

Challenging stereotypes: Muslim girls talk about physical activity, physical education and sport

Kelly Knez^{a,b*}, Doune Macdonald^b and Rebecca Abbott^b

^a*Aspetar, Qatar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, Doha, Qatar;* ^b*School of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia*

Often labelled as ‘problematic’ within health and physical education (HPE) and sporting literature, young Muslim women’s participation is frequently understood through both cultural and religious limitations seen to be placed upon them. Although these factors are negotiated by many young Muslim women, and contribute to the way in which some will understand and participate in physical activity, it would be misleading of those working within the fields of HPE and sport to assume that these are definitive, and apply to all. Through exploring the diverse ways in which eleven young, Australian Muslim women spoke about, and engaged in, physical activity, we provide a different narrative for HPE teachers and community based practitioners to both consider and draw upon in their curriculum and policy design and daily practices.

Keywords: health; physical activity; Muslim; physical education; girls; sport

Research which understands young Muslim women and physical activity through a deficit framework fails to consider the difference and diversity within the lives of these young women (Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011; Macdonald, Abbott, Knez, & Nelson, 2009). Often labelled as ‘problematic’ within health and physical education (HPE) and sporting literature, young Muslim women’s participation is frequently understood through both cultural and religious limitations. The significance of gender-segregated environments, considerations for modest and/or religious clothing, and allowances whilst fasting during Ramadan have been highlighted by many scholars (see for example Benn, 1996; Carroll & Hollinshead, 1993; Dagkas & Benn 2006; Kahan, 2003; Zaman, 1997). Whilst these are certainly important factors which are negotiated by many young Muslim women globally, and contribute to the way in which some will understand and participate in physical activity, it would be misleading of those working within the fields of HPE and sport to assume that these are definitive and apply to all. Subsequently, what we hope to do here is provide an alternative ‘story line’ to stereotypes that are often held up as ‘truth’ within Western society. Excerpts from interviews with 11 young Muslim women conducted over the course of two years convey the pleasures, contradictions, and tensions associated with physical activity in their lives.

The following sections of this article will present the challenges and opportunities encountered in the three main avenues through which these young women negotiated physical activity: family, school and community. Rather than grouping the existing

*Corresponding author. Email: kelly.knez@aspetar.com

knowledge relevant to these three fields here in the introduction, a brief literature review will foreground each of three sections to follow highlighting the extant knowledge and gaps in each area.

Method

This research formed part of the larger, longitudinal study called the Life Activity Project (see Wright & Macdonald [2010] for detail regarding project methodology and methods). This larger project sought to explore the meaning and place of physical activity in the lives of young Australians. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Queensland, and approval sought from both Queensland Education and the principals of the schools where participants were recruited. The data that are drawn upon here have been sourced from a smaller cohort of young Muslim women who lived in a capital city on the east coast of Australia, and attended one of two secondary schools. Both schools were mixed-sex, government high schools, which offered core HPE, and intra- and inter-school sporting programmes. Five young women from School A and six young women from School B, who self-identified as Muslim, volunteered as research participants. Ten of the 11 participants were from nuclear families, and all participants had siblings ranging from one to five in number. With the exception of one participant, the young women were either born overseas, or had parents who had immigrated to Australia. Countries of origin of the participants and/or their parents include Iraq, Kuwait, UAE (Palestinian), Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Fiji/Indian, Somalia and Australia. The 11 participants – 14 years of age at the beginning of the project – were each interviewed seven times over a two-year period. The interviews were conducted at school, typically during lunch times or HPE classes and lasted for 30–90 minutes in duration, depending on the participants' willingness and/or ability to discuss the topics in depth. Semi-structured in nature, each interview focused on a theme, for example, physical activity, health and fitness, the body, the use of space within the local neighbourhood, daily routines and regimes.

