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Students' physical education experiences in a multi-ethnic class

Ingfrid Mattingsdal Thorjussen  and Mari Kristin Sisjord

Department of social and cultural studies, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

As western countries have become increasingly diverse, education is often emphasized as one of the most important arenas for social integration. However, research within physical education over the past decades has highlighted how students with non-western backgrounds experience processes of 'othering', exclusion, and marginalization in the subject. In the Norwegian context, we have little knowledge about how these processes work within multi-ethnic PE lessons. In addition, scholars have pointed to the tendency of PE research on race/racism and ethnicity to focus on the minoritized 'other', while leaving out the complexity of the multi-ethnic encounter. By applying an intersectional lens, our aim is to investigate students' experiences in a multi-ethnic co-educational PE context. Specifically, we ask how the students' multiple identities may influence their experiences within PE, and what processes of inclusion and exclusion are revealed through their narratives. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in two PE classes, in an urban secondary school in Norway. Data for this article is drawn from one of the classes and consists of written field notes from observation of 26 PE lessons and semi-structured interviews with 11 students. Selection criteria for the interviews were based on gender, ethnic background, visible skills, and attitudes expressed towards the subject, as well as students belonging to different social groupings within the class. Data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. In the article, three students' narratives are discussed. The findings indicate that, while the multi-ethnic learning context is experienced as an arena in which to develop social relations across cultural differences, the students' stories also reveal how ethnic and cultural differences cause tensions in relation to students' interaction during activities and in the changing room. In these tensions, power relations embedded across students' ethnic, gender, and class identities become manifest.

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Introduction

Western countries have become increasingly diverse. In Norway, immigrants and Norwegians born of immigrant parents constitute approximately 17 percent of the total population (SSB, 2017). Politically, education is often emphasized as one of the main arenas for social integration. For example, in 2013 the Norwegian government put into action a five-year plan 'Competence for Diversity' to increase the whole school sector's competency to provide education adjusted to students with an ethnic minority background (Udir, 2013). In physical education, however, there is still a great lack of knowledge of

CONTACT Ingfrid Mattingsdal Thorjussen  ingfridt@nih.no  Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, P.O. Box 4014, Ullevål stadion, Oslo 0806, Norway

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how students from diverse backgrounds experience the subject in the Norwegian context, as only a handful of studies have taken place (Elnan, Kristensen, & Østerlie, 2017; Eriksen, 2002; Smith, 2009; Walseth, 2015).

Internationally, research has shown that increased ethnic and cultural diversity does create challenges for the organization of the subject. PE researchers have pointed to how the subject in western countries is racialized, white-centric, and embedded in Eurocentric thought, and that some students experience stereotypes and marginalization due to their ethnic and/or cultural background (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005). There has been particular focus on the tensions between Islam and western PE praxis (Barker et al., 2014), and how these have led to the exclusion and marginalization of Muslim girls (Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011). Though the meaning of religion in relation to participation in PE is a complex and important issue, it seems that an unintentional unbalanced focus in previous research has led to a narrow understanding of how, when, and which ethnic, cultural and/or religious differences are experienced in relation to the subject. This unbalance might leave understandings such as that Muslim/South – Asian girls are the only students negotiating their cultural and religious identity in PE. In addition, few studies have explored the dynamics occurring in the interactions between students with a minority and students with a majority background. Indeed, as Dowling and Flintoff (2015) pointed out, there has been a tendency for PE and sport research on race/racism and ethnicity to focus on the minoritized ‘other’, and as a consequence leave the complexity of race relations out. By applying an intersectional lens in this article, our aim is to explore the diversity of students’ experiences in a multi-ethnic, mixed-gender PE context.

The article is organized as follows: First we present a review of previous research on PE in multi-ethnic contexts. Thereafter, the theoretical perspective of intersectionality is outlined, before the empirical investigation is presented with methodology and results. The results consist of narratives of three students selected among the interviewees. After that, the narratives are discussed in the light of questions raised in this article and the theoretical perspective. Finally, some concluding remarks.

