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**SHIA MUSLIM CANADIAN WOMEN'S
DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

By

NISARA JIWANI

Hon. B.Sc. Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, 2006

THESIS

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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It always seems impossible until it's done

– Nelson Mandela

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With Love,

Nisara

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to explore young Shia Muslim Canadian women's discursive constructions of physical activity in relation to Islam and the *Hijab*. The aims of the study were primarily informed by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. Qualitative methods were favored and poststructuralist discourse analysis was used to analyze the transcripts of conversations with 10 young *Hijab*-wearing Shia Muslim women residing in the Ottawa or Toronto regions. The results show that the participants discursively constructed physical activity in terms of being physically active (involved in fitness activities rather than sport), feeling good about themselves (i.e., being physically and mentally healthy), and losing weight or remaining "not fat." The participants were extremely heterogeneous in their ideas and experiences but, nevertheless, a majority mentioned that they would choose Islam over physical activity if they had to make a choice between the two. Wearing the *Hijab* while participating in physical activity was seen by most as difficult and limiting but, in the end, neither the Islamic religion nor the *Hijab* were considered barriers to physical activity. Participants strongly resisted the Islamophobic discourse present in Canada, they appealed to a discourse dominant in their own communities that presents a relatively progressive interpretation of the Quran and they constructed themselves as modern Muslim subjects yet they located themselves within a dominant gendered/religious discourse on women and physical activity. In the end, the young Shia Muslim women appropriated an intersectional discourse that legitimates their refusal to choose between their right to religious freedom and their right to physical activity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Physical Activity and Muslim Women

Growing up, my parents encouraged me to partake in physical activities and recreational programs such as gymnastics and dance. However, my brothers had a very different experience and were steered towards sports such as baseball, soccer and hockey. These variations in recreational activities were partly due to my parents' constructions of gender differences as well as the lack of opportunities for girls to partake in sport leagues that adhered to principles of the Islamic faith. As we grew older, the opportunities to become involved in physical activity increased, but mainly within the Shia Muslim community. While this made my parents happy and comfortable with letting me participate, it made me feel segregated from my non-Muslim friends who were involved in other recreation and physical activity programs. I was constantly struggling to fit in and to be comfortable not only as a Shia Muslim woman and a South Asian, but also as a Canadian; trying to retain my cultural roots (e.g., learning and maintaining my grandmother's tongue, taking part in South Asian and Islamic customs and festivals) and value system, while also adopting the culture and values of mainstream Canadian society.

As a Muslim woman, my relationship with physical activity has been constructed within dominant Canadian discourse through a series of misconceptions and misrepresentations (Taylor & Toohey, 2002). This is true of Muslim women in general and their relationship to physical activity. Misconceptions have a number of consequences. For example, the lack of inexpensive and easy access to women-only spaces prevented my

mother and my aunt from participating in physical activity when they immigrated to Canada. Their experiences, my own, and that of other Muslim women in Canada have not often been discussed. More specifically, Muslim women and the inter-relationship between culture, religion and physical activity has not received much scholarly attention in Canada. Yet, physical activity represents a crucial site for the study of issues like gender, culture, religion and other identity categories that come to define Muslim women, however temporarily.

The identities of Muslim women in Canada are not permanent or static, rather, they are constantly changing according to the different contexts in which we find ourselves (McAdams, 2003; Mischler, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarup, 1996). Identity speaks to *continuity, similarity* and *difference* (Strandbu, 2005). On one level, it refers to a sense of self and the *continuity* within that self. It's how our stories weave together moments that capture ways in which we change and stay the same (McAdams, 2003, Strandbu, 2005). On another level, it indicates the *similarity* or affiliation to a group based on social, cultural or collective ideas or the feeling of *difference* or distinction from other groups (Strandbu, 2005). Temporary identities are created to correspond to the present and, over time, this identity becomes a part of our history, leaving behind traces to help develop other multiple and complex identities (Barresi, 2002).

The relationship between culture, religion and identity are crucial components for young people born in Canada from immigrant parents (Strandbu, 2005). These "hybrid" identities saddle Muslims to not only maintain traditions and values, but also bring innovation and transformation to their communities (Strandbu, 2005). For me, being a young Shia Muslim Canadian woman, the juggling of many complex identities was at times daunting and confusing. I constantly battled with myself and had difficulty accepting who I

was, not only as a Canadian or a Muslim, but also as a person with a different skin color. Furthermore, having ancestry in India and ties to East Africa, my ethnic identity made me a different kind of “Canadian” and created internal struggles. I had to negotiate and re-negotiate my interpretation of Islam within the West by changing *who* I was in light of *where* I was, ripping my identities on and off like garments. At times, some of these identities collided with each other and I had to learn how to manage them.

With the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Muslims in general have been portrayed in a negative light (Delos, 2002; Hardy, 2006; Report: Muslim, 2004; Swiney, 2006). The constant stereotyping and labeling because I was a Muslim woman was difficult to comprehend, as were the threats and the defiling of Muslim property and garish cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (Allen, 2004; Rynning & Schmidt, 2006; Muhammad Cartoon, 2006). In addition to these general misconceptions, we have seen a particularly problematic representation of Muslim women in Western media (Allen, 2004; Hermansen, 2004). Indeed Muslim women have been discursively constructed as powerless, oppressed, dependent and lacking in feminist orientation. Of course, the typical Muslim woman was represented as veiled, connected to the domestic sphere and cut from any type of public sphere endeavor, including leisure. And while there are Muslim women in the world who fit the stereotype (and the media are always quick to find them), there are all the others who do not and who suffer from these stereotypes.

Though some research has shown that Islam has a negative attitude towards sport and physical activity, there are many that illustrate Islam’s positive attitude towards sport and the encouragement of physical activity for all Muslims, including women (Khan, 2002; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman 1997). Teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (*Hadiths*) as well as

passages from the Quran (Graham, 1977) encourage physical activity as well (Walseth and Fasting, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

In brief, the current problem with Muslim Canadian women and physical activity is multifaceted. For Muslim women in Canada, the constant negotiation and re-negotiation of a “safe” space to practice physical activity coupled with the experiences of being a Muslim Canadian woman seem difficult to juggle but little is known about such negotiations and experiences. As well, early research on race and sport has been criticized for being ethnocentric (Raval, 1989; Fleming, 1994) and for contributing to the stereotypes of Muslim women and lack of physical activity (Walseth, 2006b). But for Muslim women in Canada, practicing physical activity can be difficult. Without sex-segregated spaces, and given negative associations with the Hijab, many Muslim women tend to restrict their participation in physical activity to their cultural or religious groups (Nakamura, 2002; Taylor & Toohey, 2002; Tirone, 2000; Zaman, 1997). In most cases, Muslim women and physical activity are rarely mentioned, and most often are discussed in relation to the Hijab and its perceived “oppression.” In addition, we have little information about how Muslim women experience physical activity and are generally unaware of what they require to participate. As researchers, we are unaware of how Muslim Canadian women experience physical activity both inside and outside their communities as well as the perceived barriers with which they may be faced. Coupled with this lack of information is the lack of consultancy occurring with Muslim women to identify such needs, wants, requirements and barriers in relation to their constructions of physical activity.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the above problems, the purpose of the present study is to understand Shia Muslim Canadian women's constructions of physical activity. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to understand young Shia Muslim Canadian women's: (a) reasons for partaking (or not) in physical activity; (b) views of physical activity in relation to Islam and the Hijab; (c) appropriation, accommodation or resistance to dominant social discourses on gender, culture and religion; and (d) experiences in physical activity and their perceived impact on gender, religious and cultural identities. The insights from this study will fill an important gap in Canadian literature both in the area of Women's Studies and the Sociology of Physical Activity and Sport. Hopefully, knowledge from this study will also inform contemporary debates regarding policy initiatives with regards to physical activity programs for Shia Muslim Canadian women.

Significance of the Study

As a Shia Muslim Canadian woman who believes strongly in the importance of physical activity for Shia Muslim Canadian women as well as the population in general, the most important reason for conducting the study is clear: there simply is little to no information available that is specific to Shia Muslim Canadian women and physical activity. And while integration of Muslim Canadians in physical activity and sport is occurring within the larger community, there are still barriers. Specifically there have been two cases in 2007 whereby young Muslim girls have been told to either remove the Hijab when participating in competition or remove themselves from the game. The first of these incidents occurred with a Muslim girl who was not allowed to participate in a soccer tournament in Quebec, Canada because of her religious headgear ("Group Mulls", 2007). The second case involved a

Muslim girl team in Quebec that was not allowed to participate in a Tae Kwon Do tournament because of the girls' Hijab ("Hijab," 2007; "More athletes," 2007; Omar, 2007; Ponting, 2007). In light of these events, this study will provide much needed knowledge on social discourses and their "effects" on the experiences of Muslim women. The media tends to perpetuate demonizing depictions of Muslim men as terrorists and Muslim women as oppressed and stifled by their Hijab or Burka both locally and on a global scale (Farooq, 2007). Focusing on Shia Muslim Canadian women's discursive constructions of their experiences and subjectivities will provide new insight necessary to infuse the discursive terrain with alternative and empirically grounded discourses.

This study will provide an avenue for young Shia Muslim Canadian women to speak about the issues they face when engaging in physical activity as well as their own meanings and constructions of physical activity and the barriers and obstacles to physical activity as well as its opportunities and avenues for emancipation. My approach for this research will primarily be informed by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theory (Rail et al., 2002; Weedon, 1999; Said, 1978; Smith, 1999; Spivak, 1995). It has been suggested that most research on physical activity, women and visible minorities has often not been attentive to the processes of racialization, gendering or marginalization (Theberge, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002). In contrast, the present study will consider such processes and recognize that a woman's subjectivity is made possible through the already gendered and racialized discourses to which she has access (George, 2004; Rail et al., 2002; Weedon, 1999). Thus, the aim of this study is to not only map the discourses to which young Shia Muslim women have access in constructing their meanings of physical activity but also to investigate how they position themselves in relation to these discourses. For example, do these women

passively accept and enact the physical activity messages promulgated in most mainstream white Christian¹ media? How do these women construct meanings for physical activity alongside discourses about what it means to be a Muslim woman?

