

“Because I Am Muslim, I Cannot Wear a Swimsuit:” Muslim Girls Negotiate Participation Opportunities for Physical Activity

Manal Hamzeh and Kimberly L. Oliver

Drawing on the works of postcolonial critical feminist and Arab Muslim feminist scholars, we discuss in this paper how 4 muslim girls (ages 14–17 years) negotiated their participation in opportunities for physical activity. Data collection methods included self-mapping questionnaires, digital photos, private journal entries, and recordings of informal conversations. We discuss (a) how three discursive challenges emerged in veiling-off opportunities for physical activity, and (b) how the girls uncovered alternative ways of being physically active. To promote active life practices with muslim girls, we need to (a) navigate the diversity of young muslims within the intersecting discourses in their lives that potentially challenge their participation in physical activities, and (b) honor young muslims’ choices while negotiating their chances of maintaining physical activities.

Key words: discourse, gender, hijab

As some students in this study conveyed:

The coach in my school always nags me to join the basketball and volleyball teams. See, I am tall and my brother is a great basketball player. But my father says I cannot play because I am a girl. (Layla, 17)

I love swimming. I was starting to win competitions in this city, but last year Mom pulled me out. (Amy, 14)

This paper is part of a larger project in which we sought to understand how 4 *muslim*¹ girls negotiated opportunities for physical activity. The study took place in a local muslim community in two southwestern U.S. border

towns, and it extended over a period of 14 months. In this paper, we discuss how these 4 muslim girls negotiated their participation in opportunities for physical activity available throughout this study. Specifically, we discuss two main themes: (a) veiling-off opportunities for physical activity, and (b) uncovering alternative ways of being physically active.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework draws on the works of postcolonial critical feminist scholars who problematize educational studies that racialize, ethnicize, and culturize muslims in different transnational and diasporic contexts (Ahmed, 2002; Meetoo & Mirza, 2007; Razack, 2008). We draw on the work of Asher (2003, 2005, 2007) who has critiqued multicultural educational approaches that seem to address the struggles of diverse students living on the margins of American schools. We also draw on the works of poststructural critical feminist scholars like Weedon (1997, 1999) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), who have deconstructed normative discourses. Importantly, we draw on Arab Muslim feminist scholars like Ahmed (1992) and Mernissi (1991), who identified a gendering discourse in the lives of muslim girls and women and, thus, enable us to find the possibility of exposing and disrupting

Submitted: June 2, 2010

Accepted: April 26, 2011

Manal Hamzeh is with the Department of Sociology and Women's Studies Program at New Mexico State University. Kimberly L. Oliver is with the Department of Human Performance, Dance and Recreation at New Mexico State University.

this discourse. Additionally, the work of feminist critical theorists committed to social justice like Fine (2007), Lather (2007), and Sirin and Fine (2008) informed the methodology of this project and kept us open to considering multiple alternative methods when working among and with muslim youth.

Physical Activity and Muslim Girls

Over the past decade, there have been an increasing number of physical activity studies about muslim youth and especially about muslim girls in the schools of North America, Europe, and Australia. Some of these studies deal with physical activity in general, while others focus on physical education in schools; however, the discourses about muslim youth in physical activity and physical education settings are remarkably similar in both contexts. Some studies drew from the literature that claims muslim students are increasingly withdrawing from physical activity and physical education (Benn, 2000a, 2000b, 2002), are facing particular cultural barriers when taking physical education (Dagkas & Benn, 2006), and are less likely to participate in sports and recreational activities (Cortis, Sawrikar, & Muir, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007) than those students who are not muslim. Other scholars doing physical education studies about muslim youth strategically advocate for muslim students and call for “religiously responsive” accommodations in physical education (Elnour & Bashir-Ali, 2003; Kahan, 2003).

They suggest that to include muslim students in physical education programs, educators need to learn more about Islam to accommodate muslim norms in dress for girls, body exposure, and physical contact between boys and girls. Similarly, Zaman (1997) suggested that female-exclusive spaces should be provided for physical activity, with total screens keeping muslim girls away from the male staff and client gaze.

To date, these scholars have also categorized muslim students among the culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Cortis, et al., 2007), religious/faith-based groups (Kahan, 2003; Walseth, 2006; Zaman, 1997), and so-called minority groups, immigrants, or foreigners in the West (De Knop, Theeboom, Wittcock, & De Martelaer, 1996; Pfister, 2000; Strandbu, 2005; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). They also have grouped muslim students with those who are categorized, or who self-identify, as Arab (Martin, McCaughy, & Shen, 2008). As such, muslim students are either a homogeneous group or, in the case of muslim girls, they are one monolithic group wearing a headscarf (Kahan, 2003; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman, 1997). These groupings exclude students who are muslim but not religious at all, or who are interpreting their *muslimness* in multiple ways. Additionally, they exclude the Arabs who are not muslim but may or may not be living and negotiating dominantly muslim discourses. Finally, they exclude

those muslim girls who do not wear the headscarf and perform their muslim religiosity or identities in many ways that are often not visible and very much in flux.

Through the above grouping of research participants and suggested accommodations, physical education scholars are genuinely seeking to find pedagogical solutions and are calling to adopt special national policies to integrate muslims in national sport initiatives and in multicultural physical education curricula and school spaces. However, according to Keaton (2006) and Strandbu (2005) “religiously responsive” accommodations actually end up excluding muslim girls from participating in swimming, dancing, competitive athletics, and contact sports. That is, despite the good intentions, these same scholars may actually be displacing and excluding more muslim students from participating in physical activity.