Previous research

Over the past decades, a growing number of studies have been investigating students’ PE experiences in multicultural/multi-ethnic contexts, or focused more specifically on the PE experiences of ethnic minorities (Azzarito, 2009; Azzarito, Simon, & Marttinen, 2017; Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Barker et al., 2014; Benn & Pfister, 2013; Benn, Dagkas, & Jawad, 2011; Bramham, 2003; Dagkas et al., 2011; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015; Farooq & Parker, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2011, 2013; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012; Hill, 2015; Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Hills, 2007; Knez, Macdonald, & Abbott, 2012; Lee & Hokanson, 2017; McGee & Hardman, 2012; Pang & Hill, 2016; Pang & Macdonald, 2016; Stride, 2016; Taylor & Doherty, 2005; Walseth, 2015; With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011). From these studies, three main themes emerge: (1) the meaning of culture and religion; (2) foregrounding heterogeneity; and (3) how hegemonic PE discourses produce ‘the other’.

In Norway and several other European countries, the majority of immigrants originate from African and Asian countries, many of whom are Muslim. A lot of the studies on ethnic minorities and physical education have for this reason had a specific focus on Muslim students, and especially Muslim girls (Benn et al., 2011; Benn & Pfister, 2013; Dagkas et al., 2011; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015; Farooq & Parker, 2009; Knez et al., 2012; McGee & Hardman, 2012; Miles & Benn, 2016; Stride, 2014; Walseth, 2015). Several studies have reported that girls with an Asian or Muslim background have a lower level of participation in physical education than other students (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012). Explanations have been related to cultural and/or religious barriers for participation and inclusion in the subject (McGee & Hardman, 2012). However, recognizing that being physically active and maintaining good health is encouraged within Islam, studies have addressed how PE fails to take into account

the special needs of this group, hence contributing to exclusion from the subject (Benn et al., 2011; Dagkas et al., 2011).

Lately scholars have pointed to the tendency within previous research to perceive culture and religion as barriers to participation in PE, and that this amongst other factors, has obstructed acknowledgement of the heterogeneity within groups (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012). As such, a number of studies have challenged prevailing stereotypes of different groups of students, illuminating the multiple ways students negotiate and navigate their opportunities to be physically active in PE (Hill, 2015; Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Knez et al., 2012; Lee & Hokanson, 2017; Nelson, 2012; Pang & Hill, 2016; Pang & Macdonald, 2016; Stride, 2014, 2016; Walseth, 2015). For example Stride (2014) used an intersectional lens to highlight how Muslim girls express agency by critically reflecting on their PE curriculum, trying to alter which activities are included, refusing to accept teachers' beliefs about their ability, and seeking other arenas outside the PE context in which to develop their skills. Following the request of several scholars for the implementation of an intersectional perspective in PE research (Dagkas, 2016; Flintoff, Fitzgerald, & Scraton, 2008; Penney, 2002), a growing number of studies have examined how experiences and agency are connected to children and youths' multiple identities (gender, social class, ethnicity, culture, religion, ability), and how these are interlinked (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015; Hill, 2015; Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Stride, 2016; Walseth, 2015; With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011). For example, Hill (2015) and Hill and Azzarito (2012) explored how youths' negotiations of their bodily performances in PE are generated along gendered and racialized lines. In relation to western health discourses, specific bodies and identities are normalized, celebrated, and legitimized within pedagogical settings such as physical education (Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). Furthermore, studies have discussed how the prevailing discourses in physical education, sport and fitness produce 'the other', and position students with different backgrounds hierarchically within existing power relations that benefit white, boys/men, middle class and western interests (Azzarito, 2010, 2016; Azzarito et al., 2017; Barker et al., 2014; Bramham, 2003; Flintoff, 2015; Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006). In a study among British Asian boys, Hill (2015) highlighted the relationship between physical capital, in terms of a strong, competent and fit body, and status in PE. By utilizing visual and participatory methods, she revealed how boys invested in their bodies (did body work) to gain status in the class and amongst peers. She found that, for these boys, even though participating in a single-sex setting, where British Asians constituted the majority, the boys faced racialized definitions of the normative body. From this Hill argues that though:

ethnic minority boys may be able to locally redefine the way that, for example, Asianness and masculinity are defined and performed ... they still engage with broader definitions of sporting bodies and their place in a world where sport is most often linked to whiteness and/or blackness (pp. 775-776).

