thinkers and ideas from Fiji. This research project will also create opportunities for critical thinkers of developing countries to connect with gender/racial issues in terms of sports sociology with disadvantaged groups such as the Indo-Fijian women and will add new knowledge of such disadvantaged groups to the knowledge of women and sports in the world.

### **How is the study being paid for?**

The research is for a PhD thesis and will be completed with the assistance of the available student grant.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

The study is based on qualitative research and includes two interviews, one poetry workshop and at least one observation (fieldwork) of each participant in their everyday life, whilst participating in a sports/leisure activity.

**Interview 1:**

This interview is estimated to last between 60 to 80 minutes and involves a discussion based on the 6 to 8 photographs which you would take on your mobile phone or other electronic devices which relate to your experiences/perceptions of sports/exercises/athleticism/physicality in Fiji. You are also welcome to bring along and talk about pictures that have been taken in the past. There will be some questions asked to establish a background in terms of religion, school, career, family, area of residence and hobbies/passions. The interview will be recorded for the purposes of transcription.

**Poetry Workshop:**

You will be invited to participate in a poetry workshop at a venue close to your accessibility. This session is aimed to be of 60 minutes and to equip you with basic poetry writing skills so that you can write free verses out of your transcripts from interview 1. The workshop will have some individual and group activities. In any case if you are not able to/wish not to attend this session, then your transcript will be emailed to you together with explanatory notes on poetry writing (free verses). After the session, you will be given two weeks to create poems which reflect your views and experiences of sports participation and athleticism in Fiji.

**Interview 2:**

This interview will be 60-80 minutes long and will be a discussion on the poem/s that you would have written after the poetry workshop; please get your written poem/s along for this interview. The interview will be electronically recorded for the purposes of transcription.

**Fieldwork:**

You are requested to allow the researcher to observe you during a leisure/sports activity and/or the hobbies which you mentioned in interview 1. The aim of this fieldwork is to observe and take some

field notes (journaling). There are no intentions to take any photographs or do any audio and video recordings. The observation is intended to last from 45 to 60 minutes.

**How much of my time will I need to give?**

1. 60-80 minutes in each interview. An approximate total of 160 minutes.
2. Taking 6 to 8 photos related to sports and exercise experiences and perceptions-15 minutes.
3. Participation in a poetry workshop, which will prepare participants for the poetry writing activity for interview 2 (60 minutes).
4. Poetry Workshop – (60 Minutes).
5. The project is an ongoing one and the abovementioned contact hours will be spread between 5 to 6 months.

**What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?**

There will be no direct benefit to the participant, however there may be a benefit to the broader community through participation through the creation of new knowledge. Your participation will help gain new insights into the reasons of invisibility of Indo-Fijian women from Fiji's sporting scenes and will help promote the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji and the diaspora. However, participants who complete both interviews will receive a \$35 voucher in compensation for their effort.

**Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?**

It is not anticipated that the research should cause any risk or discomfort to participants. However, participants will be able to cease participation and withdraw their data from the study without any consequence. Your child/you can contact 'The Fiji Women's Crises Centre' (+679 3313300/ +679 9209470) and/or 'Child Support helpline' (1325) in case they feel distressed.

**How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?**

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified.

Interview data will be de-identified before publication. Pseudonyms will be used for participants to maintain anonymity. Participants will also have the opportunity to amend their transcripts for errors of expression or fact before publication. In any case, the identities of the participants will be anonymised in all forms of publications.

**Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?**

Please be assured that only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the raw data you provide. However, your data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time. The dataset including the anonymised interview transcriptions will be stored in the hard drive and laptop of the researcher which will be encrypted. After 5 years, all data will be deleted.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason. If you do choose to withdraw, any information that you have supplied will be removed from the study.

**Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact details – Rohini Balram (19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au). They can contact the Chief Investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain a copy of the information sheet.

**What if I require further information?**

Please contact Rohini Balram (19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au, should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

**What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the WSU Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher.