The findings presented here are situated within an interpretive framework (Macdonald et. al, 2002). We were particularly interested in what physical activity in the lives of the 11 participants 'looked like'. That is, what activity did the young women engage in on a day-to-day basis? How were spaces within the local neighbourhood (including the school, parks, council facilities) used? Who was influential in enabling or constraining access to physical activity? These guiding questions were used as the initial lens through which the transcripts were read. From this reading, three themes developed: families, school and community. Emerging within these themes we continued to see positive experiences of the young women participating in physical activity that contradicted much of the current literature. It is through the participants' perspectives, presented using the participants' self-selected pseudonyms, that we present an alternative story line of participation in physical activity which can 'talk back' to some of the popular beliefs surrounding what Muslim women can and can not 'do' and share the young women's 'voices' (Iisahunter, 2009).

Research findings: Muslim girls 'talk'

Physically active with families

Despite an abundance of research concerning the positive influence of families on young people's engagement in physical activity, the majority of this research sits within the paradigms of epidemiology and psychology (Macdonald et al., 2004). Furthermore, few have seriously considered the role of the family when exploring the different ways in which young Muslim women make meaning of, and participate in, physical activity. Current sociological research which has explored young Muslim women and physical activity has typically focussed on sport or school-based HPE, with little consideration of the way in which the family intersects with young Muslim women's understanding of, and participation in, physical activity. An important departure from this, however, is the work conducted by Kay (2006) and Walseth (2006). Kay (2006) identifies the various ways young Muslim women in Britain negotiate the juxtaposition of family identity with the Western experiences encountered on a daily basis, with a particular focus on sport. Walseth (2006) highlights the way in which previous literature has focussed on the role of immigrant parents (not necessarily Muslim) as 'agents that constrain' participation (p. 87). Walseth extends this notion within her own research to conclude that whilst parents of some of the young Muslim women in her study certainly constrained their participation in sport, they were also just as likely to be supportive. This notion of 'enabling and constraining' can be applied to the young women within this research and extended beyond participation in sport to include the larger umbrella term of physical activity. Below are examples from two of the young women in this study, whose parents enabled participation in physical activity.

Kameela: My mum loves to swim, when she was little she used to swim a lot, she taught herself how to swim, and she likes me to do swimming. She wants me to do swimming a lot.

Interviewer: And how did you learn to do calisthenics, who has taught you that?

Kameela: Um, my father. But now I like play soccer (with him) and calisthenics, and he tells me like, to do high kicks, he puts up his hand like, he puts up his hand and he says to kick this high.

Ranya: We try to exercise, me and my mum you know, if we have time we will take my little sister and brother and we will put them in the strollers and go for walks.

Parents acted as enablers to participation for both Ranya and Kameela through both encouraging the young women to participate, and also engaging with them. These types of comments were not limited to Kameela and Ranya, with many of the other young women (for example Jasmine, Tasneem and Yvette) describing how their parents encouraged them to be physically active. Walking, swimming and going to the park and beach with parents on weekends were common occurrences for many of the young women in this study. The talk of the young women however, also provided examples of the ways parents constrained participation in physical activity. Whilst Ranya often walked with her mother for exercise, her parents were more cautious of participation in 'club sports', as shown by the way in which Ranya talks about how her sisters' participation in sport is constrained by her parents.

Interviewer: Why isn't your sister in a [sporting] club, if she loves sport so much?

Ranya: I don't know, maybe cause, you know, we have a large family and we don't have time to take her, my mum and dad don't have time to take her to the clubs . . . and maybe they don't even want to take her because they might be afraid for her.

Interviewer: What do you mean by 'afraid for her'?

Ranya: You know because she is a young girl, and something may happen to her if it is too far away.

The two examples provided by Ranya so far, remind us of the necessity to move beyond the boundaries of sport and HPE to include the broader notion of physical activity. Although Ranya's parents seem supportive of her participating in physical activity and 'taking exercise' by walking for example, there are limitations on what she (and her sister) is able to do. Sport, it would seem, provided a gendered element of risk and concern for personal safety. Another participant, Zeena, also gave an example of how her parents impeded her participation in sport through both their lack of interest in sport, and their belief that it is 'not good for a girl to do sports'. For both Ranya and Zeena, the way in which gender intersects with sport is significant when considering the way their parents constrain their participation. This is not a new finding constrained to some Muslim parents: other studies have found that parental restriction of independent mobility, with regards to being physically active, is more prevalent amongst adolescent girls than boys (Carver, Timperio, Hesketh, & Crawford, 2010; Tranter & Pawson, 2001). Halpern also commented on the gendered-associated constraints, such as social pressures and lack of parental encouragement that girls face compared to boys, in explaining lower levels of physical activity (Halpern, 2003).