To summarize, previous research has gone from a focus primarily on minority students' barriers to participation, to exploring and illuminating heterogeneity *within* ethnic minority groups, as well as to an processes of 'othering' within ethnically diverse PE contexts. We agree with Barker and colleagues' (2014) argument that much of the previous research has not fully been able to capture individual difference, and has therefore limited our understanding of ethnic difference within the PE context. Hence, the present study aims to further investigate in which ways students' multiple identities are relevant for their PE experiences, and how their experiences can shed light on processes of inclusion and exclusion in the multi-ethnic, mixed-gender PE setting.

Intersectional perspective

As an analytic tool, intersectionality grew out of the work of black feminists in the 1960s and 70s, as a response to black womens' experiences of finding their issues in a subordinated position within anti-racist, feminist, and union movements (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). From this, intersectionality has spread globally and been developed in different national contexts and fields of research (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Davis (2008) defines intersectionality as 'the interaction between gender,

race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis, 2008, p. 68). Rather than limiting the focus to how a single category such as gender or ethnicity works to shape people's experiences, intersectionality seeks to understand 'the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience' (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 25). As such, intersectionality is concerned with how people's multiple identities position them in any given social context and produce power relations, difference, discrimination, and exclusion.

Looking at intersections alerts us to look beyond additive models of oppression, such as adding the category of ethnicity to that of gender as a 'double burden' in the lives of ethnic minority women (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Rather, the focus is on what makes subjective experiences qualitatively different and how, within a space consisting of different categories (Staunæs, 2003). The importance of each category might vary within different contexts, with no predetermined pattern between categories; however, 'in lived experiences there may be a hierarchy in which in some situations certain categories overrule, capture, differentiate and transgress others' (Staunæs, 2003, p. 105).

Though intersectional work varies in the level of analysis, whether the concern is about 'giving voice' to marginalized groups or foregrounding how inequalities are produced through institutional practices, intersectional scholars acknowledge how oppression works at the institutional, symbolic (hegemonic), and individual level (Choo & Ferree, 2010). However, a post-structuralist emphasis on the individual is present, where centralizing the 'lived experiences as the starting point from which macro structures and processes can be referenced and fore-grounded' (Flintoff et al., 2008, p. 77) becomes important.

One of the core ideas of intersectionality is relationality, and the rejection of binary thinking (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). This is especially important in relation to theories of minority/majority and issues of inclusion/exclusion, as dichotomies make it impossible to explore both/and experiences, and force a ranking such as white over black, men over women. Furthermore, binary thinking excludes the possibility of being simultaneously oppressed and oppressor, and obscures the importance of revealing one's own bias in (re)producing social inequality and unequal power relations (Hancock, 2016). For example, PE research has revealed how an internalization of western discourses prevailing in the subject has led to minority students in some cases becoming complicit in racialized discourses (Azzarito, 2009; Barker et al., 2014; Walseth, 2015), or how white teachers'/researchers' misrecognition of their whiteness in PE teacher education might uphold a deficit view of racialized students, compared to an unmarked white norm (Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2015).

Though the importance of viewing how gender, class, and race intersect has long been advocated for within the field of physical education (Bain, 1985), intersectionality as an analytic lens in PE research is fairly new (Stride, 2016). Today many scholars consider the use of an intersectional perspective crucial to further our understanding of the diverse ways that young people engage with physical cultures (Dagkas, 2016; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). However, there is a danger when highlighting diversity of concealing inequality (Flintoff et al., 2008), especially when including difference without critically examining the relation to unmarked categories. Hence, it is important to also investigate how powerful identities work to define the normative, taken-for granted standards we internalize (Choo & Ferree, 2010). In order to meet some of this challenge and be able to bring forth more of the complexity embedded in individual biographies and experiences, we have narrowed our focus to three student narratives, representing students of both minority and majority backgrounds.