The bulk of research on women and physical activity is associated to large scale quantitative studies focusing on participation rates. While this method has proven useful to accumulate descriptive statistics on participation in physical activity, it has not provided information on *how* physical activity is interpreted and experienced by women (George, 2004; Reinharz 1992). The present study is significant from a methodological standpoint since it contributes to filling the gap by using a critical discourse analysis method and investigating how women construct physical activity and the connections between such constructions and their constructions of culture, religion and the Hijab. Links between such constructions and wider discourses at work in communities, at school or in the media will be drawn upon in an attempt to understand why certain meanings are favored over others.

Beyond academic contributions, the study also has practical applications. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences of physical activity and gain further insight and awareness on their own involvement with physical activity in a way that is new for Shia Muslim Canadian women. These conversations with the participants may provide them with the inspiration to find a way to contribute to their communities in a manner which is related to increasing the awareness of physical activity and its benefits. The study will bring a better understanding of the barriers Shia Muslim Canadian women face on issues of access to physical activity spaces and participation in relation to the Hijab, the community (Muslim community and the community at large), culture and religion.

¹ In this case, using the term “white Christian” is not meant to homogenize as of course both the “white” and Christian populations are heterogeneous. However, the purpose is to indicate the “white Christian’s assumed superiority” (Ruby, 2004).

Recommendations stemming from this study will be forwarded to the participants and Shia Muslim mainstream communities with a view to providing information that may help in designing more opportunities for physical activity among young Shia Muslim Canadian women. For the Shia Muslim Canadian women, it is my hope that participation in the study will have provided a positive learning experience in relation to physical activity and its place in their lives.

CHAPTER II

SHIA MUSLIM WOMEN: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Understanding Shia Muslim women's history is important in understanding who they are today. Shia Muslims who immigrated to the West from the Orient had an interesting past that is usually overlooked. Many of them resided in India and were Hindus before they converted to Islam (Lapidus, 2002). From India, many migrated to East Africa to take up business opportunities that the British did not want (Patel, 1972). Following generations of residency in countries such as Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, many Shia Muslims immigrated to Canada, arriving in the early 1970s often due to political disorder. Therefore, many Shia Muslims may represent and identify with three or four homelands in different continents (e.g., Asia, Africa, North America) and with this, carry with them different traditions, cultural habits and their own interpretations and practices of the Islamic faith.

Muslims and British Imperialism in India

Islam came to the Indian subcontinent at different periods of time and was absorbed in a variety of ways (Kazi, 1999). From the seventh century onwards, lower class communities were attracted by Islam's message of egalitarianism and converted or married into to Sunni and Shia Islam (Kazi, 1999). Through this, one fourth of the Indian population became Muslim (Spear, 1956). In India, Muslims do not represent a single homogenous community and are comprised of many diverse traditions, languages and attributes. Many Indian Muslims have also adopted Hindu practices such as Hindu marriage customs and rituals along with other traditions which suggest that Indian Muslims have mixed certain

customs from their religious upbringing as well as customs specific to Indian subculture (D'Souza, 1985).

The British Empire began its process of colonization² of India in 1757 and this process lasted until 1947 (Stoddart, 1988). Although there was no real army to defeat, British domination came from the processes of cultural transfer and power. Military officers, traders, educators and the like disseminated ideas, beliefs and rules concerning social behavior throughout the Empire (Stoddart, 1988). The most prominent change came through the use of the English language, which became a medium for exchanging moral codes, social attitudes and behavior (Stoddart, 1988). The English language created a bond between the imperial power and the colonial settlement while simultaneously dissolving and erasing smaller Indian dialects (Stoddart, 1988).

The process of cultural transfer included a transfer of beliefs through games and sports. Through sport, the empire was able to express dominant British beliefs, standards and colonizer-colonized relationships. Sport, was used as a tool of governance and conciliation in a British-ruled India (Radzi, 2006). Additionally the influence of sport created competition, as well as exclusionary and participatory practices within India (Stoddart, 1988). While a select few were trained and allowed to play, the beliefs and rules of sport were followed by all who were colonized. Bourdieu (1978) argues that cultural institutions such as that of sport are important in promoting and maintaining class relations through socially shared beliefs. Though these institutions may be utilized more often by the culturally elite, they are valued by the masses (Stoddart, 1988). Sport can be seen as a powerful institution which can create

² Colonialism is described as a recurrent feature of human history which not only was the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods, it also restructured economies drawing the colonised into a complex relationship of power and domination between the Orient (the colonised) and the Occident (the coloniser) (Loomba, 1998, Said, 1978). The process of colonisation also extended through institutions, transfer of knowledge, language, and colonial culture (Said, 1978).

shared beliefs and attitudes between rulers and the ruled while simultaneously enhancing the social distance between them (Stoddart, 1988).

The Empire created elite schools where the privileged, such as Indian princes, could participate in sports that included football, cricket, and polo. By playing team sports, it was thought that participants would learn the concepts of teamwork, obeying authority, being loyal to one's own team and respecting the rules (Stoddart, 1988). This also created a power relation in that only those who had the resources to participate could do so (Hargreaves, 1986). The masses would participate in informal social networks by gathering to watch the games and matches (Stoddart, 1988).

Western sports were established to replace traditional recreation diversions (Radzi, 2006). Along with this came Western values such as the "sisterhood"³ ideology and the imposition of these values upon Muslim women in South Asia, who were depicted as "insecure, introverted personalities in need of intellectual change and physical freedom" (Radzi, 2006, p. 5). Western women then began a process of cultural reform through Western physical exercise and sports for Asian Muslim women (Radzi, 2006). Brownfoot (2003, p. 142) comments that, "by playing sport at school in teams and girls of other ethnic groups, it was also felt that Asian females would learn both cooperation and competition, and interracial harmony would evolve." Men however, controlled women's involvement in sport and limited their use of sporting facilities to specific days and times (Brownfoot, 2003).

By the end of the 19th century, many sports were established and their social purposes were widely accepted and understood. From this stemmed large amounts of literature not

³ In the effort by the British to govern the colony and maintain supremacy, British (white Christian) women were employed to promote the concept of "sisterhood" as an ideology in which Christian women were portrayed as healthy and fit to assist in the dissemination of imperialistic ideals (Brownfoot, 2003; Radzi, 2006).

only on the game, but how to dress, behave and conform to imperial ideals (Stoddart, 1988). Through this, power relations were exercised with little to no resistance from the colonized people, who in the course of this, were *won over* to sports and their associated Imperial values and culture (Hargreaves, 1986).

Muslims and the Decolonization of India

The formal dissolution of colonial empires occurred in the middle of the 20th century and the granting of independence to colonized India occurred in 1947 (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). The end of colonial rule created high hopes for the newly independent countries, although many British influences remained within them. The continued Western influence was exercised through political, economical and ideological forms of control (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Sport was used as a form of political control with Indian officials and governmental agencies. In Pakistan, the control of sport became a political platform; well-known members of the administration were also important figures on the national board of several sporting institutions (Stoddart, 1988). Sport was used as an instrument to promote transcultural unity and British loyalty as well as for nation building purposes (Appadurai, 1995, Stoddart, 1988). Though sport may have been significant in maintaining British power within the Empire, it is important to note that Muslim women were not reported as being involved within any sporting institutions as officials, athletes or members unless it was as spectators and that too had its limitations. Research on Muslim women in India and their participation in physical activity following decolonization is still at best, limited (Chelladurai, Shanmuganathan, Jothikaran, & Nageswaran, 2002).

Muslims and Immigration to East Africa

Many Shia Muslims who migrated to Africa from India did so at the end of the 19th century in order to take up trade opportunities that the British did not want, and for which the Africans were perceived to be unqualified (Twaddle, 1975). Generations of Muslims were subjected to British imperialism and the effects of colonization not only in their “home countries” but as well in their new countries (Twaddle, 1975). While India was granted independence from the British Empire in 1947, this came much later (1962-1963) for East African countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. These countries suffered the long term effects of colonization and are still influenced by the West and foreign aid (August & Nimtz, 1980; Hauser, 1999).

The short-lived independence from the British Empire was followed by a tyrant rule by Idi Amin Dada in Uganda who came into power via a military coup against former president Milton Obote in 1971 (Omara-Otunnu, 1987). Amin’s regime targeted various ethnic and political groups with violent methods ranging from threats and imprisonment to expulsion and massacre. In 1972, under charges of economic exploitation, Amin ordered the expulsion of the entire non-African population, most of whom were South Asian. Many of these “non-Ugandan” people had resided in Uganda for generations and no longer held citizenship to their ‘home’ nation (Kasozi, 1994). Many Africans of South Asian descent were forced to leave Uganda without money or assets, while their land, property and goods, were confiscated by the government. Due to whispers of a pending war between the Ugandan government and Tanzanian government, many Asians also fled from Tanzania and neighboring countries such as Kenya left, of which many never returned (Patel, 1972).

During Idi Amin's eight-year reign, it is estimated that some 50, 000 to 300,000 Ugandans were killed, in addition to the 50, 000 Asians were displaced (Horn, 1979). Many other Asians from neighboring countries (Tanzania and Kenya) also fled to countries such as Canada and the United States for their personal safety⁴. Idi Amin's rule was violent, motivated by ethnic, political and financial factors, and continued for quite a while without international intervention (Smith, 1980). His reign lasted until he challenged the borders with Tanzania leading eventually to his fall from power in 1979 (Valentino, 2004). Following this decade of unrest, very few Africans of South Asian descent returned to the region (Dossa, 1999).

Muslims and Immigration to Canada

Thirty percent of all immigrants who come to Canada reside in Toronto, a city comprised of people from 106 nations and in which more than 100 languages are spoken (North York Board of Education 1996). According to the 2001 Canadian census, approximately 423, 235 new immigrants from Southeast Asia have come to Canada in 1991–2001. Immigration to Canada has had important consequences for immigrant women and they have had a different experience from immigrant men (Ralston, 1996). Immigrant women often associated with the domestic sphere of being housewives and primary caregivers to their family, they tend to be more isolated from participation in mainstream society (Darlington & Mulvaney 2003). Because of this lack of integration, many immigrant women become more involved within their own South Asian communities (Ralston, 1996). *No New Land* a novel written by Vassanji (1995) depicts a scenario involving a Muslim man of South

⁴ During 1972-1973, and 1978 Idi Amin engaged in border clashes with Tanzania with a view to take over the Kagera region (Timeline Uganda, 2008). In 1976 Idi Amin claimed parts of Kenya as belonging to Uganda which created unrest for citizens (Timeline Uganda, 2008).