**This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13113.**

## **Appendix 1.f Participant Information Sheet – Parent/Carer**

**Project Title:** Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji’s Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

### **Project Summary:**

Your child is invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Rohini Balram under the supervision of: Ass.Prof. Jorge. Knijnik and Dr. Bonnie Pang (Western Sydney University)

There is a lack of research based on understanding the relationship between sports and disadvantaged groups of women such as Indo-Fijian women. Indo-Fijian women are poorly represented in the sporting platforms in Fiji, therefore, it is necessary to explore factors that cause the invisibility of Indo-Fijian women in sports participation. This research project aims to build pathways that promote sports participation in this group and will serve as a platform for powerful/innovative and emerging voices, stories, thinkers and ideas from Fiji. This research project will also create opportunities for critical thinkers of developing countries to connect with gender/racial issues in terms of sports sociology with disadvantaged groups such as the Indo-Fijian women and will add new knowledge of such disadvantaged groups to the knowledge of women and sports in the world.

### **How is the study being paid for?**

The research is for a PhD thesis and will be completed with the assistance of the available student grant.

### **What will my child be asked to do?**

Your child will be asked to participate in two interviews, one poetry workshop and at least one observation (fieldwork) in her everyday life, whilst participating in a sports/leisure activity.

### **Interview 1:**

This interview will be a 60 to 80 minutes’ discussion, based on the 6 to 8 pictures which your child took in relation to her views and experiences of sports and exercise participation in Fiji. She can also



bring along and talk about pictures that have been taken in the past (digital or print copies) which play importance to her engagement/views of sports/exercise/athleticism.

### **Poetry Workshop:**

The workshop is intended to be of 60 minutes and to be organised at a venue which is near to your child. Please note that if your child lives outside of Suva (capital of Fiji) where the researcher is based, the researcher will travel and will also propose to have a one to one discussion/walk through with the writing of free verses from transcripts with any participant in remote areas. This session aims to equip your child with basic poetry writing skills and explain the requirements (rules) for the poems that she will be requested to write out from her transcripts. After the workshop, your child will be given two weeks to write poems/free verses.

### **Interview 2:**

This interview will last for 60-80 minutes where your child will bring her written poem/s to talk about/. The interview will be recorded for the purposes of transcription and consent will be taken again (verbally) for the audio recording of the interview.

### **Fieldwork:**

You are requested to allow the researcher to observe your child during a leisure/sports activity and/or the hobbies which she mentioned in interview 1. The aim of this fieldwork is to observe and take some field notes (journaling). There are no intentions to take any photographs or do any audio and video recordings.

### **How much of my child's time will he/she need to give?**

1. 60-80 minutes in each interview. An approximate total of 160 minutes.
2. Taking 6 to 8 photos related to sports and exercise experiences and perceptions-15 minutes.
3. Participation in a poetry workshop, which will prepare participants for the poetry writing activity for interview 2 (60 minutes).

4. Poetry Workshop – (60 Minutes).

5. The project is an ongoing one and the abovementioned contact hours will be spread between 5 to 6 months.

**What benefits will my child, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?**

There will be no direct benefit to the participant, however there may be a benefit to the broader community through participation through the creation of new knowledge. Your child's participation will help gain new insights into the reasons of invisibility of Indo-Fijian women from Fiji's sporting scenes and will help promote the sports participation of Indo-Fijian women in Fiji and the diaspora. However, participants who complete both interviews will receive a \$35 voucher in compensation for their time and effort.

**Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for my child? If so, what will be done to rectify it?**

It is not anticipated that the research should cause any risk or discomfort to participants. However, participants will be able to cease participation and withdraw their data from the study without any consequence. The Fiji Women's Crises Centre (+679 3313300/ +679 9209470) and/or Child Support helpline (1325) in case they feel distressed.

**How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?**

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified.

Interview data will be de-identified before publication. Pseudonyms will be used for participants to maintain anonymity. Participants will also have the opportunity to amend their transcripts for errors of expression or fact before publication. In any case, the identities of the participants will be anonymised in all forms of publications.

**Will the data and information that my child provides be disposed of?**

Please be assured that only the researchers will have access to the raw data your child will provide. However, their data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time. The dataset including the anonymised interview transcriptions will be stored in the hard drive and laptop of the researcher which will be encrypted. After 5 years, all data will be deleted.