Although a detailed exploration of gender is beyond the scope of this paper (see Knez [2010] for a feminist poststructural analysis of the way the young women in the present study negotiated discourses surrounding gender), it is important to reiterate that the parents of both young women are supportive of their daughters' participation in the broader notion of physical activity, as opposed to sport. Deem and Gilroy (1998) suggest that the broader term of physical activity does not carry with it 'masculine' characteristics that can be found in many sports within Western society. Furthermore, they state that the use of the term physical activity allows for the inclusion of more women who are active, but not necessarily participating in formal, organized sport. Deem and Gilroy's arguments for the use of the broader term of physical activity are significant when considering the way in which both Ranya and Zeena's parents enable and constrain their participation.

To further understand the way family intersects with physical activity, we need to look beyond parental influences and also consider the role of siblings and, in Zeena's instance, the extended family. Despite Zeena's parents' disapproval of her participation in sport, she was able to participate in physical activity with members of her extended family:

Interviewer: Okay, so in terms of physical activity do you still dance? Do you still do some Indian dancing now?

Zeena: Um, I do it at functions, at weddings and stuff like that; you just get up and have like fun. You get to wear really nice clothes when you are doing that and it's fun as well.

Interviewer: And where do you practise that?

Zeena: Oh, just at home, and my aunty and cousins all live close, and we are going to go to their house and practise, and it will be good.

This opportunity to be 'physical' within the safe and culturally sanctioned space of the extended family is one which may be overlooked in research which only considers formalised sport and physical activity as legitimate types of movement. As an only child, Zeena did not have the opportunity to participate in 'less structured' physical activity, or play, with siblings, however she frequently referred to her extended family, including adult aunts as facilitators for movement. For other young women, the role which siblings played in their daily physical activity was more significant, as shown below.

Interviewer: Who do you play with? Where do you play?

Sarina: Um, I usually, me and my (older) sister we usually go for a jog at the park, and I'll take a soccer ball, or basketball and we start playing with it.

Interviewer: How often do you do that?

Sarina: Probably every second day.

Interviewer: Why do you do it?

Sarina: Just for fun.

Yvette: Because, I play a lot of rugby and stuff with my brothers, because they encourage me, and yeah.

Interviewer: Are you stronger than them?

Yvette: No they are all older than me, like one's twenty and the other is seventeen. And like this is the first time I have played volleyball so I like that.

Interviewer: And where do you play that?

Yvette: Up at the hall [at school]. And I sometimes play with my oldest brother at home.

Jasmine: I walk home and am tired, but I'll have a little snack, and then get outside in the yard and play with my brother and sister, like kick ball, you know little kids' games.

The opportunity to 'play' with siblings outside of school hours provided an invaluable space for participation in regular physical activity away from (and in addition to) HPE and organised sport. Furthermore, for Yvette and Sarina this opportunity also allowed for exposure to activities such as rugby and soccer that are typically seen to be 'non feminine' within Western society. As with Zeena, this informal, less structured form of physical activity with family members creates possibilities for Yvette and Sarina in spaces and places that are often not acknowledged within the literature.

Indeed for the six young women discussed so far, the family played a significant role in facilitating their engagement in physical activity. Whilst parents can certainly act as a 'constraint' to participation in sport, it seems that when the broader term of physical activity is used, parents are more likely to act as important enablers for the

young women. Exploring the role of siblings and extended family has also enabled a new and different understanding of physical activity engagement patterns. For Zeena, Jasmine, Sarina and Yvette, these 'other' family members provided the space and opportunity to be active on a regular basis, without the dependence upon organised and structured activity, such as HPE and sport. Interestingly, there did not appear to be a relationship between religiosity and the opportunities to participate in physical activity with family.