Asian descent, some young Canadian white males and the difficulties of being an immigrant in a new home:

The three louts had come up behind Esmail and began their abuse. Esmail turned towards them and looked frightened. "What do you have there, Paki? Hey, hey? Paki-paki-paki..."...perhaps Esmail had answered them back... An alarm was raised and suddenly people were gathered where Esmail had stood... Esmail punched in the stomach had been thrown down and was crying... "Save me, save me, I have done nothing"... (Vassanji, 1995, p. 95)

Esmail's experience is an example of what some immigrants in the diaspora may encounter and the feelings of rejection they may feel because of ethnic differences (Genetsch, 2003). Keeping this in mind, periods of initial contact between groups are crucial in shaping subsequent patterns of development with immigrants (Myles & Hou, 2002). If initial contact with immigrant groups is not well received, it can produce residential segregation of visible minorities for both social and economic reasons (Logan, Alba & Zhang, 2002). However, ethnic or racial minorities may choose to live together to gain social, cultural or economic benefits beyond those associated with the initial transition period of immigrant adaptation and acculturation (Myles & Hou, 2002).

Within the 1970s, there was a surge of Indian, South Asian and Muslim immigrants who migrated to Western Countries such as Canada and the United states because of political unrest in their homelands. The new "immigrants" experienced prejudice and discrimination and were "managed" in ethnically marked spaces (Dion & Kawakami, 1996). Focusing on the Toronto region Dion (1989) found a considerable divergence between "visible" racial

minorities (Black, Chinese and South Asian) and white, ethnic minorities (Italian, Jewish and Portuguese). It was reported that there was considerable perceived discrimination and prejudice, as well as little perceived opportunity and little courtesy and respect toward these immigrant groups (Dion and Kawakami, 1996).

CHAPTER III

SHIA MUSLIM WOMEN TODAY: RELIGION, CULTURE, IDENTITY

This chapter focuses on the existing literature related to the experiences of Shia Muslim Canadian women with physical activity, recreation, and identity. While studies concerning physical activity, fitness and women have increased significantly in recent years, information about Shia Muslim Canadian women is limited. However, examining the few studies available on South Asian women and Muslim women in general provides some understanding of how cultural, religious and ethnic identities play a role in the constructions of physical activity. This review of literature will provide an overview of studies within four areas: (a) Shia Muslim Canadian women today; (b) the Hijab; (c) the juggling of Shia Muslim Canadian identities and (d) a story of discrimination, assimilation and stereotyping.

Shia Muslim Women Today

According to the 2001 census of Canada, the Muslim *ummah* (community) is represented by 579, 640 people, the majority of which (over 60%) reside in the province of Ontario (Census, 2001). Most Western⁵ knowledge on Islam focuses on Sunni Muslims as it is the prominent religion of most Middle Eastern and North African countries (Momen, 1985). However, Shia Muslims are the next largest group after Sunnis in the Muslim world. While many are now becoming familiar with the two large sects, presentations of both by journalists and the media are quite misleading (Momen, 1985). Though the general public may be aware of the two major sections in Islam, most are unaware of the sects with the two

⁵ The use of the term “the West” is not intended to homogenize as of course Western people are heterogeneous (Ruby, 2004, p. 19). However, the purpose is to indicate the West’s assumed superiority (Ruby, 2004).

main branches. The problem with this is the non-distinction and homogenization between various kinds of Muslims which has created the “us versus them” mentality within the West (Roald, 2001).

Some authors have pointed that the idea of Islam versus the West has increased since the aftermath of September 11 (Ahmad, 2003; Cankar, 2004; Swiney, 2006). The fear and hatred that has come from this has created a further gap between the two, with Islam on one side and the West on the other. In Western countries, there has been a hardening of attitudes, where generalizations have been made and the contempt of “Others” is more prominent through racial profiling (Swiney, 2006). Aggressive attacks on Muslims and those who may look like Muslims (such as Sikhs due to conspicuous clothing) have occurred through physical and emotional abuse, and through criticisms of their beliefs and their treatment of women in and out of Western societies (Dion & Kawakami, 1996; Ahmad, 2003). Islam has been viewed as the “Other/Orient” culture pitted against “Western” ideas (Mutman, 1993). Indeed, in *Covering Islam*, Said asserts that it is not to be confused with Christianity against Islam, rather the West versus Islam:

[T]hese enormous generalizations have behind them a whole history, enabling and disabling at the same time...[W]e must immediately note that it is always the West and not Christianity, that seems pitted against Islam...why? Because the assumption is that whereas “the West” is greater and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam—its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding—is still mired in the religion, primitivity and backwardness. (Said, 1981, p. 10)

It is important to note that though Islam and Christianity may have similar religious ideals, they do not participate within the same hegemonic order in Western culture (Mutman, 1993). While Christianity is a form of dominant ideology within the West, the way Islam is viewed and practiced is a direct result of Orientalism. Orientalism describes the various disciplines, institutions and styles of thought by which Europeans came to know the "Orient" over several centuries which reached its peak during imperialism (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001). For Said (1978) the link between power and knowledge and the construction and domination of Orientals effectively demonstrates how the process works by identifying and homogenizing "Orientals" at the same time. Like Said (1978), Spivak has examined the way in which the world is formed by the dominant perspective and geopolitical location of the "First World" (The Occident) and is constituted by a network of texts from British colonial archives to US foreign policies (Morton, 2003).

Keeping in mind the works of Said (1978) and Spivak (1988), the term 'fundamentalism' must also be approached carefully as it has been oversimplified in Western context (Roald, 2001). The media tends perpetuate the idea of 'fundamentalism' as associated to violent activities of religious groups that are associated with violence or forceful practices (Said, 1978, Roald, 2001). Islamic fundamentalism seen in this latter way should then be seen as part of a specific consequence of history that has been constructed by the Occident (Mutman, 1993).

Islam in the West has also gained significant media coverage post-September 11. Newspapers, television broadcasts and all other forms of media, have generally offered stereotyped representations of Islam and Muslims (Karim, 2002; Cainkar, 2004; Zine, 2006). The word Islam means peace, yet the images portrayed are the opposite. Media portrayals of

Muslims only reinforce the negative connotations associated to Islam (Alvi, Hoodfar & McDonough, 2003).

Due to the negative connotations associated with “Muslimness” four distinct but overlapping coping strategies are employed by Muslims in Canada (Alvi, Hoodfar & McDonough, 2003). The first is known as disassociation, whereby Muslims segregate themselves from the Muslim *ummah* (community), renounce their faith, and change their names to be more accepted in the West. The second response is withdrawing from the wider society to connect with Muslim communities and minimize contact with non-Muslims. The third response employed by Muslims is self-assertion. Frustrated by negative stereotypes, many Muslims choose to claim their space in society, voicing their opinion at every opportunity. Many of them were able to do this through clothing by wearing symbolic pieces as a form of silent but forward communication, and this is adopted both by male (by wearing the Palestinian scarf) and female (by wearing the Hijab) populations of the Muslim *ummah* (Alvi, et al., 2003). The fourth response is education and to try to dispel old colonial images surrounding the veil and its misconceptions (Alvi, et al., 2003).

Given that there is a constant supply of negative connotations and images associated with Islam and Muslims, it isn't surprising that the “World of Islam” has been seen as the “enemy” (Hassan, 1999). In general, the hatred, violence, verbal and psychological “Muslim bashing” is continuing (Hassan, 1999; Hassan, 2001; Caldwell, n. d.). Yet, in the middle of all this, are the sympathetic outpourings from the West for the Muslim women particularly those not residing in the West. Muslim women have become the oppressed “other” but the concern for them quickly recedes when Muslim women migrate to Western countries. Feelings of resentment and fear that cultural norms are being compromised by “foreigners”

are eminent within the West and a better understanding is not achieved (Brah, 1996; Hassan, 1999).

The 2001 Census (Census of Canada), reported that there are 579, 640 Muslims in Canada of which 352, 530 reside in Ontario. Also, the census indicates that visible minority women comprised 13.5% of the Canadian population. Shia Muslim women (both as a visible minority women and as Muslims) are put in a precarious position, where they must constantly negotiate and re-negotiate their identities and what it means to be Muslim, Canadian, South Asian as well as how their religious, ethnic or family background may play a role in these conflicting identities. The struggle to be 'modern' versus the 'traditional' Muslim woman creates confusion in what it means to encompass these identities and be accepted in Western society (Handa, 2003).

Unveiling the Hijab:

The Public and Private Faces of Shia Muslim Women

Diaspora communities of Muslims are growing in many Western countries and evidence suggests that Muslim communities and Muslim women in particular face similar difficulties across national boundaries (Jawad & Benn, 2003; Dagkas & Benn, 2006). In the West, there are constant accusations by non-Muslims that Islam is a religion that is hostile towards women (Roald, 2001). Non-Muslims in the West find it difficult to differentiate between cultural and Islamic practices, and thus see Muslim women as being oppressed by an androcentric religion, (Roald, 2001). Focusing on one aspect of this is the Hijab and the misinterpretation comes from the association of the lack of gender equity to the wearing of the Hijab (Ameli & Merali, 2006; Roald, 2001). What academic literature fails to include is

the diverse voices of many women who do not feel their religion is constraining and support and/or wear the Hijab (Ameli & Merali, 2006).

Because of the many misinterpretations of the Hijab, it is important to distinguish it from other garments as well as understand its uses. There is the sari (traditional Indian and Pakistani dress where the draping can be made long to cover the head) and the *Shalwar Khameez*⁶ with or without a *Dupatta*⁷ that are widely used by Indian, Pakistani, East African women and sometimes men. The Hijab can be different for those in other countries. The *Hijab*⁸ may be a generic term used to also speak of the *burka*⁹, or *jilbab*¹⁰ or *Niqab*¹¹ (Ameli & Merali, 2006). There are thus many ways in which the Hijab can be worn. It is also important to note that the Hijab is seen often as a state of being and is not necessarily represented by any one piece of clothing (Alvi et al, 2003; Ameli & Merali, 2006).

Many Muslim women choose to wear the Hijab as a symbol of adherence to their faith. While some Muslim women are forced to wear the Hijab, many wear it because they want to; in short for some women the veil can be empowering (Alvi et al., 2003; Ameli & Merali, 2006; Cooke, 2001). The Hijab also carries with it symbols of piety and spirituality as well as it is a representation of shared Muslim identity (Alvi, et al., 2003). The veil can also be seen as a form of beautification, in the same way Western women wear makeup (Hoodfar, 2003). Muslim women also wear the Hijab to be seen for their intellect, rather than

⁶ An outfit consisting of a long shirt (*Khameez*) worn over pants (*Shalwar*). It is traditional to India and Pakistan but has been adopted by many in other areas of the world.