**Can I withdraw my child from the study? Can my child withdraw from the study?**

Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary and they are not obliged to be involved. Your child can withdraw at any time, or you can withdraw them, without giving a reason. If your child does withdraw, any information that has been supplied will be removed from the study.

**Can I, or my child, tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you or your child, can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact details – Rohini Balram (19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au). They can contact the Chief Investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain a copy of the information sheet.

**What if I require further information?**

Please contact Rohini Balram (19333364@student.westernsydney.edu.au, should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

**What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the WSU Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree for your child to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Consent Form.

The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

**This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13113.**

## **Appendix 1.g Interview Guide – Semi-structured Interview and Photo Elicitation**

### **Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji’s Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study**

Prior our meeting to talk about your experiences with sports in Fiji, I would like you to take a few photos on your own device and bring them to the interview.

#### **Information for participants:**

The purpose of the photos is for understanding your own perceptions of and engagement in sports/exercise and physical activities in Fiji. When taking the photos, please have the following in mind:

- Through your camera, capture what sports/exercise and athleticism mean to you.
- Let your camera share stories of what sporting/physical activities are/are not a part of your life; describe your engagement/disengagement in sports and exercise in Fiji through your eyes.
- Imagine that you have friend with whom you communicate quite a lot on social media-who lives in another country and plays a few different sports. What pictures relating to your own sporting experiences and perceptions in Fiji, would you like to share with him/her?

#### **Interview 1: Photo-voice Interview**

Name of interviewee:

Name of interviewer:

Venue of interview:

Consent form checked and signed:

#### **Background information: (20 minutes)**

- a. Which part of Fiji are you originally from?
- b. What high school/tertiary institute did you attend/are you attending?
- c. How would you describe your ethnic background?

- d. Who do you live with?
- e. What is your religious background?
- f. Would you happen to know what castes your parents are from?
- g. What languages do you speak?
- h. How would you describe your family- traditional, modern, conservation, open minded, etc.?
- i. What are you studying now/where are you working now?
- j. What countries have you travelled to and what were the reasons for travels?
- k. What interests do you have in India, (if any) knowing that your roots are from there?
- l. What are some of your hobbies and how often do you do these activities?

**Photo-voice interview: (45 to 50 minutes)**

- 1. Now let's begin with looking at the photographs which you have taken and brought with you and talk about your perceptions and experiences with sports/exercise and athleticism in Fiji. Let's look at them one by one- so which one will you like to talk about first.
  - a. Can you tell me why you took this picture was taken?
  - b. Do you remember how you felt whilst taking this picture?
  - c. What sort of memories does this place/picture bring to you?
  - d. Can you tell me what appeals/does not appeal to you in the picture and why?
  - e. How does this picture relate to your perception and experiences in sports?
  - f. When you look at this picture, does it trigger your memory in terms of senses (feelings, emotions, smell, sounds, etc.)
  - g. What do you like/dislike about the place where the photograph was taken in terms of experiences with sports/exercises and/or different people present?
  - h. How does this place influence your interest/participation in exercise/sports?

- i. How are your experiences of participation and exposure to sports in the area you stay? Is it different from where you used to stay? How/how not? (for those participants who might have moved from rural to urban areas and vice versa)
- j. What kind of changes would you like to see in order to promote your engagement in sports and exercise?

**Conclusion: (5 mins)**

Is there thing further that you would like to add in terms of your perception and experiences in sports participation in Fiji. Do you have any questions in relation to this project?

Thank you for your time and participation.

## **Appendix 1.h Interview Guide – Semi-structured Interview via Ethnographic Poetics**

### **Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji's Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study**

#### **Information for participants:**

The purpose of the poetry is to allow you to express your feelings, emotions whilst writing about your experiences with sports/exercises/athleticism during your childhood, in school and in adult life (if applicable), in Fiji. The content of your transcript from interview one is your starting point which you will use as a prompt to help trigger the plot of your poem/s (you are not limited to the transcript and are free to add new ideas and experiences which you might not have spoken about during the interview), in terms of a topic/incident/experience in regards to your sporting experiences in Fiji. The idea is to get you to write your narratives in your own words/voice creating an understanding of your own perceptions of and engagement in sports/exercise and physical activities in Fiji.