Physically active at school

As Benn, Dagkas, and Jawaad (2011) highlight, school is, for some young Muslim women, the only place where formal physical activity will be experienced. Indeed this was evidenced among some of the participants in the present study where school-based sport, and to a lesser extent HPE, provided valuable opportunities for many of the young Muslim women in this project to engage in physical activity. Furthermore, the way in which most of the young women embraced opportunities to participate in school-based activity contradicts much of the HPE and sport literature which positions young Muslim women as 'problematic' (Carroll, & Hollinshead, 1993; McInerney, Davidson, Suliman & Tremayne, 2000).

Both schools were involved in a Wednesday afternoon (12.30 pm–3 pm) inter-school sports programme. Students in Year 8 and 9 were encouraged to nominate and/or tryout for membership in a variety of summer or winter sports. Teams were allocated a coach (usually a teacher) and students attended regular training sessions and competed on a weekly basis (alternating between home and away games). Grand final winners from each district went on to compete at an inter-district level. Students who were not members of an inter-school team participated in activities which were conducted at the school. Although there was little enthusiasm among the 11 participants towards HPE, seven of the young women in this study belonged to inter-school sporting teams for both summer and winter competition.

Although Zeena's parents 'don't think it's good for girls to do sport', it is through her schools' Wednesday afternoon inter-school sports programme that Zeena was given the opportunity to be a member of a sporting team which trained and competed on a weekly basis.

Interviewer: Okay, so you're playing in the school netball team?

Zeena: I love, I extremely enjoy playing netball. I love netball.

Interviewer: Why do you like netball?

Zeena: I don't know. I just played it all my life, I enjoy playing, I don't like playing basketball, it's too rough for me. I've always played netball, so I'm just not used to basketball, I actually hate it. I don't hate it, I just don't find it . . . I find it scary. Soccer, I like soccer. I don't know, I just really really love netball, I played it all my life basically. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Zeena: If I had a choice . . . see I really wanted to play outside school netball, like for other teams, outside of school, but I never got the chance to ask my parents. Like, I know they would be like 'No, it's going to interfere with your studies too much'.

Zeena spoke passionately of her love for netball, and how much she enjoyed being a member of a sporting team. Additionally she reminded us in her last sentence that if it was not for school sport, she would not be able to play competitive netball. Jasmine, who attended a different school to Zeena, expressed a similar passion for playing inter-school sport.

Jasmine: Oh I love playing netball; netball is cool.

Interviewer: And do you play that in school?

Jasmine: Yeah.

Interviewer: And is that on Wednesday sport?

Jasmine: Yeah, I just love playing netball. I'm mostly good at soccer, but if it's netball or basketball, cause in summer time, I play basketball because netball is a winter sport, I play netball in winter time. That's the sport I like.

Tasneem and Sarina were also members of inter-school sporting teams, but unlike Zeena and Jasmine who both played netball, these two young women played touch football (Tasneem) and soccer (Sarina):

Interviewer: On a scale of one to ten, how are your fitness levels?

Tasneem: Um, a seven maybe.

Interviewer: And why do you place yourself as a seven?

Tasneem: Cause I, um, you have the choice to do inter-school sport or not (at Year 10), and I choose to do it. So when it comes down to choices of doing sports and things, I'd rather do them, than not.

Interviewer: And what do you get to choose from, what were your options this year?

Sarina: Like, on Wednesdays we do sports, like from 12.30 to 1.30. And so, we like have a range of sports that you want to do, so you choose, so I chose soccer.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sarina: First I chose cricket, and then for winter we had to choose another one, and I chose soccer.

Interviewer: And why did you choose soccer?

Sarina: Um, cause I really like soccer. I've been doing soccer nearly all my life.

School sport clearly provided a valuable opportunity for the young women in this study to participate in a wide variety of physical activity ranging from cricket, soccer, and touch football, through to netball, basketball and tennis. For some of the young women, such as Jasmine and Alana, HPE classes (which were co-educational at both schools) also provided a different opportunity engage in physical activity.

Jasmine: ... my HPE teacher goes, 'You're not the best person in sports' and I agree, but she goes, 'You always participate and that's what great', so that's why I have a go.

Like rugby, I hate rugby, but I'd still have a turn, and I've even scored a try.