This grouping and culturally accommodating approach is susceptible to excluding many muslim students because it is reductive and essentializing to muslim youth and/or Arab youth. Thus, we argue that the above scholars’ interest in “helping” and including muslim and Arab students in more physical activities is built on some kind of racial thinking (Razack, 2008) that may be obstructive to engaging these students’ interest in physical activities. According to Razack (2008), muslims selected as such for studies come to represent the “culturized and racialized” other:

Although racialized groups are no longer widely portrayed as biologically inferior (as a cruder version of racism would have it), dominant groups often perceive subordinate groups as possessing cultures that are inferior and overly patriarchal, a move described as the culturalization of racism. (p. 173)

Additionally, we argue that these studies (Benn, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Cortis et al., 2007; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Kahan, 2003; Knop et al., 1996; Martin et al., 2008; Pfister, 2000; Strandbu, 2005; Walseth, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman, 1997) also attribute muslims’ physical inactivity to the confinement of so called “cultural norms” or “Islamic requirements.” While this conceptualization may show educators being responsive to cultural diversity and accordingly acting as promoters of multicultural education, they may also be ranking educational decisions based on the “de-valorizing of non-white cultures” (Razack, 2008, p. 173).

Moreover, such conceptualization represents norms as rigid values and practices that are fixed and non-negotiable, and thus, could be accommodated with best practices or special policies. It also represents norms as values and practices that are recognizable and visible and not as subtle and complicated ways of living muslimness in context. Beside the visible headscarf or the long

cloak that some muslim girls wear in public (Elnour & Bashir-Ali, 2003; Kahan, 2003; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman, 1997), many other more subtle forms of gendering discourses prevent muslim girls from being physically active, such as those serving capitalism in a globalizing and transnational context. These more subtle gendering discourses are overlooked when researchers focus on what they visually perceived as *the* “cultural barrier” to muslim girls’ physical activity. That is, these studies (Kahan, 2003; Knop et al., 1996; Martin et al., 2008; Pfister, 2000; Strandbu, 2005; Walseth, 2006; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman, 1997) simplify what “cultural norms” muslim youth, especially girls, have to negotiate in order to be physically active. More importantly, they overlook the diversity and fluidity of muslim youth and/or Arab youth, and they deny them the use of their ability to negotiate their own muslimness in physical education and other school spaces.

Parallel to the above studies on girls and their physical inactivity, other poststructural feminist scholars have worked with girls and noted that they are challenged by gender discourses that discourage them from taking up opportunities for physical activity (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005; Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Wright, 1995). Working with girls in a Mexican-U.S. border town, Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughy (2009) added that educators who are committed to working with girls and finding enjoyable physical activities need to look at the diversity and intersectionalities of the discourses of gender, race, and class in schools. They further claimed that the intersecting discourses in the lives of girls not only challenge their participation in physical activities but, once identified and critiqued, become possible to interrupt by the girls themselves.

More importantly, while girls may be working to counter the discourses in their lives by becoming physically active, they are simultaneously being girly girl (Oliver et al., 2009), being borderland *meztizas* (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010), or for that matter, being muslim with a headscarf. While this simultaneous negotiation of several discourses may seem to some scholars and educators contradictory to being physically active, it also means that we need to understand the locality and the context of the intersecting discourses in the lives of girls and look to the girls’ lead in making their own changes to become more physically active (Oliver et al., 2009; Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010). In this, we need to work with the girls as the creators of their own multiple ways of being physically active.

The Hijabs Acting as a Gendering Discourse

To add to the complexity of meeting the girls’ individual physical activity needs in different contexts (Oliver et al., 2009), we argue that it is crucial, when working with muslim girls, to acknowledge and understand an-

other gendering discourse concerning physical activities in schools, one that intersects with other discourses of femininity such as “girly girls don’t want to mess their hair” (Oliver et al., 2009) or “the boys won’t let us play” (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010). We call this discourse the hijab (veil) discourse (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010). This discourse is not the narrow visual representation of the headscarf that some muslim as well as Christian and Jewish women have been wearing over the centuries in many shapes and forms (Ahmed, 1992; Clarke, 2003; Mernissi, 1991). Rather, the hijab discourse, is the gendering discourse using female muslims’ bodies as sites through which their ways of thinking and acting have been deeply challenged over the centuries (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1991). According to Arab-muslim feminist Mernissi (1991), the hijab is not exclusively the visual embodiment of a muslim maintaining her/his decency in dress and in behavior (Mernissi, 1991). Rather, it is also the embodiment of two more “hijabs” that have constituted muslim women’s bodies in more subtle ways than the (hyper) visible hijab (headscarf or long cloak). They are the spatial and ethical hijabs. The spatial hijab represents the border that restricts female muslims’ mobility in public spaces. The ethical hijab represents the protector that shelters muslims girls from forbidden things, or *harams*, such as meeting men alone without the presence of an immediate adult family member, preferably a male.