⁷ A large scarf worn by women to compliment a *Shalwar Khameez*.

⁸ A scarf which is worn over the head and pinned beneath the chin. The word can also be used as a general term to refer to other forms of head covers.

⁹ A veil which is tied over the headscarf and covers the face except for a slit for the eyes. Other types can cover the entire body.

¹⁰ A full length loose outer garment, much like a coat.

¹¹ Another form of covering for women (another name for a type of Hijab)

for their sexuality. The Hijab does not deny that Muslim women too are sexual beings, but rather their sexuality should be shared in the privacy of their homes (Moghissi, 1999).

Within various competing gendered, racialized and regulating discourses such as religion and colonialism, representations of Muslim women and South Asian women, in both media and academic discourses, for the most part, are unsurprisingly “fixed” (Ahmad, 2003). Historical as well as contemporary encounters continue to embody Shia Muslim women as well as South Asian women through cultural and religious frameworks which view them as not only as oppressed, and figures of victimhood but also as sexualized Others (Ahmad, 2003; Said, 1978). Numerous stories from around the world and in Canada have made headlines and sparked debate on honor killings, ‘forced marriages’, domestic violence, and terrorism (Hertz, 2007; Wilkes & Teotonio, 2007). While positive representations of Muslim women are available, they seem to be underrepresented and therefore Muslim women are often homogenized and associated with negative images and descriptions ((Hertz, 2007; Wilkes & Teotonio, 2007).

Religious identity can also be coupled with the Hijab. In a study conducted on veiled and unveiled Muslim women of Texas, Read and Bartkowski (2000) highlight how gender identities reproduce existing Muslim discourses, in that cultural discourses are reproduced, constructed and contested in relation to the Hijab. The veiled respondents' accounts of wearing Hijab conformed to the pro-veiling gender discourse and many of the veiled women presented various sorts of religious imagery when asked about their motivations for veiling such as: veiling was a commandment from the Quran, a commitment to Islam, or a symbol of worship. Several other participants suggested the Hijab cultivated friendships and networks as well as serving as form of Islamic identity (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Unveiled

participants were reluctant to judge their veiled Muslim sisters but some suggested the Hijab was a cultural component and not a religious one. However, many unveiled Muslim women in the study identified strongly with religious and ethnic identities. Themes of individualism, tolerance for diversity, and the "choice" to veil or to remain unveiled were implied by both those who chose to wear the Hijab and those who did not (Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

Shia Muslim Women: Juggling Identities

Identity indicates an affiliation to and similarity with a group whether it is social, cultural or religious, as well as a feeling of difference from other groups (Strandbu, 2005). Shia Muslim Canadian women are constantly negotiating and re-negotiating their identities in relation to what it means to be Canadian, South Asian, and Muslim. The growth of diaspora Muslims in Canada raises the complexity of multiple identities coupled with influences from the culture of others within Canadian society (Dagkas & Benn, 2006). I follow those such as Bannerji (2000) and hooks (1990) that conceptualize women of color as dynamic and creative agents in constructing their identities and shaping their experiences. Keeping this in mind, the literature addressing the complexity of Shia Muslim Canadian women and their connections to their culture, religion, ethnicity and racial identities will be discussed, while at the same time being aware that these components cannot of course be disentangled.

Muslim Women and Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is embedded in histories that constantly undergo transformation (Hall, 1990). Far from being fixed entities, it is subject to continuous performance of history, culture and power (Hall, 1990). For instance, Mani (2003) discusses how clothing has become a vehicle for performance of ethnic and cultural identity, in addition to looking at

clothing practices which are often assumed to be congruent with histories of “national origin.” She discusses the combination of both “native-costume” and Western clothing (such as wearing a Kurti¹² on top of jeans, or wearing a nose ring or anklet) as being a process through which cultural and ethnic identities are enacted (Mani, 2003). Concurrently however, such performative acts of culture may reaffirm essentialized identities.

Research performed by Tirone (2000) focused on illustrating incidents of racism and indifference encountered by South Asian Canadian teens and young adults as they pursued recreation and leisure. The 15 participants in this qualitative study were Canadian teenage and young adult children of immigrants from the South Asian countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Tirone (2000) found that many South Asian Canadian Muslims experienced blatant forms of racism (such as verbal abuse) as well as felt discrimination in the workplace, within schools or within other social institutions due to their clothing and garments, specifically the Hijab or the Shalwar Khameez. Through this, South Asian Canadian Muslims were constantly identified as being a part of a minority group, continually being labeled with their associations with Islam or for their skin color which has led to forms of exclusion.

In addition to clothing, culture is produced through family connections with their “homelands” which become part of an individual’s identity (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). Some scholars recognize that family life and the role of family values can be still highly respected within ethnic groups (Basit, 1997). Basit’s study focuses on British Asian Muslim young women and how they have assimilated to or rejected defined roles set by family expectations (1997). Basit explains that family ties and obligations go beyond the nuclear unit and are of utmost importance (1997). Furthermore, emphasis is placed on respecting

¹² Loose fitting cotton shirt that is often worn with pants such as jeans (similar to the style of Shalwar Khameez).

elders, maintaining the honor of the family and restraining from having relations with the opposite sex (Basit, 1997). For British Muslim women, Basit (1997) discusses the importance of roles which are clearly defined and goals which are achieved through a commonality between all members, therefore, individual or personal identity (selfish interests) is not a priority.

British Asian Muslim families attach a great deal of importance to education. However many parents are worried about “corruptive influences” of “secularism” particularly with their daughters (Basit, 1995a). Children are socialized from a very young age to behave in a certain manner within South Asian communities (Basit, 1995a). While South Asians and Muslims may appear to be completely “Westernized”, speaking English fluently and holders of educational and professional qualifications, they are often still committed to upholding their community’s “moral and religious identity” (Basit, 1997). Therefore, family influence is a key component in mediating potential constraints of individual or personal identity.

Bhachu (1996) focuses on Asian women in the Canadian context and how they have come to represent and symbolize the “victim” and may be forced to struggle with “oppressive cultural systems.” Furthermore, Bhachu (1996) explains that Asians struggle to adapt to Western ideals, however, Asian culture, and its values are not as readily accepted by Canadian society (Bhachu, 1996). Bhachu (1996) asserts media and the images it portrays help to reinforce these negative stereotypes, within Canada and the United States respectively. In addition, cultural spaces are emerging from local diasporas as well as through national and international realms (Bhachu, 1996). This has produced new cultural images which are mixed with Western and individual cultural and religious practices, thereby

creating a new hybrid of mixed traditions, while trying to move forward from the post September 11 typecast (Mani, 2003).

In this respect, multiculturalism within Canada must also be explored. The term multiculturalism first gained currency in 1971 as a policy which was to encourage members of all ethnic groups in Canada to maintain and share their language and culture with other Canadians (Pryke, 1998). Neil Bissoondath, a well known author, has questioned the multiculturalism policy in his book, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* in 1994. Bissoondath (1994) argues that multiculturalism has become cult-like (as is reflected in his title), where adherence is mandatory and questioning forbidden. Those who refute the multiculturalism policy are then branded as racist (Abu-Laban, 1998). Canada is then a construction of an “imagined” space of “multiculturalism”, where only certain representations, of ideas and communities are accepted. Take for example labels such as “immigrant” or “visible minority” or “minority woman”. It raises questions of what it meant to be “Canadian” and who really is considered “Canadian”. Bannerji (2000, p. 64), powerfully states that:

the category “Canadian” clearly applie[s] to people who ha[ve] two things in common: their white skin and their European North American (not Mexican) background.

Because of this, immigrants simultaneously belong and don’t belong. They are still seen as the “Other” and are considered both insiders, and outsiders. Insiders because they abide by Canadian laws, and rules, but outsiders because they cannot conform to the Canadian white European identity (Bannerji, 2000).

Handa (2003) focused her research on the dominant discourses constructed in culture and community within South Asian Canadians and how they continuously battle the East/West binary which is reproduced or re-produced through the Canadian/Indian dichotomy (Handa, 2003). For the South Asian Canadian women, neither the Canadian nor the South Asian ties was adequate enough in encompassing their identity. In addition, many felt that there were exclusionary practices in Canada and the women desperately felt the need to be included (Handa, 2003). In her part of her research, Handa (2003) speaks to a woman about her identity and Canada:

Amita: Do you see yourself as Canadian, Ismaili Muslim, East African?

Nisha: If someone said where are you from, I'd say East Africa. I wouldn't say Canada. Even though I'm born here 'cause that's like where we're from and if they asked religion I'd say Ismaili.

Amita: So would you under any circumstances call yourself Canadian, or do you feel that doesn't really describe who or what you are?

Nisha: I don't. I think if like I was in India or something. Like when I was in India I said, "Yeah, I'm Canadian." (p. 134)

For Nisha, being Canadian makes sense only outside of Canada, as well the term Canadian did not reflect the complexities of the "different parts" of her identity (Handa, 2003). This form of relation to one's own country of birth shows that many first generation Canadians do not feel "Canadian" and at the same time have difficulties in adopting or identifying completely with their "South Asian-ness" (Handa, 2003).

Muslim Women and Religious Identity

According to Williams (1988), religion is often a significant aspect of ethnic culture, but can be difficult to establish the exact relation between the two: whether religious affiliation is essential to the ethnic community, or if religious orientation is secondary to ethnic identity. Though immigrant groups differ in the ways they focus and integrate their religious and ethnic identities, some of these immigrant communities emphasize religious identity and rely on religious institutions primarily to preserve cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries (Yang & Ebaugh 2001). Another closely related explanation of why religion may become an important basis for identity recognizes the functions that religion plays in society. In addition to meeting spiritual needs, membership in a religious organization offers many non-religious material and social benefits, including community networks, economic opportunities, educational resources, and peer trust and support (Chen 2002; Hurh & Kim, 1990).

Research by Knott & Khokher (1993) among young South Asian Muslim women in Britain highlights the emergence of complex, shifting strategies which allows for the situational assertion, rejection, or synthesis of values considered either “religious” or “ethnic”. They found that many young South Asian Muslim women established a firm distinction between “religion” and “culture”, which was largely indistinguishable for their parents (1993). Further, South Asian British Muslims rejected their parents’ conformity to ethnic traditions which were considered as symbolic (such as manner of dress) while wholly embracing a Muslim identity itself. Among these young women, Knott and Khokher explain, there is a “self-conscious exploration of the religion which was not relevant to the first generation” (1993, p. 596).