Methodology

The data in this article are drawn from a larger PhD project about secondary students' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in PE in a multi-ethnic school context. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in a co-educational PE class at a public school¹ located in the Oslo area. The first author did data gathering. The data consist of written field notes from observations of 26 PE lessons as

well as semi-structured interviews with 11 students, five girls and six boys, conducted at the end of the observation period. The interviews were carried out in separated rooms at the school during school hours. The interviews, lasting from 50 to 80 min, were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide contained questions about family background, leisure-time activities and interests, and social relations. Other questions centered on welfare, learning outcomes, and perceived learning environment in PE as well as more broadly in school. Because the overall aim of the project was to promote diversity, selection criteria were based on the students' gender, ethnic background, visible skills, and attitudes expressed towards the subject, as well as students belonging to different social groupings within the class. All the students were born and raised in Norway.

For this article, three students' narratives were selected: those of Lea, Mahan, and Christine. We think that they all provide articulate cases showing the importance of ethnic, cultural, gender, and class identity, and hence have the potential to broaden our understanding of diversity among ethnic majority/minority students and their experiences of PE. The students selected represent different positions in terms of integration/inclusion and their relationship to the Norwegian majority culture. According to Dowling (2012): 'Our individual stories say something not only about us as individuals but equally something about the context in which we live and work; micro stories about individual lives are therefore also stories about macro societal relations' (p. 39). As such, narrowing the focus to these students, in combination with the intersectional framework, allows for a more complex understanding of how power relations are embedded in the youths' lived experiences.

We employed a thematic narrative analysis, where each interview/set of field notes was worked on separately, looking for emerging themes (Riessman, 2008). Themes were in some cases drawn directly from the data (for example, friendship); in other cases, themes were built on theoretical concepts (for example, inclusion) (Fangen, 2010). Based on the emerging themes, relevant episodes or quotes in each fieldnote and each interviews were organized into chronological biographical accounts (Riessman, 2008). The biographical accounts then provided the basis for further analysis.

Reflecting on one's position in the research field is a complex matter that has tended to be neglected in PE research (Pang, 2017). Ethnic and racial background is considered an important aspect of the relationship between researcher and participants, especially in studies investigating the meaning of ethnicity for individuals' experiences (Hoong Sin, 2007). Through the interviews, it was implicit how the students positioned me, other students, and themselves within the dichotomy of 'Norwegians' and 'foreigners'. During the analysis, I was reminded of the unequal power relations between me, representing the majority culture, and 'the others', representing minority cultures. An example of this can be drawn from an interview with Maya, a 15-year-old girl living with her father, who had emigrated from Iran 20 years ago. To my question about whether she considered herself Norwegian or Persian, she answered:

Norwegian! Obviously! Not ... no. If **you** think that I am Persian, then for sure **you** think 'Ooh she is probably used to such Persian stuff and things like that', but no, I am Norwegian, Norwegian, Norwegian!

Inspired amongst other by Pennington and Prater's (2016) reflexive work on how their white professional identity had influenced design, implementation and analysis of their previous research, the first author wrote reflexive accounts throughout the project. This process helped raise awareness of how her white ethnic Norwegian positionality, along with other aspects such as gender, social class, age and experience, have influenced on her questions and understandings, as well as on how the participants acted, interacted and talked to her in this study.

In terms of ethical considerations, the project is approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). The school was contacted through the PE teacher, and permission to conduct research at the school was obtained from the school management. Written informed consent was obtained from teachers and parents, and oral consent from the students interviewed. Consent stated that all data would be handled with confidentiality. The participants and parents were informed of the possibility of withdrawing at any time. All names of persons are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Findings and discussion

In order to contextualize the students' experiences, we first give a picture of the class. Thereafter, the cases of Lea, Mahan, and Christine are presented. Each of the cases is discussed in relation to how their diverse background is embedded in their experiences.

Context

The class consists of 26 students, 11 girls and 15 boys. About one third of the students are bilingual. All students except one were born and raised in Norway. The bilingual students' parents came from countries in South Asia, the Middle East, West Africa, or North America. Based on the students' descriptions as well as field notes, the class may be described as a class with distinct social cliques. Most of the students portray it as 'an okay class', while simultaneously describing a class with a lot of teasing and bullying, verbally, physically, and on social media. Several delineate the class as noisy, where a few students 'take up a lot of space', expressed in terms like: 'Pretty noisy sometimes, but not that much in PE, in PE everyone is quite active as a matter of fact' (Gina), and: '... there are many who think they are best, try to show off, it's very noisy actually during lessons' (Christine).