After you receive your transcript, read through it and highlight areas/subjects you might like to write about. The written poems will be free verses and does not necessary have to rhyme, include figures of speech or follow strict poetry rules. However, if you feel comfortable in using any poetic device, you are welcome to do so.

See this poetry writing as an opportunity to write freely in any sort of style that you wish to and feel free to use your mother tongue together with English or that alone if you wish to. Just be yourself and express any issues that might be sensitive; issues and experiences which you were not able to talk about when prompted in the face to face interview and can write more freely in your own space.

When thinking of your poems, please feel free to use any of the following prompts together with your transcripts:

- Imagine that you are in high school and during your English oral presentation lesson, your teacher has asked you to talk about a lived experience in terms of sports participation. What are some of the things that you would like to tell your teacher and classmates?



- When was the first/last time you took part in a sporting activity? You can describe that and include how you felt about this?
- What feelings are associated when you talk about sports participation and why did/do you feel like that?
- Think of a Bollywood movie based on sports featuring a female athlete. How does seeing a female of your phenotype influence your participation and perception of sports? What are some of your own sporting experiences in Fiji which you can relate to with this sportswoman/movie?
- You are watching the Fiji 7's national team play the Hongkong 7's finals in the IRB series, what are some of the thought that might run through your head; what feelings are associated with you being a spectator?

### **Interview 2: Ethnographic poetics interview**

Name of interviewee:

Name of interviewer:

Venue of interview:

Consent form checked and signed:

### **Ethnographic Poetics-voice interview- Poetry background: (15 minutes)**

1. Tell me how many poems you have written and how long it took you; did you enjoy the process of writing about your sports experiences or would you have preferred another topic /subject to write on-why?
2. Did you use any of the prompts with your transcript or are the poems based on your transcripts alone?
3. Did writing the poem trigger other memories/sensitive issues that we did not talk about in the last interview?

Now let's begin with the poem/s which you have written and brought with you, on your perceptions and experiences with sports/exercise and athleticism in Fiji. Do you want to read it to me?

**Ethnographic Poetics-voice interview – Discussion of written poems: (45-50 minutes)**

- a. Why did you choose to write about this aspect/incident of your sporting experience? What importance does it play in your life?
- b. How did you feel when you wrote about your experiences as mentioned in this poem?
- c. What sort of memories does this incident/experience bring to you?
- d. Can you tell me what appeals/does not appeal to you in the poem and why?
- e. How does this poem relate to your perception and experiences of sports? In Fiji
- f. When you wrote/read this poem, did/does it trigger your memory in terms of senses (feelings, emotions, smell, sounds, etc.)
- g. How does this poem reflect your interest/participation in exercise/sports?

**Conclusion: (5 minutes)**

Is there any other poem that you have written from your transcript that you would like to share and talk about or perhaps read it out to me? Is there anything else that you would like to talk about in relation to your perception and experiences with sports and athleticism in Fiji? Please feel free to ask me any questions in relation to this project that you might like to know?

Thank you for your time and participation.

**Appendix 2.a Participants' Demographics – Age, occupation, place of residence, place of birth, caste and religion**

Participant	Age	Occupation	Residential area	Place of birth	Caste	Religion
Ashriya	15	High School student	Davuilevu	Davuilevu	Kshatriyas	Hindu
Anshu	16	High School student	Nakasi	Nakasi	Unaware	Hindu
Ariel	16	High School student	Nakasi	Nakasi	Unaware	Hindu
Dipika	23	Network engineer	Suva	Lautoka	Kshatriyas	Hindu
Fanny	22	Video editor	Davuilevu	Suva	Unaware	Hindu
Jasmine	22	Tertiary student	Suva	Suva	Unaware	Christian
Khushi	21	Sales assistant /Part time tertiary student	Davuilevu	Rakiraki	Unaware	Hindu
Meena	18	High School student	Nakasi	Suva	Unaware	Hindu
Roshni	24	Stay-home mum	Davuilevu	Ba	Unaware	Christian
Razia	24	Sales clerk	Davuilevu	Suva	None	Islam
Sania	15	High School student	Nakasi	Nakasi	Unaware	Hindu
Sapna	24	Network engineer	Suva	Labasa	Brahmin	Hindu