Interviewer: Are you enjoying HPE?

Alana: Yeah, HPE is fun.

Interviewer: Why is it fun?

Alana: I'm sick of theory.

Although many participants spoke enthusiastically of their participation of inter-school sport, there was generally less talk about HPE. On the few occasions when the young women did speak at length about HPE, it was without the same eagerness that was shown with their talk about inter-school sport. Interestingly only two of the young women, Ranya and Alana, commented on the problematic nature of HPE in relation to their religious beliefs/practice:

Interviewer: Are you doing any physical activity at the moment?

Ranya: We are doing, in HPE, dancing. And, I don't really like it.

Interviewer: Why not?

Ranya: Like, okay, if it was girls, okay, but there's boys there and dancing in front of boys is sort of *haram*, it depends how you are dancing. Like last Wednesday, we were doing line dancing. The first part of the dancing was linking hands with boys, walking around holding hands; me and Alana didn't do it. But some other Muslim boys did, and I was staring at them, I was so shocked, because what you have to do is hold hands, and link arms, I'm not going to do that with boys.

Interviewer: Do you think that being a 14-year-old girl is different to being a 14-year-old boy, if you are a Muslim? Is life different?

Alana: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Alana: Maybe because if you are a girl Muslim, you don't move as much as boys. There are about five Muslim boys in Year 9, they just don't care, they play sport a lot and stuff. But me, especially in Ramadan, I'd be really dehydrated. Maybe they (boys) act differently, try and be more popular. We were doing dancing in HPE and me and Ranya didn't do it, I don't want to dance.

Both Ranya and Alana made numerous comments about how their Islamic beliefs sometimes made participation in HPE difficult. These difficulties were usually centred around the problems of being active during Ramadan, and participating in activities which required a lot of physical contact with boys, such as dancing or particularly revealing activities like swimming. The young women in both schools were allowed to modify their sport/HPE uniform to conform to religious and/or cultural requirements. This may be why none of the young women in the study highlighted religious clothing as a barrier to participation in either inter-school sport or HPE. Many of the young Muslim women (including Ranya and Alana) reported concerns with HPE which are historically associated with young women who do not

self-identify as Muslim such as the dominance of boys in class, not being interested in the sports and/or activities offered, and feeling conscious of their body shape and skill level (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006; Wright, 1995).

Ranya: You look at boys, okay if we were going to play soccer, once, like last term, we were playing soccer, what the teacher did first, she let the girls play by themselves first and then the boys played by themselves. When I was playing with the girls, I was having fun, you know, cause I can get the ball and do what ever I like with it, but when the boys come when they mix with you, they are so fricken selfish, they don't, and they act as if they are the best. They come to you, they are running around with the ball, I only play if the ball comes near me, even then I'm too scared because I'm afraid someone might kick me in the leg or something.

Interviewer: So in HPE it's boys that are getting in the road. What if they had some all girl classes?

Ranya: That would be good, you know. That would be really good, because you don't feel so restrained, you would be able to do what you like, run around, do anything, because we're all girls, no one would mind.

Interviewer: And what about in HPE classes and sport, do you do that very often?

Sarina: I don't do HPE because I don't like the things they do, yeah, so I just bring a note (from home) or something.

Interviewer: Is that the same for a lot of other girls? Do they, are there many other girls that bring notes because they don't like the sport?

Sarina: From other classes, yeah.

Although HPE provided opportunities for the young women in this study to participate in physical activity, it seems that young Muslim women face the same 'barriers' to their participation and enjoyment of HPE as many young women who are not Muslim, for example a perceived lack of choice and the dominance of male students within the class. Furthermore, this research challenges some of the previous findings that report religious beliefs as the major factor in non-participation in HPE. For the majority of the young women, it was not necessarily religious beliefs which made their participation and enjoyment in HPE difficult, but rather issues to do with the way in which they were positioned in co-educational classes because of their gender, their skill level, body image and likes/dislikes.