Second-generation American Muslims have come to embrace their religion in more visible ways than their parents (Mubarak, 2007). As Abdo (2006) documents in *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America after 9/11*, many Muslim women who were born and raised in the U.S. are choosing to wear the headscarf even if their mothers did not. An increasing number of young Muslims are attending Islamic schools, conferences and lectures, and developing a stronger affiliation with their religion and co-religionists. Muslim student associations (MSA) are also flourishing in high schools and colleges. According to the MSA national website¹³, nearly 150-200 new MSA chapters were created between 1994 and 2005. Similarly, mosques are playing a greater role in the social lives of Muslims, expanding their traditional roles as a place of worship to include local, educational and vocational activities that cater to the diverse needs of its members, such as computer classes for adults, basketball games for teenagers, and town hall meetings on political candidates for local elections (Mubarak, 2007).

According to Mubarak (2007), the number of Muslim students on college campuses has also increased in the last decade and Muslim students are becoming more vocal in requesting that university administrations accommodate their religious needs. Of all religious requirements, the ability to fulfill Islam's religious mandate to pray five times a day in gender segregated spaces is of primary concern to Muslim students as well as securing a clean and relatively quiet space to pray on campus is perhaps the most important religious accommodation that Muslim students (Mubarak, 2007). According to MSA National's Muslim Accommodations Task Force (NMATF, 2004), as of 2004, there were 120 prayer spaces in American and Canadian universities. Beyond securing a place to pray, Muslim students have sought the right to participate in their religious holidays, *Eid Al-Fitr*, which

¹³ Available at <http://www.msanational.org/about/faq/> (retrieved April 16, 2008).

signals the end of Ramadan, and *Eid Al-Adha*, which signals the end of *hajj*. In 1995, Syracuse University was the first university to officially recognize *Eid* as a university holiday, followed by Albany State in 2004 (NMATF, 2004) Through this, many Muslim students in the United States and Canada, are continuing to be vocal about their religious needs and recognize that it is an important component of their identities.

Muslim Women and Racial Identity

Talking about race, racism and racial identity can be difficult. For one, it identifies that race is an issue and draws a distinct boundary around women's difference on the basis of ethnicity and color (Watson and Scraton, 2001). Watson and Scraton's (2001) research focused on the experiences of physical activity and South Asian women in London, England. They found that these women often related to race, racism and racial identity to the workplace, hospitals and other social venues. However most occurrences of racism occurred when the participants were young and claim that it has become of less importance since they have become parents themselves (Watson & Scraton, 2001).

Race and racial identity also become targets of prejudice and discrimination because of phenotypical characters and genetically transmitted traits such as skin color (Benn, 2005). Consequently, in the West, an 'us' versus 'them' mentality ensues because of difference. For example, this can be seen in the treatment of Muslims who are also Asian in the overlapping complexities of the racialization of religion (Benn, 2005). In an increasingly globalized world, diasporic groups face a "double bind": first the need and desire to retain cultural values and second the desire to assimilate and reject their racial and cultural identities (Benn, 2005).

Zine (2001) conducted a study on Canadian Muslim youth who were committed to maintaining an Islamic lifestyle, despite pressures to conform to the dominant culture. Using a case study of 10 Muslim students and parents, the article demonstrates how Muslim students were able to negotiate both their religious and racialized identities. The participants' narratives speak of a lived experience of racial and religious discrimination as the by-product of negative racial stereotypes and Islamophobia (Zine, 2001). The discussion further explored the challenges that are faced in negotiating identities for Muslim youth in schooling experiences such as "role performance" whereby members of an ethnic/cultural group determine group membership through enactment of behaviors that can potentially be judged by others in the same group. Through this, Muslim youth have assimilated to their cultural/ethnic groups, but at the same time created forms of exclusion from the dominant group (Zine, 2001).

Many are familiar with the work of Handa (2003) who focused her research on conversations with 14 South Asian women of various religions in the Toronto area. She focuses on how these women construct and position themselves in relation to South Asian community and culture and dominant discourses. Part of Handa's research focuses on South Asian music and dance which represents both possibility and limitation (2003). For many South Asians like fashion and clothing, dance and music serve as a means of asserting racial identity and claiming cultural space. Taking part in South Asian dance or listening to South Asian music can create a sense pride. Part of the feeling of pride comes from the act of exclusion, which in the context of white dominant culture says, "This is something *you* can't understand" (Handa, 2003). The reversal of exclusion provides a sense of power. Thus this

space is not about segregation alone, but also an act of celebration, cultural self-identification, and marking-out social territory (Handa, 2003).

“Racialization” of religion, begins when certain phenotypical characteristics are associated or attached to a certain group in popular discourse, which is then usually linked with particular religious identities or religions (Benn, 2005; Joshi, 2006). As Joshi (2006) explains in his study on the racialization of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the United States, racialization reduces people to one aspect of their identity and thereby presents a homogeneous view of a community. While Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam are three different belief systems, they share some of the major outcomes of racialization such as marginalization and are considered the “Other” within Western society. Furthermore, Joshi (2006) explains that the racialization of religion “locates” certain people within the social strata in the U.S. Focusing on Islam, specific interpretations and associations occur when “Arab” and “Muslim” are used interchangeably within popular media thereby producing images and stereotypes of Islam as the “enemy” (Joshi, 2006). Joshi continues by saying that “The ascription of ‘X’ racial features to the tenets of religion ‘Y’ leads easily to the presumption that all people who look like ‘X’ share a belief in ‘Y.’ (2006, p. 219) Through this, Hindus and Sikhs have been associated to Islam because of similar characteristics such as skin color, and clothing choices in the United States and through this creates an essentialist view of their identity.

Muslim Women and Ethnic Identity

Conventional definitions of ethnic identity suggest it is an affiliation or attachment with like-minded people or attributes of certain groups that distinguish communities from one another (Fleras & Elliott, 1996). Linked with this definition of ethnicity, some social

theorists working within a cultural studies framework have also focused on notions of permeable and shifting ethnic boundaries suggest that ethnicity is ever changing. Authors such as Spivak (1993), Bhabha (1994) and Radhakrishnan (1996) have argued for understanding and expressions of identity to move away from static representations. Rather, they claim that the individual's daily interactions illustrate their cultural expressions (Khan, 2000). Ethnicity is best understood as a dynamic, evolving property of both individual identity and group organization. The construction of ethnic identity and culture is the result of both structure and agency undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture (Nagel, 1994).

Ethnic identity is both optional and mandatory and is prescribed by the ethnic categories available to a particular time and space (Nagel, 1994). Research has been conducted on the experiences of South Asians in Canada and how they have adapted, resisted and contested the Canadian way of life (Chekki, 1988). Perspectives such as the "melting pot" or the "salad bowl" mosaic have dominated discussion, not only in Canada but the United States as well (Hing, 1997). The "melting pot" implies that ethnic groups should make continual and conscious effort to blend into Canadian society as the unity of the society becomes compromised through different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and traditions (Li, 1999). However, selective modes of "ethnicity" have been accepted. This has come from "celebrating" certain communities through festivals which creates localized pockets of racialized, ethnicized spaces (Said, 1978; Bannerji, 2001; Ameli & Merali, 2006).

A recent study Kao (2000) examines the reasons why different ethnic groups follow in terms of popular stereotypical images attached to their ethnic group. Distinct images of racial groups maintain boundaries between groups and this provides a rationale to maintain

racially segregated peer groups within schools. Kao (2000) focused on asking students to comment on their peer groups as well as their race. The students interviewed reiterated the stereotypes, for example comments on Asians focused on good in “math and sciences”, while Hispanics were labeled with occupational stereotypes such as gardeners or manual labour. Kao’s study shows how students believe the preconceived notions about their peers through stereotypes that have been instilled without realizing that that is the case. There was a consensus between all groups that “acting white and “acting black” were two opposite categories of behavior. When discussions of “acting white” were initiated, it usually evoked descriptions of “acting black” (Kao, 2000). Certain mannerisms, use of speech, and dress were used to classify the groups (Kao, 2000).

In addition, Kao (2000) found that sport was also segregated by race and ethnic groups; track and football were mainly associated with the African American students, soccer for Latin American students, and swimming and water polo Caucasian students. While students from all races were allowed to try out for the respective sports, their skill levels were not seen as being par to those who were “stereotyped” to excel at a certain sport and so they were encouraged to participate in sports that their race was associated with.

The Muslim body specifically the female Muslim body can be a site of construction and contestation of identity. Dwyer (1999) explores the negotiation of identity among some young British Muslim women, drawing upon group discussions and interviews conducted with 49 participants. Dwyer’s research focuses particularly upon the ways in which bodies are marked as different within different spaces through a consideration of one bodily marker, the role of dress (1999). The author explores some of the possibilities for reworking dress for South Asian Muslim women in Britain to create alternative femininities within different

spaces, focusing in particular on the construction of 'hybrid' identities and the articulation of 'new' Muslim identities. For example, participants agreed that they never chose to wear 'Asian' clothes, such as *Shalwar Khameez*, to school because they would be subjected to racism (Dwyer, 1999). At the same time, the adoption of different dress styles (for example wearing a long skirt as a form of veiling rather than wearing the Hijab or *Shalwar Khameez*) in the Western context is associated with 'new' Muslim identities (Dwyer, 1999). For some individuals adopting a form of dress which was 'Islamically correct' meant challenging parental ideas about what was appropriate attire and thus reworking the meanings associated with 'English' and 'Asian' clothes. In this way individuals could construct an alternative 'hybrid' identity, which explicitly challenged the cultural, religious and ethnic meanings attached to 'Asian' and 'English' clothes (Dwyer, 1999).

Looking at South Asians, popular representations of the "Indian" female body are "visually" strengthened by the appearance of turbans, saris, and other culturally appropriate clothing, as well as the growing number of places of worship such as temples and mosques (Vertinsky et al., 1996). Bissoondath (1994) suggests that current representations of multiculturalism in Canada emphasize "difference" which heightens stereotypes. The media has also been a catalyst for producing stereotyped images of Indo-Canadians. Recent reports of "honor killings" and of Indo-Canadian men promoting orthodox "backward" and "out of date" customs and values has only reinforced Indian women's oppression (Vertinsky et al., 1996; Hertz, 2007; Wilkes & Teotonio, 2007). Thus, racism can be seen to be based on both ignorance and the acceptance of stereotypes.