**Appendix 2.b Participants' Demographics – Mother tongue, spoken languages, language spoken at home and parents' occupation**

Participant	Mother tongue	Spoken languages	Language spoken at home	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation
Ashriya	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Taxi Driver	Housewife
Anshu	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi Hindi, English	Fiji-Hindi	Driver	Housewife
Ariel	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Mechanic	Housewife
Dipika	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English, basic <i>iTaukei</i>	Fiji-Hindi	Retired High School teacher	Housewife
Fanny	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Driver	Community health worker
Jasmine	Fiji-Hindi	English (very basic Fiji-Hindi)	English	Legal officer	Housewife
Khushi	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Farmer	Housewife
Meena	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English, basic <i>iTaukei</i>	Fiji-Hindi	Deceased	Sales Rep
Roshni	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Carpenter	Housewife
Razia	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Taxi Driver	Housewife
Sania	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi, English	Fiji-Hindi	Mechanic	Housewife
Sapna	Fiji-Hindi	Fiji-Hindi, Hindi English	Fiji-Hindi	Businessman	Businesswoman

**Appendix 2.c Participants' Demographics – Number (and order) of siblings, primary and high school type and hobbies**

Participant	Number of siblings	Participant's order in siblings	Primary school type	High school type	Hobbies
Ashriya	3	2nd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Netball and singing
Anshu	1	1st	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Bollywood movies, dancing, studying and reading
Ariel	2	1st	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Bollywood movies, badminton and volleyball
Dipika	2	3rd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Christian, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Hockey, classic Hindi Music, trying new food
Fanny	1	1st	Christian, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Christian, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Dancing, reading
Jasmine	2	1st	<i>iTaukei</i> managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Christian, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Dancing, chess and modelling
Khushi	2	3rd	<i>iTaukei</i> managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Dancing and soccer
Meena	2	2nd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed,	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed,	Netball, reading

			multi-ethnic	multi-ethnic	
Roshni	2	2nd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Cooking and baking
Razia	2	1st	Muslim managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Muslim managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Reading and dancing
Sania	1	2nd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Dancing, badminton and soccer
Sapna	2	3rd	Indo-Fijian managed, co-ed, multi-ethnic	Government- co-ed, multi-ethnic	Gymining, Boxing

**Appendix 2.d Participants' Demographics – Educational level, marital status, number of children, people participant resides with and current sports and physical activities**

Participant	Educational level	Marital status	Number of children	Residing with	Current sports/Physical activity
Ashriya	In Year 10	Single	None	Grandparents, parents, two sisters and brother	Netball
Anshu	In Year 11	Single	None	Parents and sister	None
Ariel	In Year 11	Single	None	Parents and sister	Volleyball & badminton
Dipika	Bachelors	Single	None	Sister and brother-in-law	Hockey
Fanny	Tertiary Certificate	Separated	1	Parents and brother	Dancing
Jasmine	Tertiary	Single	None	Parents and two brothers	Dancing and resistance Training
Khushi	Certificate-Advance Computing	Single	None	Sister, nieces, brother-in-law and mother	Soccer and swimming
Meena	In Year 12	Single	None	Aunty, uncle and cousins	Netball, soccer and rugby
Roshni	Year 12	Married	2	Husband and 2 children	None
Razia	Year 12	Divorced	1	Brother, sister, grandmother, parents and son	None
Sania	In Year 9	Single	None	Parents and sister	Badminton, Soccer, volleyball
Sapna	Bachelors	Single	None	Boyfriend	Power lifting

## Appendix 3a. Poetry Workshop Plan

**Project Title:** Indo-Fijian Women as Subversive Bodies in Fiji's Sporting Arena: An Arts-based Study

### Aims of Workshop:

After the workshop the participants will be able to:

- define what poetry/free verse is
- understand the four basic poetic devices- simile, metaphor, personification and alliteration
- analyse an existing poem for content, themes and emotions
- write a free verse

**Duration:** 60 Minutes

**Participant introductions:** 5mins

### Resources:

- Print out of researcher's written poem on her sporting experiences
- Writing paper and pens
- Print out of poetry writing task

**Ice Breaking ice activity:** 5 minutes

**Activity 1: Group Poem** – All participants are to sit in a circle where one participant will start with a piece of paper and write on it a single word that describes 'sports'." The next participant would add another word, and as the paper continues around the circle, a poem should emerge that expresses the thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears about sports. (In the case of 3 to 4 participants, the paper will be passed around the circle a few times.