With the reconceptualization of the hijabs, we argue here that scholars doing work with muslim girls need to acknowledge the hijab discourse in the lives of the participants. More importantly, they need to expose it in its three dimensions—visual, spatial, ethical—as both a central discourse necessary to negotiate within the muslim girls’ families and local muslim communities, and as a discourse that is interacting with other colonizing, racializing, gendering, and sexualizing discourses in the globalizing, transnational, and diasporic contexts in their lives (Khan, 2002; Meetoo & Mirza, 2007; Razack, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

To move beyond critique of the studies mentioned and explore specifically how 4 muslim girls negotiated their participation in opportunities for physical activity, we draw on the work of critical feminist researchers and educators who do activist research in collaboration with young people using multiple alternative methods of challenging and countering injustices (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Method

This paper is part of a larger study in which we sought to understand how 4 muslim girls negotiated opportunities for physical activity in their lives. The study took place in a local muslim community in two southwestern U.S.

border towns and extended over a period of 14 months. The researchers worked with 4 girls Layla, Dojua, Abby, and Amy,² all of whom self-identified as muslim, considered themselves believers in Allah, and attended the local mosque occasionally—for religious occasions and for Arabic and Qur'an classes on Sundays. They all considered English their first language. Layla was the only girl who wore the headscarf in public, and she had worn it since she was 11 years old.

At the time of the study, Layla was 17 years old, a junior in high school, and self-identified as Arab and Arabian American. She said, "My culture is almost my whole way of life." Later she said while laughing that sometimes when she is filling applications she checks the category "White Anglo...or Caucasian." Layla was born in the United States. She visited Saudi Arabia once. Her father maintains strong ties with his family there, but does not hold an American passport. Layla understands some spoken Saudi Arabic, but hardly understands the Arabic of the Qur'an.

Dojua was a 17-year-old senior in high school who is also taking dentistry classes in the local community college. She self-identified as "Muslim Algerian." She was born in Algeria and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was eight. Dojua understands some spoken Spanish. Algerian Arabic is the main language spoken at home, but Dojua hardly uses it elsewhere. Dojua's family has frequent communication with their families in Algeria, yet had visited only once since they immigrated 9 years ago.

Abby was a 16-year-old junior in high school and self-identified as "Muslim, Algerian American, and African." She speaks Spanish and Algerian. Abby was born in the United States. Her parents also self-identified as Algerian American born in Algeria. At home her parents speak Algerian-Arabic and French, yet use English as their public and professional language. Abby's parents keep strong ties with their families in Algeria and in different parts of the United States. They have traveled occasionally to Algeria since their immigration about 16 years ago.

Amy was a 14-year-old freshman in high school and self-identified as "American Pakistani/Asian Pakistani of a Muslim Pakistani culture." Amy was born in Lahore, Pakistan. She immigrated to the United States with her family when she was a baby. Amy's parents are Pakistani American, born in Punjab, India. Amy's home languages are Punjabi, Urdu, and English. Amy's family still has strong ties to Pakistan and travels there at least once a year.

Manal, the primary researcher in this study was a doctoral student at the time of the study. She self-identified as *arabyyah muslimah*.³ She is multilingual and Arabic is her home language. Islam is her religion by birth. For two-thirds of her life, Manal lived in muslim dominant contexts, in which she was constantly negotiating the hijab discourse as a national athlete in her 20s and later as a professional with political aspirations.

Kim, a university professor in physical education teacher education, was Manal's advisor at the time. She self-identifies as White, middle class, and physically active. She is fluent in English only and had some prior experience with muslim female students and has worked extensively with schoolgirls negotiating how they experience their bodies and physical activities.

Data were collected over a period of 14 months. Manal met with the 4 girls 17 times for approximately 9–11 hr each time. She met them at the local mosque, the university's activity center and pool, the department's study lounge, or in places around town. Initially at the local mosque, Manal met and worked with Layla and Amy, who invited their friends, Dojua and Abby. This process of "convenience sampling" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70) allowed us to work with the 4 muslim girls of diverse profiles, to spend more time with them, to know them better, and to capture more of their lived bodily experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The informed consent forms signed by the 4 girls differed from those signed by their parents. In the ethical protocol, approved by the university's institutional review board, data from the girls could be disclosed to the parents only with the girls' explicit consent. This protocol for releasing data was designed to ensure the girls' anonymity and confidentiality. Manal highlighted and discussed the paragraph describing this process with every parent and girl, each of whom then signed a consent form.

To understand how the girls negotiated the opportunities for physical activity presented in this study, we used a variety of data collection methods, many of which Kim had developed in her work with girls over the past 13 years. These methods included (a) filling out a self-mapping questionnaire that sketched some basic information about the intersections of each girl's identity, family members, school interests, places and activities of interest, and the ways they saw themselves as Muslims (Sirin & Fine, 2008); (b) taking photos of events, places, and people in their lives that they wanted to share with us or with the other girls—we provided them with disposable cameras but they also brought in previously taken photos (Oliver & Lalik, 2000); (c) selecting and cutting images from fashion and music magazines of their choice (Oliver & Lalik, 2000); (d) free-writing in their journals with prompts like "I am..." and "What if" (Oliver & Lalik, 2000); (e) exchanging emails between Manal and the girls in which they elaborated on some issues they were questioning at the time; (f) creating a body collage and individual scrapbooks to represent and describe themselves to Kim in an oral presentation; (g) engaging in small group conversations; and (h) participating in a variety of physical activities. All conversations were audio recorded, and field notes were taken after each session with the girls.