The majority of the students appear motivated for PE and take part actively in the lessons. The class has had the same PE teacher in grades 9 and 10. He is a white, ethnic Norwegian, educated PE teacher with several years of experience. He is popular among the students and described as competent, well prepared, and inclusive. Throughout the fieldwork, he facilitated a broad spectrum of activities, employing various teaching methods.

Lea

Lea is born and raised in Norway. Her parents escaped from Sri Lanka because of war. She lives together with her parents and a younger brother. Both parents are full-time workers; her mother is an accountant and her father a chef at a school. They are Hindus, and Lea says that her Tamil and Hindu background is important to her family. Every Sunday she attends the Tamil school, where they learn language, history, and social studies. At the same time, a strong orientation towards integration in Norwegian society is apparent. The family speaks Norwegian at home, her mother attends a fitness studio, her brother plays competitive soccer, and, until recently, Lea used to play handball in a sport club. At home, they have a treadmill, which her mother encourages her to use 'so I don't get fat'. Lea likes swimming, and dancing with the girls at the Tamil school, and she proudly recounts how she came second at the Tamil school's sports day last year. Lea enjoys going to school, and she has a few friends. However, she also says that she has experienced being bullied by classmates over some time, because of her name and religion.

A contradiction is present in Lea's story between enjoyment of physical activity outside school and how she describes herself in relation to PE:

I'm not that sporty. Actually I am quite lazy, and I don't really like PE, not really, if it is hard work and stuff (...) then I get tired ... so I do not like PE that much. ...

Yet, during observation and parts of the interview, there is some indication that Lea enjoys PE, as expressed here:

I think it is fine that we have PE ... I manage some of the stuff we have, but I'm not that fast running and stuff ... like the 60 meters, I'm not fast ...

In PE lessons, however, she appeared to be a devoted student, active and tough, not afraid of the ball during games. She is interested in learning sports and she likes the opportunities PE provides for getting to know her class, especially when girls are together apart from boys: 'I like it best if it is

only the girls. It's like, then they support you, make you feel confident.' Important for Lea's PE experiences is PE as a social arena, allowing her to build social relations and a sense of community, which reflect her gendered and ethnic identity and her family's orientation towards integration, but also seeking community with girls, similar to her Tamil school context.

Although expressing confidence and physical ability in her leisure activities and the Tamil school context, Lea appears to be excluded from the image of a good student in the context of PE (Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Pang & Macdonald, 2016). While eagerly narrating her sporting experiences from the Tamil school, such as practicing for a dance show, or taking part in sport days, she continuously underlines her non-sportiness and lack of skills in relation to PE. Many students, including Lea, talked about status among peers being related to being good at sport, a body pressure to be fit and slim, and have a nice body, as well as dieting, and having a healthy lifestyle. Also, at home Lea is negotiating a fitness discourse in her mother's encouragement not to get fat. By portraying herself as non-sporty and rather focusing on the social aspects of PE, Lea's narrative could be read as a resistance to the dominant discourses, similar to some of the girls in Stride's (2014) study among South Asian girls. Yet, in the PE context, not every subject position is available to Lea, as reflected in a comment made by her classmate Christine: 'Lea is the total opposite of me. She does not like exercising at all.' As a result, her resistance might reproduce the stereotypical picture often attached to ethnic minority girls of Asian heritage in relation to physical activity: that they are non-sporty and lazy (Stride, 2016; With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011). In this sense, Lea's devaluation of her physical capital in PE could be understood as 'internalized oppression and learned bias' (Hancock, 2016, p. 82).

Mahan

Mahan's parents are from Iran, but have lived in Norway for almost 20 years. Mahan was born and raised in Norway. He perceives himself as mainly Persian, which he relates to his parents' cultural background, e.g. language, traditions, and food that are Persian. His parents are Muslims, and Mahan describes them as liberal, not strictly following religious rules. His parents are divorced, but live in neighboring blocks, and Mahan stays every other week with each. Both parents have higher education and are full-time workers, the mother in a technical position at a hospital, his father as an engineer. Mahan has an older sister, who is taking general studies in high school. In his spare time, Mahan plays soccer with friends. Sometimes he does some jogging on his own. He wants to start training at a fitness studio, but his parents prevent him. They are afraid he will lift too heavy weights before he is fully-grown. His parents encourage him to go back to play competitive soccer with the local team instead. Mahan says that he enjoys school because of his many friends. He has been one of the bullies at school, and in his class. Though he says that he has pulled himself together, he experiences being treated unfairly, and being the first to be accused if something bad happens.