**Instructions- Body of the lesson:** 40 minutes

**Definition of poetry:** it is a **literary piece of work that expresses feelings and ideas**. It usually uses a distinctive style or rhythm.



## **Introduction of four basic poetic terms with examples:**

**Simile-** Comparing two things with the use of ‘as’ or ‘like’ – She is fast like a cheetah

**Metaphor-** Comparing two things without using ‘as’ or ‘like’ – She is a cheetah

**Personification-** generally considered a type of metaphor in which an inanimate object is given human qualities or abilities- The cries of the wind could be heard around the stadium when the home team lost the match.

**Alliteration-** Alliteration is the repetition of initial constant sounds of nearby words. It is a literary sound device used for emphasis and effect- “She sells seashells at the sea shore.”

**Activity 2: Individual Poem** - participants are to write out 3 to 4 lines of their favourite songs and then circle all the nouns and plug in new nouns instead. They will then do the same with verbs. The result will be silly sentences that can also be beautiful or profound. The participants will be allowed some time to revise their poems so that they make more sense.

## **Introduction to Free Verse**

### **What is a Free Verse?**

**It** is a type of poetry that does not contain patterns of rhyme or meter. **Free verse** is considered an open form of poetry, as opposed to poetry written in structure or form, and tends to follow natural speech patterns and rhythms.

Let’s write a free verse

**Activity 3: Writing a Free Verse** - Read the article (on the following page)and imagine that you are Saba, you live in India and you play soccer, write out a few lines on any of the incidents/issues that Saba faced as mentioned in the given script. You can describe how you felt as this incident occurred or describe the incident itself in some detail.

# The Indian girls' football team challenging stereotypes

by Priti Salian (24 May 2016)

**Mumbai, India** - All 7ft 2ins of Saba Parveen charge down the centre of the pitch to receive a pass. Then she smoothly dribbles past the defenders and sends the ball curving into the goal with a powerful right-footer.

Seated in the audience, the same boys who jeered at her a couple of years ago, cheer her on. It's difficult to believe that the 25-year-old only learned to play football three years ago. Saba lives in Mumbra, a Mumbai suburb with a largely Muslim, lower and middle income population of 900,000, according to the 2011 Census of India report. Her only previous exposure to sport had been as a child playing cricket with neighbourhood boys on the street outside her home. But as she grew older, even that had become out of bounds. "You want to play cricket? With boys?" she recalls her mother saying as she dismissed her requests.

"I needed my family's consent for everything that I wanted to do outside the four walls of our home," she says. And with four brothers, there was always someone to keep an eye on her.

Being a girl in Mumbra isn't easy, Saba says. Getting permission to spend time in public spaces can be difficult.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/5/24/the-indian-girls-football-team-challenging-stereotypes>

**Conclusion:** 5 Minutes

- Participants can discuss their poems in groups

- Read out their poem if they wish
- Ask questions on the lesson

**Extended Lesson:**

Participants are to write a free verse/poem based on their transcripts from interview 1 within the next fortnight and bring along their written poems to Interview 2.

### Appendix 3b. Sample colour coding on Excel sheet

Gender (wars/paradoxes/bending); Extended body and body image & objectifying gazes; Racial discrimination; Class; Education - Development of mind vs. body; Physicality