Despite the young women's attitude to HPE, the majority eagerly participated in, and belonged to, an inter-school sporting team. Whilst school sports programmes have often been criticised for being too traditional and competitive, Ennis (1999) reported that young women were willing to participate in a competitive team environment when it was supported by a 'positive cooperative atmosphere' (p. 39) that enabled the young women to 'participate at a level in which they felt successful' (p. 40). Although the research conducted by Ennis was based on young women participating in a 'team sport' HPE curriculum (using the Sport for Peace curriculum), the notion of a 'positive cooperative atmosphere' and the importance of 'choice' as highlighted by Flintoff and Scraton (2001) may help explain some of the young Muslim women's enjoyment of inter-school sport, and disengagement in HPE. This is supported by the way in which Zeena, Jasmine, Tasneem and Sarina

talk about their involvement in inter-school sport, and comments made by Ranya, Jasmine and Sarina regarding the problematic nature of HPE classes.

Physically active in the community

The majority of the participants were physically active within the community. This 'public' display of physical activity in the community further contradicts much research which positions young Muslim women's participation in physical activity as problematic because of religious constraints and the need for gender segregation (De Knop, Theeboom, Wittock, & DeMartelaer, 1996; Zaman, 1997). Palmer (2009) in her research with a community health-service-facilitated soccer programme for young refugee Muslim women, highlighted that for the young women in her study, participation 'must always be done in culturally prescribed ways' (p. 31). What is interesting to note is that Palmer indicated that not all of participants chose to adhere to traditional religious requirements, opting to wear the 'standard' shorts and t-shirt soccer uniform within a public space. Whilst we, along with Palmer, acknowledge that culture extends well beyond dress code, we argue that Muslim women are frequently positioned within society according to traditional clothing attire. Indeed it is important to highlight examples of difference in order to offer an alternative to the homogenous stereotype that dominates public discourse. Below are examples of how the young women in this study were physically active within the community.

Interviewer: ... what sort of physical activity have you been involved in?

Tasneem: I still do club touch football; I have stopped now because it is off season.

Interviewer: And what about now, in the past year or so [what sport have you done]?

Yvette: Um, I've been playing volleyball, softball, baseball, touch.

Interviewer: And is this still in schooling hours or outside.

Yvette: This is HPE [inter-school sport]. And I play tennis now.

Interviewer: Outside of school?

Yvette: Yep.

Interviewer: And with a tennis club.

Yvette: Yep.

Interviewer: How often do you do that?

Yvette: I have one private coaching lesson, and on like, Thursday, and I have Sunday matches and they go for three hours.

Kameela belonged to the army cadets:

Interviewer: And, you've told me that you do your army cadets. When you arrive there, what do you do?

Kameela: First you just hang around and talk. And at 6 o'clock you form up, you stand up in a line, and they mark the roll.

Interviewer: Okay, so you line up, they take the roll, you have all of your camouflage gear on. Then what do you do?

Kameela: Um, usually play games and stuff.

Interviewer: And are they physically challenging? Do you get puffed?

Kameela: Um, yeah.

Interviewer: And do you enjoy that?

Kameela: Yeah it's fun.

Although Kameela, Tasneem and Yvette were the only participants who participated in community based 'organised' activity (army cadets, touch football and tennis respectively), the majority of young women were active in public spaces. As previously noted, Zeena performed Indian dancing at weddings and other special events within culturally sanctioned environments, Ranya walked with her mother (with both wearing the hijab) around the neighbourhood and Sarina jogged around the park and played soccer/basketball with her sister. The assumption that Muslim women are not able to be physically active in public was dispelled by the young women mentioned so far and we are reminded that young Muslim women are not a homogeneous group.

Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this paper was to move away from understanding the physical activity engagement patterns of young Muslim women through a deficit framework and to provide an alternative narrative to young Muslim women's participation in physical activity where they are a minority cultural group. When considering the ways in which the participants engage in physical activity, we acknowledge that it is necessary to recognise the complex intersections of Islam, gender and physical activity (Benn, Dagkas, & Jawad, 2011; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2011) across the family, school and the community.