Mahan enjoys PE. He likes the PE teacher whom he describes as competent, a teacher with concrete plans for each lesson and one who takes the students seriously. He enjoys ball games, and amongst others has gained an interest in basketball after learning the game during PE classes. He also likes running and learning sprint techniques, which has made him a faster runner.

Experiences of cultural differences are portrayed throughout Mahan's narrative. There is a clear division between *us* (foreigners) and *them* (real Norwegians), in PE, in school more generally, and outside the school context. Like many of the interviewees, he talks about students being bullied because of their cultural and religious background, especially Muslim girls:

... there are some with hijab and stuff that many laugh at, or some laugh at and joke about their father forcing them and that they are not allowed to go outside their house and should only be in the kitchen to cook.

In relation to PE, he tells how some students can experience the meeting with Norwegian body culture as challenging, both in relation to how to dress and in relation to showering after the

lessons. In a long explanation, he talks about how boys with a non-western background wait to shower because they feel it as uncomfortable when:

... someone is showering naked, joking and stuff while they are naked with their body ... in Norway that's just normal and stuff like that, while someone from another country with a totally different culture might think that it is disgusting or uncomfortable, so that person might wait until the others are finished.

However, he adds: 'It's not just foreigners; there are some original Norwegians that wait too because they think it's uncomfortable.' When I asked Mahan whether the other students respect it if someone choose to shower after the others, he explains:

it's like if someone is bigger, then they might laugh and say "you are not showering with us because you are fat" or something like that, so yes it can lead to bullying.

Apparent in Mahan's story is how he is negotiating both his Persian background (body modesty) as well as a western youth culture (fitness, being sexy). Throughout the interview, Mahan describes how Norwegian body culture might be experienced as 'disrespectful' and 'repulsive' by students with non-western backgrounds. At the same time, he seems to be caught up in a fitness discourse, seeking a fit and slim body, apparent in his wish to exercise in a fitness studio. The complexity becomes present in PE, particular in the changing room, where different body cultures meet, as described by O'Donnovan, Sandford, and Kirk (2015). The changing room is a 'value laden site in which the proximity to other bodies facilitates (perhaps even necessitates) a process of comparison, surveillance and self-regulation' (p. 57). As such, Mahan's story reveals some of the hidden learning experiences, e.g. how the locker room becomes a site where students with a non-western (minority) background learn about Norwegian body culture.

It is interesting to note also how he turns the conversation from a question of respect for one's ethnic identity to focus on body appearance and students being bullied because 'you are fat'. His move could be understood as a way of resisting a marginalization of minority cultures, making the issue more of a general problem.

Christine

Christine was born and raised in Norway. She lives in an apartment in a block together with her mother, father, and older brother. Her parents are ethnic Norwegians. They have high school education and are full-time workers, her mother in the health service, her father in a workshop. Her brother has just finished vocational studies to become an electrician. Her family are Christian, but not active participants in church. Christine has attended a broad spectrum of leisure activities, such as sport, theater and Scouts. Her family has a physically active lifestyle and encourages Christine to exercise. Her brother plays competitive soccer and attends a fitness studio. Christine formerly played soccer, but quit and started volleyball instead. Christine likes going to school and has a lot of friends. During the interview, she continuously distinguishes between the popular, described as self-confident and not obeying rules, and the unpopular, where she and her friends belong.

Christine enjoys PE and is a hard-working student. When the teacher sometimes makes it voluntary to do a last round of running or strength exercises, Christine always takes part. In contrast to previous research showing that many girls lose their enjoyment for PE as they enter secondary school (Mordal Moen, Westlie, & Skille, 2017), Christine's interest in the subject has increased. She loves competing and working to achieve new records, particular in running:

its *that* feeling when you sort of can just give all in and sort of like be the first or like get in like one of the best for example then it is sort of like *the* adrenalin kick in a way ...

She further elaborates on the importance of an inclusive and supportive community when competing: '... then you can push each other forward, cheer on each other and sort of be happy together'.