Data analysis was three-fold. First, Manal transcribed each audio recording after meeting with the girls. Manal

coded (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007) the data by reading every line in the transcripts and then taking segments directly from the repeated text and giving them names (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Simultaneously Manal wrote her notes and impressions, which elevated the literal codes to descriptive categories (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). In this analysis, Manal was grouping her notes as highlighted themes to fit the conceptualization of the project. Second, Manal compiled all textual data sources into one document and did a more focused coding or a more elaborate thematic analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Then Manal compared all the emerging descriptive categories in different data sources in ways that informed the purpose of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Third, Manal rewrote the thematic groups into vignettes, which accordingly created the theoretical interpretations and the claims of the study and this paper (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In this study, Manal's historical, cultural, and linguistic literacies of Arabic, Islam, Muslims, and the three hijabs positioned her as an insider (Hill-Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 2003). Manal's seeming nonobservance of Islam's pillars, nonembodiment of the visible hijabs, and academic status all positioned her as an outsider (Hill-Collins, 1990), especially to the girls' parents. In her role as consultant to the study, Kim was positioned more as an outsider. Given our multiple positionalities, we practiced "strong reflexivity" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15) throughout the study. That is, we stayed mindful and critically reflective "about the different ways [our positionalities] can serve as both a hindrance and as a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15). That is, with her insider's literacies and critically reflexive approaches, Manal recognized and negotiated the differences between the parents' and her interpretations of the hijabs in relation to physical activities. On a weekly basis, Manal debriefed Kim through detailed emails of raw impressions, concerns, and questions about the previous meeting with the girls. Kim responded to Manal with her outsider's readings of any challenges perceived by Manal and with suggestions on how to negotiate them. These debriefings and exchanges represented our "reflexivity samplings" (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 496) in this study.

Practicing reflexivity was a major methodological tool with which Manal became more attentive to the hijabs' multiple subtleties in the lives of the 4 Muslim girls, aware of the differences between the parents' and her interpretations of the intricacies of the hijabs, and more able to find ways to negotiate these differences. That is, the combination of interactive methods in this project, the practice of strong reflexivity by two researchers with very different positionalities in relation to the hijab discourse, and Manal's use of her cultural and linguistic literacies all helped provoke deeper insights about the purpose of this paper.

Results

We discuss (a) how the three hijabs emerged in "veiling-off" the physical activities offered during the course of the study and (b) how the girls uncovered alternative ways of being physically active. The thematic sections below are organized in order of their emergence in the study as Manal spent time with the girls during the 14 months.

Veiling-Off Opportunities for Physical Activity

When Manal introduced the study and was seeking the parents' consent, their interpretations of the three hijabs—visual, spatial, and ethical—were potentially veiling-off the girls' participation in the physical activity presented in the study (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010). However, the parents' interpretations were not monolithic nor were they nonnegotiable by Manal with the parents.

Mothers Are Skeptical of Wall Climbing and Swimming. To introduce the study to the parents and obtain initial consent, Manal invited the mothers to visit the university activity center, the second main site of the study after the local mosque. Initially, Manal was afraid the parents might not allow the girls to participate in the second part of the study because of the presence of males in the university activities center. This space might potentially have the girls violate the parents' interpretation of spatial and the ethical hijabs. However, after the visit and after meeting Kim, the mothers seemed to approve of the space and were excited about the prospects of engaging their daughters with fun and useful activities during the summer break.

Right before beginning the work with the girls in the summer and setting the schedule of activities for the study, Dojua's mother, Khatima, came to the university's activity center to check out the physical activities Manal planned for the study. She was representing the other three mothers and was not among the four mothers who came in the previous visit in the spring. Specifically prior to signing the parents' consent, she was responsible to ensure that none of the physical activities violated their interpretations of the visual, spatial, and ethical hijabs. At this time, Manal showed her the wall-climbing room, the weightlifting room, the bike-spinning room, and the pool facilities.

Khatima observed a wall climbing class and a spinning class. In the climbing class, she saw a male instructor touching the students' bodies while helping them to put a harness around their hips. She expressed to Manal that she did not want her daughter to join a wall-climbing class because of the physical proximity of the male instructor to the bodies of his students. In the spinning class, she saw that the majority of the participants were male, led by a female instructor. However, she did not mind the spinning classes when she said to Manal, "Well, I guess it is like being in school with boys. No problem." To Khatima,

wall climbing might potentially have the girls violate the parents' interpretation of the spatial and ethical hijabs not only by being present with a male instructor in the same space but also by being touched by him. However, to Khatima, the presence of males in the spinning class in the same space but on separate bikes would not so much have the girls violate these two hijabs.

Additionally, when this mother visited the indoor and outdoor pools and saw it was a coed space, she suggested that Manal get permission from the pool's management to have the girls swim in the indoor pool without the presence of males. She made this suggestion to minimize the potential of having the girls violating the three hijabs just in case they were wearing anything revealing other than their faces in the presence of males.

Within a week after Khatima's tour to the activity center and after Manal visited all four mothers discussing the benefits of physical activities and trying to understand the ways each mother interpreted the hijabs, two things happened. One, Manal informed the mothers that she would provide the girls with a female wall-climbing instructor and that she obtained a permission for the girls to override the dress code at the university pool and swim with long pants instead of a swimsuit and/or while keeping on the headscarf. Two, the mothers sent the signed consent forms with their daughters.

The mothers' initial encounter with the activities offered in the study showed that the three hijabs might veil-off several kinds of physical activities offered to the girls in the study. The mothers' skepticism about the possibilities of violating the hijabs in general and Khatima's suggestions to accommodate her own interpretations of them were potentially veiling-off at least three physical activities before the beginning of the study. However, Manal's flexibility in altering the conditions within the physical activity spaces was necessary to keep the possibilities for the girls to make their own choices as we moved along with the study. Additionally, spending time with the parents to build relationships of trust showed that the hijabs are not homogeneous among the parents and that there are negotiable differences.