Participant	
Ashriya	<p>My grandmother usually says boys can do whatever they like but girls must listen to their parents.</p> <p>My parents don't allow me to go out at night and keep a phone. Because I'm a girl I should not use phone and my brother is a year older and can do anything I don't know why is that I have asked why and think maybe for safety reasons.</p> <p>My grand parents and parents are older and lived more so they know more; I am too young.</p> <p>We wear shorts and in netball we jump to catch the ball... so there are girls gossiping about us so but I don't care about them because it's my life I will do anything. Boys also they have like big eyes when we play, talking about us; they just stand and stare when we play.</p> <p>There are some Fijian boys in school who say things in their language - I don't understand fully but I know they are making fun of me when I play netball- like call me skinny and all.</p>
Sania	<p>The boys teased the girls during PE when they were playing soccer, saying that they will not able to play and sat and watched.</p> <p>I felt uncomfortable and shy to run as the boys were looking at me and I was wearing shorts. Like I start thinking how my body actions are and how they'll see me or what their way of thinking might be.</p>
Meena	<p>It is good to have a toned body with muscles so our body can get healthy and then rough.</p> <p>Because I'm a girl so my parents always dream that when I grow up, they want me to like become something so that's why they're emphasising more on education.</p>
Anshu	<p>Last couple of weeks during PE we focused on our coverage for our mid-term exam, we girls sat down and did our coverage and the boys they usually play sports.</p> <p>A native male PE teacher asked boys to try netball and girls soccer, boys refuse and feel shy to play netball, he then joined the boys and one the girls to encourage them. The girls laughed at the boys when they played netball.</p> <p>Fijian boys are few in school but they are strong and no one messes with them. Fijian men are the strongest in Fiji as they have very fit bodies and play rugby, Fijian women are stronger than Indian women as Indians play sports sometimes but these women are always participating.</p>

Appendix 3c. Participant written free verses

When I hear the whistle  
It is like a canon  
Firing the signal for the game to  
a war between warriors  
with victory on their minds  
There's need to surpass the goalie  
I take a shot and hit the ball  
The ball flies and touches the net  
The crowd set off their feet  
I can still hear their screams  
from thousands of miles away

I FEEL SO SHY  
GROWING UP ANXIOUS  
FOREVER FEELING OVER WEIGHT AND AWKWARD  
BUT THIS PLACE IS NEW  
WHERE I CAN REINVENT MYSELF I HAVE FRIENDS TO GUIDE ME  
ON THIS NEW JOURNEY I HAVE FOUND A PLACE TO CALL HOME  
MY THERAPY, MY ESCAPE  
NO LONGER AFRAID TO BE THE ONLY FEMALE IN THE ROOM  
NO LONGER INTIMIDATED BY AESTHETIC APPEAL OR PHYSICAL STRENGTH  
WE BANTER.  
WE HAVE A LOVE FOR THE SPORT.  
WE ARE FRIENDS  
WE ARE EQUAL.

When on the field I have the fire  
Win or lose don't matter  
To play is what I desire  
I am good as a goalie  
Also ok as a lead  
I desire to see myself in the mid field, rolling  
It's not always about hitting a goal  
Few minutes of play in a day is what it really takes  
Fearless I feel, stress and tension it eradicates  
Reading is my drug but Soccer My passion  
Few friends and a nice game  
Oh! what satisfaction.

It is a bright sunny day  
we tighten up our shoe laces  
The referee on the field blows the whistle  
I enter the field with great confidence  
Our friends boast and cheer  
For years everything when young all was good  
Then suddenly 'Boom' it all goes away  
Lack of recognition from boys  
and all the societal issues  
Regarding interest of girls playing sports  
Parents also made a decision  
that Indo-Fijian aren't fit to field in sports  
We have dreams to become professional players  
and make our parents proud  
That girls are as good as boys  
But it was shattered by the same parents  
For whom the girls dreamt once  
To make them proud.



She took the chance

Because in the end she did not want to regret  
All she wanted was to prove herself  
That she can do it if she tries her best  
Her passion for sports gave her forbidden love in life  
Tears of joy rolled down her cheeks  
When she made it to the national team  
It was a dream come true  
She sat back and recalled  
All the struggles and pain she had along the road.  
Dreams never die, pain never lasts  
To make a difference in her life, against the odds she had to stand  
Now she is living her dream and playing the sports she love  
Away from her family but they always have her back  
She will keep going hard till she has nothing left.  
Never satisfied as she has a point to prove.  
To everyone that anything is possible regardless of the shade  
People will judge, people will talk and say.  
She is a girl, she shouldn't play sports,  
She should be home early  
She shouldn't be wearing this and that  
She puts her faith in her God  
And whenever in doubt, she chants  
I am a fighter  
I am a warrior  
I am fierce  
I am bold  
I am a fighter, I am a warrior, I am fierce, I am bold.