When talking about what they learn in PE, she commonly emphasizes knowledge about taking care of the body. In PE, they learn about methods for strength training, and how they should eat and exercise to promote a healthy lifestyle, reflecting a health and fitness discourse apparent in her narrative: 'you have to exercise in a way to sort of burn some calories. You cannot just sit here and eat, one has to do something.' She also admits great pressure exists among peers, in terms of having a nice body, doing well in sport, and being in good shape.

Despite her seeming enjoyment of sport and physical activity during leisure, and satisfaction with her effort in PE, her narrative reveals tensions in relation to gender, race/ethnicity, and bodily experiences. Central to her story is gender as a barrier for learning experiences. She says that the boys are noisy and excluding in ball games, and stare at the girls' bodies, commenting, and thereby creating insecurity:

... for example, when we have swimming ... then I would like to be girls only, instead of having to ... think about the boys too, that they sort of look at your body in a way ... as they usually do ...

Christine's story also contains experiences of ethnic differences, how ethnic tensions are formed in the multi-ethnic class. For example when the PE teacher invites them to form pairs or small groups on their own:

I can be with anyone, but sometimes ... I'd like to be with my best friend ... but suddenly the others, like I am friend with those too, but they are from another country, or have another skin color for example, and they are thinking like "ooh, you don't want to be with us", and then the two of them (Lea and Diana) have to be together ... but I've told them sometimes "I can be with you!" But they think like ... they use the word "racist!" sort of ... it is just for fun ... one just thinks of it like a joke.

As the quotation indicates, and as Christine reveals elsewhere in the interview, she wants to be inclusive, and build social relationships across ethnic divisions. Her invitation, however, is met with the accusation of being a racist. Christine's statement is, however, ambiguous. By writing off Lea's racist accusation as a joke, Christine's majority position becomes apparent, as joking about racism can be understood as a way of preserving the norm of whiteness (Essed, 2005).

Discussion

The narratives of Lea, Mahan and Christine reveal some similarities with regard to family background. They grew up in the same neighborhood, with parents working full time, belonging to lower middle/middle class. Their families support a physically active lifestyle, and encouraged their children to exercise. The three students enjoy being physically active, however their experiences differ at several points due to their gendered and ethnic identities, and their relation to the majority culture.

In order to understand how categories are lived and experienced Valentine (2007), in line with McCall (2005), suggests exploring how people use identities to mark differences between groups in specific contexts, and 'how particular identities become salient or foregrounded at particular moments'. (Valentine, 2007, p. 15). The narratives of Lea, Mahan and Christine make visible the fluidity and complexity of how the students' multiple identities are experienced, and how different situations in physical education enforces their different identities. For Christine gender is central to her swimming experiences, as she sees it as an arena where girls' bodies are looked upon. For Lea, also, gender is of importance for creating a supportive learning environment, when only girls are together. In Mahan's story, gender appears significant in relation to racialized masculine body cultures, where boys with ethnic minority backgrounds may experience 'otherness' and marginalization. Furthermore, in line with earlier research, both Lea and Christine experience physical education as dominated by boys (see for example With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011), while Mahan somehow admits to be among the dominant and noisy boys.

Central to the narratives is how notions of 'the body' play an important part. It is evident that the three are, from their different outlooks, negotiating western health-, sport- and fitness discourses (Walseth, Aartun, & Engelsrud, 2015). While being able to redefine and see herself as physically

competent in her private life (Tamil school and leisure activities), Lea perceives herself as non-sporty in relation to PE. This may indicate how Lea is faced with racialized definitions of sporting bodies within the PE context, in which ethnic-minority girls are pictured as stereotypically inactive in sport. (Hill, 2015). Mahans' narrative reflects the intersection of gender, culture and the body. He is concerned with body appearance, however, his experiences balance between seeking a fit (non-fat) body, and being offended by western nakedness. Mahan says that fat boys' bodies may cause bullying, which might explain his wish to start to exercise at a fitness studio. According to Hill (2015) 'the intersection of sporting masculinities, body work and status in PE may especially affect minority boys' (p. 775). Mahans' story of how ethnic and cultural differences are experienced in the locker room adds to 'identifying the complexity of masculinity' (Hill, 2015, p. 775; see also Bramham, 2003; Campbell, Gray, Kelly, & MacIsaac, 2018 for interesting discussions). Christine is pre-occupied with health, appearance and performance, reflecting her position in a western health, sport-and fitness discourse. She admits that she feels great pressure in relation to bodily appearance, particularly in gender mixed contexts.