Girls Question Prohibitions of Swimming and Basketball. As the researchers spent time with the girls and worked with the different methods, the girls' own questioning of the hijabs started to emerge. In their journals, in their conversations with Manal individually or in the group, and in their creations of the photo scrapbooks and body collage, the girls shared what these hijabs meant to them in relation to physical activities as well as other bodily experiences important in their lives at the time.

Layla, Dojua, and Amy shared and questioned the multiple meanings of the three hijabs specifically in relation to swimming and basketball. Amy, who was 14 years old at the time of the study, was prohibited from wearing a swimsuit. She wrote in her journal,

I love swimming. I was starting to win competitions in this city but last year mom pulled me out. She thought Karate is good for me so I am not swimming anymore. I like Karate but I want to swim too...She [her mom] tells me because I am Muslim I cannot wear a swimsuit. But I wear shorts for PE [happy face] but long shorts. I don't know.

In this, Amy was questioning the reasoning of a particular visual hijab imposed on her with her approach to puberty and its relation to the chance she had in picking up swimming as an activity available in this study. Although Amy had not been swimming for 1 year, her mother, Jamilah, explained to Manal later when Manal attended one of the karate competitions Amy participated in, that such an activity guaranteed that Amy would continue to be physically active. That is, by shifting to karate, the physical contact Amy would be experiencing with the boys in her league is not a violation of Jamilah's interpretations of any of the hijabs.

Layla, who was 17 years old and the only girl wearing the headscarf at the time, was also prohibited from swimming and certainly from wearing a swimsuit. Her parents' prohibition was imposed on Layla not only because she is a girl and had to cover her head or observe the visual hijab, but because she is simply a muslim. Layla expressed her sadness about being unable to participate in swimming on the first day all the girls decided to go to the pool. As she sat by the pool when the other three girls were swimming, she told Manal that her father thinks, "Public pools are dirty for Muslims to swim in." According to her father, dipping in public water was forbidden for Layla or was not ethical for her as a muslim to pursue. To Layla's father, the pool area is a place that violates his interpretation of the visual and spatial hijabs that are related to her way of dress and presence in coed spaces. Swimming in a public pool also violates his interpretation of the ethical hijab that differentiates Layla as a muslim by not mixing in the same water with those who are not muslims. In other words, Layla's headscarf would not be enough to veil her off from the nudity of men as well as from their gaze at her body. That is, swimming all together as an activity of choice available in this study was veiled-off from the girls.

Dojua was allowed to swim at the university pool if she were in an area far from males' sight, as her mother told Manal, or if she were wearing something less revealing than a swimsuit. Though Dojua was allowed to swim, her mother was worried about violating both the visual and the spatial hijabs when she said to Manal, "Dojua will wear something like long shorts and a long sleeve shirt." Abby had no problem choosing swimming as a physical activity in the study. She was apparently allowed to swim with her two-piece bathing suit anywhere. Earlier Abby showed us photos of a family trip to Hawaii in which her

father, mother, and brother were in bathing suits enjoying themselves on the beach.

While swimming seemed to be an activity that was highly veiled-off, the parents did not contest other activities at all. However, Layla wrote in the self-mapping form at the beginning of the study that her favorite physical activities were basketball and volleyball. Later, she expressed her desire to join her school's basketball teams, but was questioning why she could not. She wrote in her journal,

The coach in my school always nags me to join the basketball and volleyball teams. See I am tall and my brother is a great basketball player. But my father says I cannot play because I am a girl and besides he says that I will be looking like a monkey running up and down the court [giggles] making a show for the boys in my school.

Additionally, Layla shared with us that her limited opportunities to play basketball in school or at home were also related to her liking African American boys and wanting to befriend them. She said, "Because my mother acts like psycho around dudes...like she knows I am crazy about Blacks...I cannot even play with my brother's friends." Though Layla was wearing the headscarf in public, she was puzzled and complaining about her parents' prohibiting her from playing basketball. In this case, Layla's parents were worried about the three hijabs in relation to playing basketball in school in general and playing around African American boys specifically.

Only Layla and Amy expressed their confusion about their parents' prohibitions of swimming and basketball. The parents' ways of interpreting the three hijabs varied not only depending on the activity but on their own ways of being muslim. As Manal built her relationship with them and as the girls reported to them that they were having fun, the parents' interpretation of the three hijabs became more flexible and negotiable. Moreover, as the girls were spending more time with Manal and with each other, they began to make their own interpretations of the hijabs and to find their own ways of taking advantage of the available physical activities in the study.

Uncovering Alternative Ways of Being Physically Active

At the beginning of the study, it seemed that Layla, Dojua, Abby, and Amy would not participate in the physical activities offered to them. This was not only because the parents were veiling-off a few activities but also because the girls themselves were not interested in some of the activities they tried during the study. By the last third of the study, the girls chose the activities they liked and uncovered ways of being physically active.

Girls' Independent Choices of Enjoyable Physical Activities. The array of physical activity choices offered in this

study and the sheer presence of the girls in the university activity center, presented the girls with another chance to independently select the physical activities they enjoyed. Every week when the girls joined Manal in the department's study lounge, they passed through the pool, the gym, the spinning and wall-climbing rooms, and the basketball court.