CHAPTER IV

SHIA MUSLIM WOMEN: IDENTITY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Our identities are not permanent or static, rather, they are constantly changing and evolving according to the different contexts in which we find ourselves (McAdams, 2003; Mischler, 1999; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarup, 1996). Young people born in the West with immigrant parents are core examples of “hybrid” or Shia Muslim Canadian identities (Strandbu, 2005). This hybridity encompasses elements of Islam, Canadian and South Asian cultures and traditions, ethnicity, and gender (Khan, 2002). Hybridity also focuses on the varied cultural experiences and discursive environments (Dallaire & Denis, 2005) in which Shia Muslim Canadian women decide who they will be. Such hybrid identities mean that young women may be brought up to maintain certain traditions and values, but as well as bring innovation and transformation to their community (Strandbu, 2005). Physical activity is about both tradition and innovation and is intertwined with various components of the young Shia Muslim women’s identities. At the same time, integration into the larger society and within physical activity becomes a site of tension and contestation when some Muslims are quick to integrate into the larger community, while other Canadian Muslims seek to segregate themselves and associate themselves within their own cultural, ethnic and religious communities. The following sections focus on the literature that addresses these components and then links them with physical activity.

Gender Identity and Physical Activity

Within sport scholarship, research on Muslim women has been marginal and has been criticized for being ethnocentric and stereotypical (Walseth, 2006b). The few existing studies

have mainly concentrated on the Muslim girls or women's low level of participation (Carrington et al., 1987; De Knop et al., 1995, Strandbu, 2005, Scraton, 2001). In general, authors have had trouble deconstructing concepts such as "woman" or "Muslim", and at times reproduced essentialist discourses. In that regard, it is important to recognize the complexity of Muslim women and not see them as a homogenous group (Wray, 2002).

Perhaps one of the most important practices in the construction of gender identity is physical activity. Despite the recent increases in women's participation, physical activity remains an area where gender and gender differences are constructed and expressed (Theberge, 1993). Men still occupy and dominate the prominent positions within sport institutions and physical activity has been considered extremely important in the development of masculine identities (Theberge, 2003). Denying women opportunities to play sport has been viewed as a form of control over their bodies (Theberge, 1993). Muslim women in Canada face a number of obstacles when it comes to their participation in physical activity. We have also seen an increasing number of discrimination cases involving Muslim girls and the Hijab. According to many, such cases deter Muslim girls and women from partaking in physical activity (see "Group Mulls", 2007; "Hijab", 2007; "More athletes", 2007; Omar, 2007; Ponting, 2007) and there are some who argue that it has been motivated by racialized sexism and "gendered Islamophobia" (Zine, 2003, p. 10).

Earlier research suggests that due to gender differences, Muslim girls face more problems than Muslim boys in the context of physical activity (Carrington, Chivers & Williams, 1987). According to Carrington and his colleagues (1987), these problems are due to religious and cultural traditions that assign men and women particular roles as well as to dress codes that restrict access to or movement within physical education classes. Other

researchers such as Fleming (1994) and De Knop et al. (1996), focused on the low value placed on physical activity by Muslim youth in Western Europe. Thompson (1990) has further argued that in Australia and New Zealand, Muslim women have been more interested in getting their children involved in physical activity than being involved themselves.

Walseth and Fasting (2003) addressed the experiences of Egyptian Muslim women and found that those who supported the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam strongly agreed with segregated physical activity participation for women. Many Muslim women quoted Hadiths (sayings of Prophet Mohammed) which demonstrate the importance of physical activity (Walseth & Fasting 2003). By using Islam as their platform, Muslim and Islamist feminists search for modern interpretation of the faith and apply it to change how Muslim women and Islam is viewed both in general and towards physical activity (Walseth & Fasting, 2003).

Racial Identity and Physical Activity

Researchers have found that racial intolerance can negatively impact the range of leisure activities available to minorities (Fleming, 1994; Rojek, 1995; Tirone, 2000, p. 91). Identifying race as an issue draws a distinct boundary around minority women on the basis of ethnicity and color (Watson & Scraton, 2001). Individuals that have experienced this intolerance tend to seek physical activity partners from within their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds which can in turn reduce the likelihood of racist incidents, but may also limit the range of physical activity opportunities. Minority groups such as South Asian Canadians that participated in physical activity programs found that racism and indifference contributed to the barriers of participating with others not from their own racial or ethnic backgrounds (Tirone 2000).

Identifying instances of racial abuse and how they are experienced by some Muslim women is crucial for demonstrating the existing power relations between minority groups and society itself (Watson & Scraton, 2001). Overt acts of racism can include name calling and teasing because of distinctive clothing (for example, the Hijab or Shalwar Khameez) or their skin color. In a study conducted by Tirone (2000) most of the discrimination faced by participants was overt, however, this gradually decreased as participants reached adulthood. Overt displays of racism was replaced by indifference where dominant group peers showed no interest in the rich cultural traditions of their homelands leading to assimilation with or disassociation from dominant society (Carrington et al., 1987; Tirone 2000).

Different mechanisms to cope with racism and indifference in conjunction with physical activity have been utilized by minority groups. This can include avoidance, withdrawal, the need to excel, retaliation and violence (Tirone, 2000). Tirone (2000) found that certain members from the South Asian group avoided physical activity due to the fear of overt racism and indifference while other refused to participate because they would not trade their traditional clothing for the shorts worn by Western peers within sports. Others felt the need to be competitive with their own team mates and most prevalent, the issue of racism has lead to violence among minority groups who feel they need to protect themselves and in turn, retaliate (Tirone, 2000).

Vertinsky, Batth and Naidu's (1996) research offers important insight into Indo-Canadian women and the difficulties faced in being able to participate in regular physical activity. More so, Vertinsky et al., (1996) address issues race and sexism and the stereotypes that have been perpetuated in popular culture in the West. It is understood that racial intolerance can negatively impact the range of opportunities available to minorities (Fleming,

1994; Rojek, 1995). When South Asian women are stereotyped as being passive and not interested in being physically active, it can be damaging to the development of their self esteem (Camino, 1995). Despite differences in ethnicities, religion and other cultural sources, the homogenization of the Indian women has created an image within recreation providers that they “look and “seem” the same (Vertinsky et al., 1996). Vertinsky et al (1996) also look at the stereotyping of Indo-Canadian woman “look” and have the same requirements and needs which can create a sense of “false universalism” that educators, administrators and government officials tend to perpetuate. Furthermore, Indo-Canadian girls are characterized as “weak” and “passive” and therefore assumed not interested in being active. The insensitivity and differences in cultural and religious values are overlooked. This has created additional challenges and barriers for Indo-Canadian women to get involved in sport and physical activity (Vertinsky et al., 1996).

In addition, many of those in the teaching profession are largely European-American and have had little or no exposure to issues that are significant to minority cultures (Sparks & Butt, 1996). While the ethnic, racial, cultural uniqueness of students is increasing it can create challenges for both student and teacher. As the diversity of the student population continues to grow, Sparks and Butt (1996) suggest the need for the teaching process to be responsive to these differences.

Cultural Identity and Physical Activity

The significance of family influence on physical activity among young women from minority (Muslim and South Asian) communities in Britain also plays an important role (Tess, 2006). Researchers have found that Muslim girls were more likely to enjoy leisure activities with family members rather than with their peers from dominant groups (Tirone,

2000; Tess, 2006). Some reasons for this participation included parents' active roles as companions, as well as active support in their physical activity choices by coming to events and games as well as providing transportation to and from venues (Tirone, 2000). On the other hand, family expectations of roles of young women also affect the choice of physical activity undertaken and studies show that parents influence Muslim girls' opportunities and experiences throughout their lives (Tess, 2006).

Bhopal (1997) found that a majority of South Asian women valued family traditions therefore community is an important factor in maintaining connections. Some parents held membership to South Asian social clubs, which were central to the community, and its roots in tradition helped to provide activities for teens, parents, and children in participating in physical activity (Tirone 2000). Clubs also provided opportunities for interaction between teens of their own age that may have no been possible with school friends and in other recreation environments due to parental objection. Because teens were participating within the community, parents felt comfortable with the social environment created for their children (Tirone, 2000). However, parents would deter their children from joining non-South-Asian groups and were less supportive of their participation in these other physical activity programs (Tirone, 2000, Tess, 2006).

Some Muslim girls, while wanting to participate in physical activity expressed that it would only be acceptable with their parents if it conformed to the principles of Islam. If parents were unsure about the suitability of the occasion or the facility, they could prevent their daughter attending (Tess, 2006). Not only can this deter Muslim women from looking for physical activity opportunities, it limits them to focus on participation within their religious and cultural groups (Tess, 2006). However, some parents and male siblings felt that

Muslim girls did not participate enough in sport and should do so. Some mothers of Muslim girls also encouraged physical activity and wished to see their daughters take advantage of these opportunities within the Western context (Tess, 2006). The more assimilated to the dominant culture, the more Muslim women participated in mainstream physical activity (Dagkas & Benn, 2006).

Of particular interest was research conducted by Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan & Guerin (2003) which focused on interviews, observations and conversations with 37 Somali Muslim women in New Zealand and “explored barriers to fitness and exercise, the social, physical, and cultural effects of physical activity, and solutions to facilitate Somali women’s access to fitness and exercise opportunities” within their community (Guerin et al., 2003, p.84). They found that the need for culturally and religiously appropriate physical activity opportunities would benefit both the women and the community in innumerable and possibly immeasurable ways. By engaging in the physical activity it was found that it helped to decrease weight gain among the women, and improve their physical health (Guerin, Diiriye, & Corrigan, 2003). Guerin and colleagues also noticed the benefits of positive social interactions, opportunities and community cohesion amongst the women. As well, it provided an avenue for some social interaction with other women in the community who were neither Somali nor Islamic. Most importantly it was found that the self identification of *their* needs was important in creating and contributing to successful physical activity programs.