As has been a concern of several scholars, our data indicate that racial issues are still a 'silenced dialog', rarely addressed in PE (i.e. Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Douglas & Halas, 2013). Yet, the narratives reveal that ethnic/cultural background plays a crucial role in students' PE experiences, especially in their interaction with peers. Data show how issues related to ethnicity/race/cultural differences are dismissed as unimportant, indicating how discourses of whiteness are at work in PE (Barker, 2017). For example Mahan marginalizes his own statement by adding that '... it's not only foreigners or those with a non-Norwegian background ... [that do not want to shower together]'. Though Mahan's claim is of importance, rejecting the common assumption that it is only minority students who have a 'shower problem', it may at the same time contribute to legitimizing of not dealing with how cultural differences are experienced in PE, thus leaving the Norwegian majority culture undisputed. Furthermore, in explaining Lea's racist charge as a joke, Christine renders harmless what might be deeper structures of exclusion, and manages to preserve her privileged (white) position, being the one in position to offer inclusion.

Like most of the students interviewed, the three students presented here all experienced PE as a social arena, a place to be with friends and/or develop new friendships, which relates to former research emphasizing that social relations and friends may promote a safe learning environment in PE, particularly for girls (Ennis, 1999; Hills, 2007; Stride, 2014). This becomes especially important in school contexts where ethnic and cultural diversity is increasing, since there seems to be little mixing between youths with majority and minority backgrounds in their spare time (Steen-Olsen, 2013), and that this division gets more distinct from childhood to adolescence (Rysst, 2015). However our data reveal how the students' social experiences in the multi-ethnic class also point to processes of exclusion along ethnic lines. The stories presented in this article show that ethnic divisions are an important part of students' experiences', though, when not spoken about openly in PE, this might create an exclusive learning environment, reinforcing cultural differences. Even Christine's (apparently) open invitation fails in her attempt to bond across ethnicity.

Conclusion and implications

Through the three students' narratives, the study has demonstrated the complexity of how students' multiple identities intersect and shape their PE experiences. Their narratives revealed how various situations in the subject conveyed different aspects of the students' identities to be foregrounded. A common feature in the narratives was related to how the students faced racialized discourses of health, sport and fitness, in line with former research (e.g. Azzarito et al., 2017; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015; Hill, 2015; Hill & Azzarito, 2012). The idealization of sporty bodies and issues related to nakedness were closely linked to western culture, causing experiences of exclusion for Lea and Mahan. Furthermore, the results illustrated the importance of PE as a social arena in the multiethnic PE class. PE was seen as a place to build social relations within the class. However, the study is a reminder of the

continued 'silenced dialog' around race and ethnicity in PE. Ignoring the ways ethnicity shapes both individual experience in PE as well as the interaction among students might result in ethnic and cultural differences becoming sources of tensions and exclusion rather than an enrichment in the PE learning environment.

The importance of how students' experiences are influenced by their gendered identities has long been recognized within the field of PE (Ennis, 1999). However, in line with Barker et al. (2014), the study showed that the way cultural/ethnic/race, social class or other identity markers are relevant for students' PE experiences often works at a more subtle level. Hence, it is important to ask 'when some categories such as gender might unsettle, undo, or cancel out other categories ...' (Valentine, 2007, p. 15). Though we have attempted to highlight the complexity of how intersecting categories are experienced in the multi-ethnic mixed gender PE class, our analysis has limitations in terms of not paying particular attention to how the students' social class might co-work in the processes of inclusion or exclusion. Based on the interpretation of the three narratives, the study reveals the complexity that is embedded in individual stories. Our study might be considered as a modest contribution to the multifaceted field of PE in multi-ethnic contexts, which needs to be further explored.

Note

1. In Norway, 96,4 percent of the students attend public schools (SSB, 2016).

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ORCID

Ingrid Mattingssdal Thorjussen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8199-6625>

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