Halfway through the study, when the girls finished working on journal writing and making their scrapbooks or the body collage, they had over 6 hr to play. They started to try the physical activities available for them in the university center. Dojua joined a spinning class, while the rest of the girls watched. She did not last more than 10 min. She left telling us that she merely did not like it because "the bike saddle is too painful." All 4 girls wanted to try wall climbing. However, not long after Manal laid out the gear for them to put on and before the female instructor arrived, Dojua said, "I don't like putting on these shoes without socks...and I don't like this [harness] tying me down," and Amy said, disgusted, "The shoes smell." They all left the room giggling.

When it was time to check out the weightlifting room and the cardio room, they spent time on the bikes and treadmills but did not select these activities again. In the weightlifting room, Manal introduced to them the different stations and demonstrated to them some of the exercises. They tried a few exercises for a short while, but they were mostly giggling, watching themselves on the mirrors, and peeking at the boys too. Again, they did not ask to weightlift again. Abby said, "It was too loud." After these trials, they all ended up independently choosing the physical activity they enjoyed, whether we thought at the beginning it was prohibited by the parents or not. All this time, Manal was listening to the girls' impressions of trying new activities and kept reminding them of the remaining options. During the last third of the study, the girls decided to spend their "play" time in swimming and playing basketball.

Negotiating the Veiled-off Physical Activities. As the study progressed and we were spending an extended time in the activity center, the girls spent their "play" time alternating between swimming and playing basketball. More than five times, the girls chose to swim in the university pool and lounge around in the sun even with the presence of men/boys—lifeguards and swimmers. The first time the girls went to the university pool, Layla had her headscarf on and a short-sleeved shirt and baggy sweat pants. Dojua wore a swimsuit with a very short tight skirt-like bottoms and a matching bra-top. Amy wore a sleeveless shirt with thin straps—showing her upper chest—and long and thin surfing shorts. By the end of the study, the girls wore what ranged between a two-piece swimsuit and a headscarf with short tank tops and long pants.

On the first day at the university pool, Layla and Manal sat on the side benches watching the other three girls swim with flippers and floaters. A few minutes after

the girls were in the water giggling and obviously having a good time, Dojua called to Layla, "Come and jump in." Answering her immediately, Layla screamed, "I am going in [shouting]." Layla said to Manal, "I will go in as I am, and if a man comes in, please let me know, then I will put on my headscarf." Then suddenly she pulled off her headscarf and ran off jumping in the shallow end of the pool. Layla did not quite violate the hijabs, because at that moment there were no men around; however, she chose to jump in the pool and have fun. The girls later expressed in their journals that they had fun swimming. Layla wrote, "Last Saturday when I jumped in the pool fully clothed, [it] was something I will never regret. When I did that I felt like I threw the rule book out the window!" Dojua wrote, "Last week was pretty cool the best part was that Layla jumped in the pool when I told her. [happy face] That was fun."

Mainly Layla and Abby seemed more interested in basketball, while in the meantime Amy and Dojua opted to sunbathe at the outdoor pool. On three occasions, Layla invited her African American male friends to play basketball. They were the same boys her mother did not allow her to play with even in the presence of her brother. Layla played basketball wearing sweat pants and half a shirt showing a big part of her stomach. It was clear that the guys liked Layla and that she was popular. When it was time to leave, they hugged Layla and thanked her for playing with them. To Layla, keeping the headscarf on while playing with the boys she considered her friends was not quite a violation to any of the hijabs her parents prohibited her from violating. The variety of physical activities and clothing combination that Layla, Dojua, and Amy chose reflected their multiple interpretations of the hijabs. This also illustrated how the girls negotiated their parents' interpretations of the hijabs.⁴

Discussion and Significance

By using a range of interactive methods, we began to understand better how Layla, Dojua, Abby, and Amy negotiated their participation in physical activities. At the beginning of the study, we learned that these muslim girls' parents' interpretations of the three hijabs were potentially threatening the girls' participation in physical activities. Swimming and wearing swimsuits in a public pool, playing basketball with boys, and joining wall-climbing classes instructed by a male were all potentially veiled-off activities the girls might not be allowed to access. The parents' interpretations of the hijabs reflected the centrality of the hijab discourse in these girls' lives, particularly in relation to physical activities.

However, the parents' interpretations of the three hijabs were not homogeneous and they were not about "to veil or not to veil" (Hamdan, 2007, p. 1) the girls. Their interpretations of the hijabs were very varied, flexible, and

mostly negotiable. Learning the parents' multiple and fluid interpretations of the hijabs was a process of negotiating differences that was directly connected to cultivating relationships of understanding and trust.

As the study progressed and the girls were becoming friends and working on a common project, we learned that their understanding of their parents' hijabs was also multiple and negotiable. At first, they expressed their puzzlement over their parents' interpretations of the hijabs in relation not only to physical activities but to other bodily experiences important to girls and to young people in general (Hamzeh, 2012). In response to the girls questioning of the hijabs, we stayed flexible in altering conditions within the activities and open to keeping all the activities available to them, especially those that were negotiable with their parents.

In the last third of the study and after Layla, Dojua, Abby, and Amy had tried almost all the activities presented, they made independent decisions choosing enjoyable physical activities that reflected their own multiple interpretations of the hijabs. This was shown in their invitation to the boys to play with them, taking up swimming in the last five meetings, and in their different ways of dressing at the pool or on the basketball court. In other words, when Layla, Dojua, Abby, and Amy had the lead and the opportunity to practice their own judgment and chose what they enjoyed from the physical activities offered in the study, they simply became active.