Research has shown that girls with an immigrant background specifically girls with Muslim parents are less involved in physical activity (De Knop et al., 1996; Pfister, 2000). Strandbu (2005) focused research on the under-representations of Muslim girls in Oslo in sports clubs. Strandbu found that barriers to physical activity were both cultural and

religious. She explains that some Muslim women feel social pastimes that are different, or considered “Western” and may be less willing to participate in physical activities as they may find them to be improper (Strandbu, 2005). She found that their parents wanted them to excel in education and described their parents as both caring and controlling. The role of friends was also seen as a possible contributing factor to explain why some Muslim girls assimilate or transgress to their cultural practices in relation to physical activity (Strandbu, 2005).

Stodolska and Livengood (2006) conducted a study that analyzed the effect of religion on Muslim immigrants in the United States and physical activity. The research project based on 24 interviews show that the effect of Islam manifests itself through the emphasis of strong family ties and on family oriented physical activity among Muslims. The study found that there was the need to teach and supervise children and to pass traditional moral values to subsequent generations, dressing modestly and restrictions on mix-gender interactions, dating, food and alcohol (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006). The findings of this study suggest that researchers need to pay more attention to the effects of religion on physical activity and should strive to incorporate the religious beliefs to help retain and maintain the heritage of minorities (Stodolska & Livengood, 2006).

In research conducted by Tirone and Shaw (1997) Indo-Canadian women with families did not seek time away from their families for relaxation and enjoyment and preferred to be with their husbands and children thereby leaving little room for leisure activities. When it comes to sport and physical activity, many Indo-Canadian families are concerned with safety, protection and modesty. Sportswear which is revealing, or wearing shorts and exercising in mixed company can be contrary to Indo-Canadian views of modesty. However, this is not to say that they cannot participate in physical activity. In an earlier

study, Sfeir (1985) discusses the status of women and sport and notes that physical activity has been associated with strengthening both the body and the soul.

Research conducted by Vertinsky et al (1996) on Indo-Canadian women and experiences of physical activity also focused on gender values and traditions in which roles of femininity can become more important and defined once she reaches puberty. While there are Indo-Canadians participating in physical activity, Vertinsky et al (1996) noted that families tend to gear women to partake in “feminine” activities such as badminton and dancing. These non-contact, non-aggressive activities uphold the values of modesty and femininity in Indian culture. In spite of this, there are many young women who are receiving positive encouragement from their families to be physically active (Vertinsky et al., 1996).

In many Indian cultures, female children are socialized to the particularities of their role as are females in Western societies (Vertinsky et al., 1996). However, when the socialization of Indo-Canadian occurs first in the home and then at school or other institutions, it can become problematic. Away from home she may be expected to partake in co-educational and competitive activities or wear revealing clothing that would be frowned upon in traditional families (Vertinsky et al., 1996). Through this South Asian girls may lose interest in physical activity because it does not uphold to their perceived needs and values (McKenzie, Alcaraz, & Sallis, 1994; Vertinsky et al., 1996). The choice to not participate by Indian girls is often viewed by recreation providers as a refusal to integrate or a lack of physical ability or desire to participate (Vertinsky et al., 1996).

As Vertinsky et al (1996) discovered fear of sexual harassment or the tainting of female virtue and modesty can be an important barrier to physical activity. As illustrated in their study, the concept of sexual harassment is dealt with a “Band-Aid solution” whereby

participants tend to keep incidents to themselves in order to continue playing, or are removed altogether by protective parents. Rather than explore the root of the problem, the solutions is to keep women restricted and protected. Therefore, individualized forms of physical activity such as badminton, female only aerobic classes seem to be acceptable and “safe”. In addition great importance is put on academics as a route to success within Indo-Canadian culture, as well as family obligations and therefore physical activity and recreation may not be of great importance within the Western context. However, many Indo-Canadian girls are participating in physical activity and recreation programs through organizations run by the Indian community which are culturally sensitive to their needs (Vertinsky et al., 1996). By developing their own sport and physical activity teams, Indo-Canadians are further segregating themselves from their white classmate. While separate spaces may deny the opportunity of mixed sport and power sharing between men and women, it is the only condition under which some girls will participate in physical activity (Vertinsky, et al., 1996).

Though physical activity is important component (though often not practiced) in the Muslim way of life, cultural misrepresentations are articulated (Zaman, 1997). The teachings of Prophet Mohammed and the Quran stress the importance of sports such as swimming, archery, horse-riding; encouraging both men and women to engage in physical activity in order to maintain healthy lifestyles (Nakamura 2002; Sfier, 1985; Taylor & Toohey 2002; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). Walseth and Fasting (2003) found that Muslim women in their study believed taking care of the body was crucial and gave importance to physical activity because they believe it was prescribed by the prophet.

Recreation needs of minority groups are often marginalized when facilities and/or programs are only designed to cater to the general population (Taylor & Toohey, 2002; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). This suggests that ethnic minorities are expected to conform to the norms of the dominant society (in this case, remove the Hijab) and be like the majority (Yilmaz, 2000, p. 354). With the exception of food, festivals and fairs, displays of cultural and religious identity are best confined to the private realm where they do not challenge dominant uses of space or public behavior (Whitten & Thompson, 2007).

A common understanding of sport and physical activity is that it can create feelings of belonging to a community. Walseth (2006a) focused her research on 21 young second-generation Norwegian women with immigrant backgrounds (from Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and Kosovo) who suggests that there are different forms of belonging produced through sport, traditional sporting communities, contribution to identity building and better self image. Of the women interviewed, only one used a veil. The young women participated in an array of physical activity and sports ranging from basketball, self defense, field hockey and gymnastics (Walseth, 2006a). In addition, the women did not express discomfort of having a male audience or male coaches. Among the young women that were involved team sport it was quite common in feeling a sense of belonging because of the close relationships that existed among the players, which mostly consisted of minority players, as well as the sense of community that was achieved (Walseth, 2006a). Being able to participate in physical activity for some Muslim girls was seen as a “refuge” from family obligations and housework. As well, feelings of belonging were due to the role sport played as a source of identity confirmation and ‘image’ building. These young women told stories about sport participation had given them feelings of being special and stressed that if they had not played

sport they would have been more anonymous (Walseth, 2006a). While some Muslim women did suggest that participation in sport did not create a sense of belonging, it was those who had not participated in sport in a long time or were involved for only a short period of time (Walseth, 2006a).

Religious Identity and Physical Activity

Very pertinent for this study are articles specifically related to Muslim women and physical activity and their religious identity. Of the literature available, many presented results in relation to women of South Asian descent and briefly mention the impact of different religions (Raval, 1989). This collective treatment of South Asians and Muslims has created a 'false universalism' of the complexity and diversity of these women's experiences and therefore are treated stereotypically and denied their individuality (Raval, 1989). There is a limited body of research that focuses on the experiences of Muslim women (Sfeir, 1985; Carrington, Chivers, & Williams, 1987; Scraton, 2001; Nakamura 2002; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Dagkas & Benn, 2006). However, the literature that is available, provide ideas of what Muslim women are facing within non-Muslim countries, the influences of Islam on physical activity, as well as what are the causes of this limited participation. The lack of scholarly work on Muslim women and physical activity illustrates the need to close the existing gap within this field.

The stereotyping of the Hijab epitomized in the media has profound effects on the lives of women and girls who are trying to incorporate the West into their lives, while at the same time hold on to religious values that are important to them (Ameli & Merali, 2006). Recently, the news has been filled with images and headlines concerning Hijab wearing, Muslim women and their participation in physical activity. While there are some Muslim

women who choose not to wear the Hijab, there is clear evidence that those who do are more likely to be the victims of violence, discrimination, prejudice and exclusion (Dagkas & Benn, 2006). Within Canada, the Hijab is often recognized a symbol of Muslim women's gendered oppression (Ruby, 2004). More so, they need to contend with the negative "Muslim woman" stereotype of a passive, backward, Hijab-wearer (Ruby, 2004).

Religious identity can also be coupled with the Hijab. In a study conducted on veiled and unveiled Muslim women of Texas, Read and Bartkowski (2000) highlight how gender identities reproduce existing Muslim discourses, in that cultural discourses are reproduced, constructed and contested in relation to the Hijab. The veiled respondents' accounts of wearing Hijab conformed to the pro-veiling gender discourse and many of the veiled women presented various sorts of religious imagery when asked about their motivations for veiling such as: veiling was a commandment from the Quran, a commitment to Islam, or a symbol of worship. Several other participants suggested the Hijab cultivated friendships and networks as well as serving as form of Islamic identity (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Unveiled participants were reluctant to judge their veiled Muslim sisters but some suggested the Hijab was a cultural component and not a religious one. However, many unveiled Muslim women in the study identified strongly with religious and ethnic identities. Themes of individualism, tolerance for diversity, and the "choice" to veil or to remain unveiled were implied by both those who chose to wear the Hijab and those who did not (Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

Ruby (2006) illustrates the ways in which immigrant Muslim women in Canada perceive the Hijab and associate it with diverse meanings. The article reveals a gap between dominant understandings of the Hijab as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression, and the self-expressed positive experiences of wearing the Hijab in the participants' lives. Through

focus groups, the participants stated that the Hijab helped to confirm their Muslim identities and offer them the status of being a “respectable person”. Ruby (2006) further discusses the participants’ multiple meanings of the Hijab including the notion of modesty. From Ruby’s (2006) findings, the concept and deeper meanings of the Hijab as expressed by the participants are not woven into larger Canadian society, and argues that the Hijab in the form of Muslim woman’s clothing emerges as a device to negotiate spaces within the Muslim community, as well as in the dominant western culture.

Hybridity focuses on the influence of “varied cultural experiences and the discursive environments to which one has access and how it helps decide who an individual will be” (Dallaire & Denis, 2005, p. 147). Specifically in Canada, there have been two cases in 2007 whereby young Muslim girls have been told to either remove the Hijab when participating in competition or remove themselves from the game. The first of these incidents occurred with a Muslim girl who was not allowed to participate in a soccer tournament in Quebec because of her religious headgear (“Group Mulls”, 2007). The second case involved a Muslim girl team in Canada, who was not allowed to participate in a Tae Kwon Do tournament because of their Hijab (“Hijab”, 2007). In this case hybridity becomes valuable in that the young Muslim women transgress socially constructed cultural boundaries (for example, wearing Hijab and playing soccer) based on the assumption that there is a difference between cultures (in this case Muslim culture vs. Canadian culture), while also pointing to the similarity between them because they can be merged (Dallaire & Denis, 2005). This does not mean that the merging and interaction of culture or identities is stable (Dallaire & Denis, 2005). For example in Europe tensions have increased in France, where state schools have banned all such religious symbols, including the Hijab (Dagkas & Benn, 2006).