Recommendations for policy

This research provides a 'new' snap shot into understanding young Muslim women living within contemporary Australia who do not conform to commonly held stereotypes. Of particular note is the importance of the family as a primary access point to physical activity. This is evident for example by the talk of those young women whose parents did not approve of sport due to (gendered) Islamic beliefs and cultural understandings, but encouraged physical activity for health benefits (see also Arar & Rigbi, 2009). It is therefore recommended that education programmes and future physical activity policy is valued within the Islamic community by Muslims themselves and that physical activity policymakers work with Islamic leaders and members of the Islamic community to promote ways that young Muslim women can be physically active (Dagkas, Jahromi, & Talbot, 2011). Additionally, policymakers need to

acknowledge the different and diverse ways in which both Muslims in general, and young Muslim women, understand, value and engage in physical activity and that many young Muslim women engage in physical activity with support of their parents and in the same capacity as other young women who do not self identify as being Muslim. We suggest that re-orienting policy to towards opportunity and facilitating 'enablers' holds greater potential of success than working from a framework that positions Muslim women as problematic, or in 'deficit'.

Recommendations for health and physical educators

Although this research did not focus solely on HPE, the talk of the young women around this subject was surprising. Firstly, only two of the 11 participants identified contradictions between their religious beliefs and their participation in HPE – these were in specific relation to mixed-sex dance and swimming. Secondly, the young women in this study were in many ways disengaged with HPE for similar if not the same reasons as many non-Muslim young women in general, as previous research has highlighted (Nakamura, 2002; Wright & Macdonald, 2010). Thirdly, many of the young women cherished the opportunity to play inter-school sport and were more than happy to forgo their spare lunch time for team tryouts and training sessions, although facing challenging negotiations at times (Kleindienst-Cachay, 2011).

In light of these three points, it is recommended that health and physical educators firstly move away from narrow stereotypes which can position young Muslim women as being and wanting to be 'inactive'. Secondly, where appropriate, it is recommended that teachers discuss with their female Muslim students their specific needs and requirements and to be mindful that these may change across time as the young women move through their secondary schooling and/or changing contexts. Additionally, contact with parents should also be considered (with consent of the student) to outline and discuss the HPE curriculum and the place and purpose of physical activity within the syllabus (Arar & Rigby, 2009; Nakamura, 2002). It may be useful to invite the parents and local Islamic leaders into the school as a group to discuss the place and purpose of physical activity within the syllabus. Finally it is recommended that teachers (and school government bodies) continue to provide weekly inter-school sport opportunities for all young women and to ensure that it is well resourced and inclusive. Again, the challenge here is that while being culturally sensitive (e.g., Burrows, 2004) and mindful of students' perspectives, HPE in Australia aims to play its part in challenging social constructions that limit participation for any student (e.g., Macdonald & Penney, 2009). The Australian Curriculum (2011), through its capability for 'intercultural understanding', provides a stimulus for students to:

learn to respect and appreciate their own cultures and beliefs and those of others. This includes engaging with people from diverse linguistic, social and cultural groups in ways that recognise differences and create connections and cultivate mutual respect, and coming to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped by many different histories and experiences. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011, p. 22)

It is envisaged that by learning about the construction of cultural differences in health and HPE, all students will be in a stronger position to advocate for their own

and others' physical activity participation. The cross-curricula priority for studying Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (ACARA, 2011), may be a further prompt for the community, teachers and students to better negotiate potential barriers to participation. The voices of the Muslim young women in this study could provide insights upon which to build such negotiation.

Notes on contributors

Dr Kelly Knez is a research scientist at Aspetar – Qatar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital. Her research focuses on the intersections of physical activity, ethnicity and religion. This research was undertaken by Kelly whilst at the University of Queensland, Australia, though she is now holds a research position at Aspetar, Qatar Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital.

Doune Macdonald is a Professor of Health and Physical Education and Head of the School of Human Movement Studies, The University of Queensland. From 2011–2013 she is also the Lead Writer for the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education.

At the time of contributing to this article, Dr Rebecca Abbott was a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Human Movement Studies, with an active interest in quantitative and qualitative aspects related to physical activity and health in children and young adults. Rebecca remains as an adjunct research fellow to the School. She is currently working at the Peninsular College of Medicine at the University of Exeter, UK.

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