As physical educators and researchers interested in promoting healthy and active life practices with muslim students, especially muslim girls, we may be more successful if we address the diversity of muslim youth in schools and their varied ways of interpreting the hijab discourse and their muslimness. As such, we need to collaborate with all kinds of muslims and be cognizant of the excluding "racial thinking" (Razack, 2008) of muslims as one homogeneous group or as "the strange other" (Ahmed, 2002) in the schools of North America, Europe, and Australia. That is, we need to acknowledge that in the lives of muslim girls there are several discourses, such as neocolonialism, anti-Arab racism, and Islamophobia, intersecting with other gendering discourses, including the hijab discourse (Razack, 2008; Zine, 2006a, 2006b). We also need to acknowledge that muslims are diverse and changing in their muslimness and that the hijab discourse in young muslims' lives could be interpreted in multiple ways and is negotiable with them and with their parents. That is, we need to go beyond responding to the simplistic and confining "religious accommodations" dictated by authoritative community leaders, and instead, engage directly with young muslims and their parents. This is a call to physical educators and researchers to deracialize and deculturalize the conceptualization of physical education studies and pedagogies and invite all participants to an engaging dialogue across difference (Asher, 2003, 2005, 2007).

Moreover, we need to start listening carefully to the muslim girls' themselves as agents in their own learning, as we would with other girls challenged by the many gendering discourses in their lives (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010). That is, we need to open opportunities with muslim girls to build their critical literacies in order to name and "invite the unspeakable to be voiced" (Sirin & Fine, 2008, p. 198), and thus to be able to expose any hegemonic discourse in their lives and facilitate their challenges to the injustices resulting from these discourses (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Oliver et al., 2009).

Particularly, we call upon the community of physical educators and researchers to reconceptualize their work with muslim learners as collaborative and engaging (Asher, 2003, 2007; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Such research and pedagogy is one that takes extended periods not only to gain a deeper understanding of the girls' lived experiences but to build collaborative relationships with them and with their families in the different contexts they live. In this, we call on physical educators and researchers to do research and pedagogy by persistently practicing critical and strong reflexivity (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15), what Fine and McClelland (2007) called release methods, "a hybrid of classic and innovative methods designed to invite the unspeakable to be voiced" (Sirin & Fine, 2008, p. 198), and what Lather (2007) called "unthinkable" methodologies. Finally, we call for researchers and educators of physical activities to do everything they can to (a) navigate the diversity and fluidity of young muslims within the intersecting discourses in their lives that are potentially challenging their participation in physical activities, and (b) honor the choices of young muslims, girls and boys, while supporting them to negotiate the "thought-of as fixed" Islamic values that may jeopardize their chances of maintaining physical activity.