## Childhood memories

Childhood memories still floating in my head.

The most blissful and beautiful of all.

I remember when I used to play touch rugby  
with my two best guy friends.

Tackling and throwing each other on the ground.

Getting up forcefully and running after each other 'as quick as a fox'  
That moment still brings a smile on my face

There were times when I used to play with my uncle at home  
Soccer, badminton, cricket and volleyball

It was so much fun and enjoyable

My uncle taught me how to dribble the ball

And I started improving

Now, basically, I have lost my touch.

All these memories I keep getting in my head, like a movie

Oh! what joy it brings, my childhood memories.

Playing sports is never boring to me  
PE classes and weekends I play it most  
Kicking the ball or shuttle cock is key  
When playing sports my heart and body feel free

Running is key to get good scores  
Kicking is important to get goals  
Tackles are made and tries are saved

In rugby you need to be strong and hard

Sports means you can play really cool games

If you haven't started

I suggest you start today



My life is like a netball court  
With many lines stopping me  
I must not fall on the hard surface  
I listen to the same songs everyday  
I wish something different was happening  
Instead dishes always await me  
I used to enjoy passing a ball  
Now my hands are not so happy touching cold water  
But they happily received and passed the ball  
I don't have many friends  
I wish I still could play netball  
but both my hands are full  
One holds my daughter  
and the other my son.

## I am a dancer

I hear mom saying "it's 8am, don't you have to practice for your performance?"  
I jump out of bed, shower and put a track pants and a tee,  
wear my jogging shoes and grab my jacket as I walk out.  
Despite the rain and the cold wind I walk.  
I pull my hoodie on and start to jog.  
I get back home, do my cool down exercises  
I change into my crop top and shorts.  
I plug on my earphones and play my gigs  
I twirl, I leap and I spin  
I jump, pirouette and tap.  
I am a dancer!  
I feel pain and fear - face defeat and failure  
yet I keep going.  
I smile, I practice, I perform  
I have grace and beauty  
I do not dance because I am happy; I am happy because I dance  
I hear the boys applaud and scream 'woo hoo!'  
I get a flashback - these same boys yelled 'boo hoo!' when I ran  
why the difference - I ask?  
I just dance NOW, I am brave and strong  
for I am a dancer  
I do not dance for fame and glory  
but for the deep happiness that I feel inside  
Dance is alive in me, and I am alive when I dance  
I am A DANCER.

Pass with class - fetch the catch  
That is how I became popular as goal shooter  
Thankful that my parents signed the consent letter  
Each day then in netball I got better  
I love netball, sometimes soccer too  
But rugby with my gang is something else  
Rugby is a game of commitment, teamwork and love.  
Constant support I get when I play  
Even when one person scores the try, the whole team takes the glory.

I LIKE WATCHING KRISHNA PLAY  
BUT I DON'T PLAY  
I DO EXERCISE, LOTS OF WALKING  
AND SOME YOGA WITH MY MUM  
I WISH I COULD WRITE MORE  
BUT THE THOUGHT OF SPORTS MAKES MY BODY SORE  
I DON'T LIKE BEING FORCED TO PLAY  
MY GOALS ARE ~~DIFFERENT~~ DIFFERENT  
READING AND LEARNING ARE MY MEDICINES  
I TOP MY CLASS AGAIN AND ~~AGAIN~~ AGAIN  
I LIKE TO COME FIRST AND MAKE EVERYONE PROUD



## Just a dream

Here I was, dribbling the ball and goaling  
"Practice time is up," I hear the coach yelling  
My girls and I are happy - we are getting better  
All the tackles and the pain, it was WORTH IT.  
We high five and call it a day.  
As I pick up my training bag, coach pats my shoulder  
and says - "great job captain!"  
That's when I woke up and realised -  
it was JUST A DREAM!

## 1. My Family and Sports

Life is a Playground, I live in a very small house  
we make the best of what we have  
My grandparents and parents are strict  
It's hard to fight my way to play netball

My body and mind both love to explore  
I just take a chance  
Save ~~my~~ my mind and body from rotting  
Netball and Economics are my best companions  
I don't want just stay in the kitchen and cut onions.