References

- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2002). Racialized bodies. In M. Evans & E. Lee (Eds.), *Real bodies: A sociological introduction* (pp. 46–63). New York: Palgrave.
- Asher, N. (2003). Engaging difference: Towards a pedagogy of interbeing. *Teaching Education, 14*, 236–247.
- Asher, N. (2005). Engaging postcolonial and feminist perspectives for a multicultural education pedagogy in the south. *Teachers College Record, 107*, 1079–1106.
- Asher, N. (2007). Made in the (multicultural) U.S.A.: Unpacking tensions of race, culture, gender, and sexuality in education. *Educational Researcher, 36*(2), 65–73.
- Azzarito, L., & Solmon, M. A. (2005). A reconceptualization of physical education: The intersection of gender/race/social class. *Sport, Education and Society, 10*(1), 25–47.
- Azzarito, L., Solmon, M. A., & Harrison, L. (2006). "...If I had a choice, I would..." A feminist poststructuralist perspective on girls in physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 77*, 222–239.
- Benn, T. (2000a). Towards inclusion in education and physical education. In A. Williams (Ed.), *Primary school physical education, research into practice* (pp. 118–135). London: Routledge.
- Benn, T. (2000b). Valuing cultural diversity: The challenge for physical education. In S. Capel & S. Piotrowski (Eds.), *Issues in physical education* (pp. 64–78). London: Routledge.
- Benn, T. (2002). Muslim women in teacher training: Issues of gender, "race" and religion. In D. Penney (Ed.), *Gender and physical education* (pp. 57–79). London: Routledge.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. New York: Routledge.
- Clarke, L. (2003). Hijab according to the hadith: Text and interpretation. In S. S. Alvi, H. Hoodfar, & S. McDonough (Eds.), *The Muslim veil in North America: Issues and debates* (pp. 214–286). Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Cortis, N., Sawrikar, P., & Muir, K. (2007). Participation in sport and recreation by culturally and linguistically diverse women. *Social Policy Research Centre Report, 4*. University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.
- Dagkas, S., & Benn, T. (2006). Young Muslim women's experiences of Islam and physical education in Greece and Britain: A comparative study. *Sport, Education and Society, 11*, 21–38.
- De Knop, P., Theeboom, M., Wittcock, H., & De Martelaer, K. (1996). Implications of Islam on Muslim girls' sport participation in Western Europe. Literature and policy recommendations for sport promotion. *Sport, Education, and Society, 1*, 147–164.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elnour, A., & Bashir-Ali, K. (2003). Teaching Muslim girls in American schools. *Social Education, 67*, 62–66.
- Fine, M. (2007). Feminist designs for difference. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 612–619). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fine, M., & McClelland, S. I. (2007). The politics of teen women's sexuality: Public policy and the adolescent female body. Equality and Reproductive Rights Symposium, Center for Reproductive Rights. *Emory Law Journal, 56*, 995–1038.
- Flintoff, A., & Scraton, S. (2001). Stepping into active leisure? Young women's perceptions of active lifestyles and their experiences of school physical education. *Sport, Education & Society, 6*, 5–21.
- Hamdan, A. (2007). The issue of the hijab in France: Reflections and analysis. *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights, 4*, 1079–1808.
- Hamzeh, M. (2011). "Deveiling" body stories: Muslim girls negotiate visual, spatial, and ethical "hijabs." *Race, Ethnicity & Education, 14*, 481–506.
- Hamzeh, M., & Oliver, K. L. (2010). Gaining research access into the lives of Muslim girls: Researchers negotiating muslimness, modesty, *inshallah*, and *haram*. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 23*, 165–180.
- Hargreaves, J. (2007). Sport, exercise, and the female Muslim body: Negotiating Islam, politics, and the male power. In J. Hargreaves & P. Vertinsky (Eds.), *Physical culture, power and the body* (pp. 74–100). New York: Routledge.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. L. (2007). *Feminist research practice: A primer*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Piatelli, D. (2007). Holistic reflexivity: The feminist practice of reflexivity. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis* (pp. 493–514). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hill-Collins, P. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Kahan, D. (2003). Islam and physical activity: Implications for American sport and physical educators. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 74(3), 48–54.
- Keaton, T. D. (2006). *Muslim girls and the other France: Race, identity politics, & social exclusion*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Khan, S. (2002). *Aversion and desire: Negotiating Muslim female identity in the diaspora*. Toronto, Canada: Women's Press.
- Lather, P. (2007). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Martin, J. J., McCaughtry, N., & Shen, B. (2008). Predicting physical activity in Arab American school children. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 27, 205–219.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Meetoo, V., & Mirza, H. S. (2007). "There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings:" Gender violence and the limits of multiculturalism. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 30, 187–200.
- Mernissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. [Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland]. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Oliver, K. L., & Hamzeh, M. (2010). "The boys won't let us play:" Fifth-grade mestizas publicly challenge physical activity discourse at school. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 81, 39–51.
- Oliver, K. L., Hamzeh, M., & McCaughtry, N. (2009). "Girly girls can play games" "Las niñas pueden jugar tambien." 5th grade girls negotiate self-identified barriers to physical activity. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 28, 90–110.
- Oliver, K. L., & Lalik, R. (2000). *Bodily knowledge: Learning about equity & justice with adolescent girls*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Pfister, G. (2000). Doing sport in a headscarf: German sport and Turkish females. *Journal of Sport History*, 27, 497–524.
- Razack, S. (2008). *Casting out: The eviction of Muslims from Western laws & politics*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Sirin, S. R., & Fine, M. (2008). *Muslim American youth: Understanding hyphenated identities through multiple methods*. New York: New York University Press.
- Strandbu, A. (2005). Identity, embodied culture and physical exercise: Stories from Muslim girls in Oslo with immigrant background. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 13(1), 27–45.
- Walseth, K. (2006). Young Muslim women & sport: The impact of identity work. *Leisure Studies*, 25(1), 75–94.
- Walseth, K., & Fasting, K. (2003). Islam's view on physical activity and sport: Egyptian women interpreting Islam. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 38(1), 45–60.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice & poststructuralist theory* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Weedon, C. (1999). *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wright, J. (1995). A feminist poststructuralist methodology for the study of gender construction in physical education: Description of a study. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 15, 1–124.
- Zaman, H. (1997). Islam, well-being, and physical activity: Perceptions of Muslim young women. In G. Clarke & B. Humberstone (Eds.), *Researching women and sport* (pp. 50–67). Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zine, J. (2006a). Between orientalism and fundamentals: The politics of Muslim women's feminist engagement. *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 3(1), 1–24.
- Zine, J. (2006b). Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39, 239–252.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, we use *muslim* as an analytical category helpful in acknowledging the diversity and fluidity of muslim individuals' lived experiences.
2. The participants' names in this paper were pseudonyms the girls selected themselves.
3. *arabyyah-muslimah* means Arab Muslim woman.
4. The tension between what the parents may interpret, as a violation of the hijabs, and the girls' choices of physical activities, forced us to walk a fine line throughout the study. With our weekly debriefings and reflections, we made sure that none of the girls were put at risk in this study, not to limit their choices of activities in the study, and not to violate their confidentiality and report to their parents the details of their activities. Additionally, Manal stayed in constant communication with the parents to negotiate their multiple interpretations of the hijabs and kept their trust without having to disclose any data gathered in the study without the girls' consent—according to the request of the institutional review board. Moreover, while there was no way of foreseeing exactly how the girls would behave during the study in general, and in the physical activity opportunities in particular (as is the same for any research with youth), Manal was constantly encouraging the girls to share with their mother what they were doing and learning (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Hamzeh, 2012). We address this fine line and tension in depth in these two articles.

Authors' Note

Please address correspondence concerning this article to Manal Hamzeh, the Department of Sociology & Women's Studies Program, New Mexico State University, P.O. Box 30001, MSC 3WSP, Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001.

E-mail: manahamz@nmsu.edu