Dagkas and Benn (2006) focused on the experiences of both Greek and British Muslim women. The Greek respondents were from the northern part of Greece where there is a large minority group of Turkish origin while in Great Britain, the respondents were predominantly of Pakistani origin. Dagkas and Benn's research has suggested that Greek and British Muslim women held positive views towards physical activity but were restricted in their participation due to Islamic requirements associated to dress codes, gender segregation, and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Overall, the Muslim women's attitudes were positive, with recognition of physical activity's benefits in terms of enjoyment, health, and links to success.

Although physical activity is not generally a core contributor to a Muslim woman's identity, recreation choices are based on meeting religious requirements. Taylor and Toohey (2002) found four common concepts that most of Muslim women face in participation of physical activity within non-Muslim countries and this includes; stereotyping, inclusion, exclusion and otherness. Muslim women have described feelings of discomfort and experiences of ignorance that people have toward Muslim culture and religion (Whitten & Thompson, 2007) Many assumptions made, have been are usually inaccurate and have negative connotations (Ruby, 2004). Physical activity within Islam is seen as a religious requirement but Muslim women cannot participate as most physical activity institutions do not meet their needs (Taylor & Toohey 2002). The lack of inexpensive and easy access women-only spaces deters Muslim women from participating in physical activity (Tirone, 2000; Taylor & Toohey, 2002). While inclusion was listed as one of the common components, it was limited to those who had the financial means of participating in women's only health clubs. Muslim women who were able to access these resources also mentioned

the difficulty faced by others within their community who could not use these facilities due to financial constraints (Taylor & Toohey, 2002). Most of the exclusionary practices have occurred with women within school settings by being limited in how they can participate when other men are around as well as in clothing restrictions. While other girls from the gym class wore shorts, the Muslim women had to wear track suits, again singling them out among their peers. Finally many of the women felt they were seen as “others” (through their clothing choices) and through this their recreation participation was constrained (Taylor & Toohey, 2002). Many Muslim women in non-Muslim countries find it difficult to access programs that meet their religious requirements thus, feel restricted and excluded in their recreation participation (Taylor & Toohey, 2002).

Tirone (2000) found that many South Asians felt discrimination in the workplace, within schools or within other social institutions due to their clothing and garments, specifically the Hijab or the Shalwar Khameez. Many South Asians felt that recreation providers and institutions did not create the spaces that Muslim women needed to participate actively within sport and physical activity nor were they culturally sensitive to their needs and requirements, thereby feelings of exclusion increased (Tirone, 2000).

In a review of literature on the relationship of young Muslim women and physical activity, De Knop, Theeboom, Witter and De Martelaer (1996) suggest that Muslim women in Western Europe have positive attitudes toward sport participation. However, the actual level of participation was lower when compared to others. The authors state that this could partially be due to restrictions in Islam which are significant for Muslim women (1996). Younger Muslim women who have been brought up in the West may also be characterized by a “modern religious attitude” compared to older counterparts. While there are indications

that Muslim girls are attracted to a more “modern” lifestyle, research has indicated that they tend to behave in more traditional ways (De Knop et al., 1996). De Knop et al., (1996) found the position of women in Islam is more of an issue with girls from Muslim immigrant families (De Knop et al., 1996). In addition to religion they have suggested that family can influence Muslim women’s participation in physical activity. Some Muslim families fear the westernization of their children, and therefore may restrict the behavior and social circles to those of the Islamic community (De Knop et al., 1996; Handa 2003). Finally, De Knop et al., indicate that Muslim women in non-Islamic countries confront very specific problems such as racism, difficulties to adapt, differences in culture, language climate and environment. Finally, in their review, De Knop et al., emphasize the importance of increasing physical activity participation among young Muslim women in Europe and its benefits (1996).

Nakamura (2002) conducted his research on Canadian Muslim women, found that there were three areas in which Islamic framework within physical activity differed from Western sport ideology which included: (1), flexible and modest dress code, (2) sex segregation and (3) controlled access to their physical activity space. Modesty and privacy are important in upholding the values of Muslim women and hence cannot wear shorts, skirts or t-shirts when participating in physical activity in the presence of men. Because of this, Muslim women find it harder to blend in with the rest of society due to their clothing which automatically signals to others that they are different (Taylor & Toohey, 2002). Westerners tend to view this clothing as restrictive and conservative while some Muslim women find this clothing liberating (Ruby, 2004). After puberty, Muslim people are to be sex segregated but without the proper spaces, Muslim women have difficulty participating in physical activity programs while adhering to the principles of their faith (Sfeir, 198; Nakamura, 2002; Dagkas

& Benn, 2006). Research has highlighted that Muslim women would like to use recreation services, but felt the services were not able to meet their needs (Tirone, 2002). Furthermore, Muslim women felt that recreation providers have a minimal understanding of the group and continue to hold many misconceptions about their recreation needs (Dagkas & Benn, 2006). During Ramadan many Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset which can limit energy and cause hydration problems in physical activity (Dagkas & Benn, 2006). Nakamura (2002) found that when such needs were not met by the physical education system or the administrators of the recreational facilities, Muslim women compromised their beliefs, participated within their religious community, or stopped playing completely.

In addition, research conducted by Walseth (2006b) focused on the relationship between 21 young Muslim women's involvement in physical activity and identity work in Norway. By "identity work" Walseth refers to constructions of identity and demonstrates how ethnic and religious identities influence such constructions. She found that some Muslim women situated themselves within their ethnic identity, while others challenged the boundaries of ethnic identity and finally, some focused on their religious identities versus their ethnic identities (2006b). Muslim women's ethnic identities created specific challenges and boundaries in participating in physical activity. The young women who positioned themselves within the framework of their ethnic identities were not interested in physical activity because it was not seen as "respectable femininity" (Walseth, 2006b). Some of the women in the study were influenced by the processes of cultural maintenance and identified with their parent's ethnic group (Walseth, 2006b). Some of the young women who challenged the ideal of femininity by participating in physical activity experienced disapproval or harassment because of their participation. The sanctions experienced ranged

from being the object of gossip or being described as ‘too Norwegian’, to direct harassment which has led to disengagement in certain forms of physical activity (Walseth, 2006b). Among those who regard religion (Islam) as a more important source of identification than ethnicity, being physically active is seen as important because of Islam’s view on keeping fit and exercising regularly (Walseth, 2006b). Some Muslim women who wore the Hijab experienced more freedom from their parents who were not worried about them becoming “too-Norwegian” and were not confronted with the demands of cultural maintenance (2006b).

Conclusion

Researchers have advanced our understanding on both South Asians and Muslim women and the barriers they face with physical activity (Sfeir, 1985; Carrington et al., 1987; Fleming 1994; Tirone, 2000; Nakamura, 2002; Taylor and Toohey, 2002; Tess, 2006; Walseth; 2006, Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Dagkas & Benn, 2006). While these articles speak of physical activity in relation to Muslim women, only one refers to physical activity and Muslim women in Canada. Some articles have also focused on survey-like research which does not focus on the experiences of Muslim women. Articles such as Walseth and Fasting (2003) or Dagkas and Benn (2006) speak to a whole population of Egyptian or Greek Muslim women when it is clear that the interpretation of Islam is multiple and involves many different facets. Finally no articles were found that were specific to Shia Muslim women rather, all articles generalized Muslim women into a homogenous group not accounting for different sects or sub-sects within Islam. In general, the information that is available still tends to homogenizes South Asians into one group which does not account for the multiple cultures, religions, languages that “South Asia” is comprised of (Abbas, 2003; Zine, 2001).

Previous research on South Asians has yielded few studies taking into consideration the different experiences, cultural and religious differences as well as background which may effect or make a difference in how they are viewed (Abbas, 2003). While these articles have indeed contributed to the literature available, there are very few studies looking at physical activity and Muslim women in the diaspora context. Therefore more research is required to fill the gap on Shia Muslim women and physical activity as well as various components of their identities such as gender, religion, race and culture.

CHAPTER V

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories (Brah, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1999; Foucault, 1972a, 1972b, 1978, 1980; hooks, 2000; Said, 1978; Spivak 1988; Weedon, 1987, 1999). The feminist poststructuralist approach focuses on power, knowledge, discourse, subjectivity and performativity, while the postcolonial view focuses on history, dislocation, and diaspora. This stance is important given that past research that has often been situated within modernist, positivist, sexist and racist boundaries. This chapter will look at the key components of both feminist poststructuralism and postcolonial theory in order to show how they can be useful in the analysis of how identities and subjectivities inform the constructions of physical activity among Shia Muslim Canadian women.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist theory has been taken up by many feminists as a tool to understand subjectivity, gender and society (Weedon, 1987, 1999). Though poststructuralism does not have one fixed meaning, it has been influenced and developed from the works of Saussure (1974), Derrida (1976) and Lacan (1977) and particularly informed by Foucauldian concepts of discourse, knowledge and power (1972a, 1972b, 1978). Poststructuralism has commonly been understood to be a way of thinking that challenges the epistemological and ontological assumptions of modernity and offers a framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society and the possibilities of change (Helstein, 2007; Weedon, 1987). According to Weedon (1987), the poststructuralist perspective provides a useful structural

foundation that seeks to deconstruct language but also draw attention to social, historical and cultural specificity.

According to Weedon, the feminist poststructuralism can “provide an understanding of how gender and power relations are constituted, reproduced and contested” (1987, p. vii). Within formal institutions, women have begun to challenge the boundaries of existing knowledge and power relations (Weedon, 1987). By recognizing power relations, the social role that women play as well as challenging the dominant discourses within the individual can bring about awareness and change. Through the institutional framework, one must be aware of the continued reproduction of knowledge *over* rather than *for* women. From the feminist poststructuralist standpoint, an individual’s subjectivity is made possible through already established gendered discourses to which she may have access to (Davies, 1992). Poststructuralism proposes that subjectivity is constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we speak or think (Weedon, 1999). By understanding that reality is created through discourse, it can be argued that “Reality” is created through language and cultural practices.

Discourse and Language

Feminist poststructuralists have been particularly attracted to the work of Foucault (Hall, 1996) and so I borrow the concept of discourse from Michel Foucault (1981). Foucault viewed discourse as

Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can run different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another opposing strategy. (1981, p. 102)

Furthermore, Foucault (1972b) states that the exercise of power cannot be possible without discourse and the production of truth cannot occur without exercising power. Power does not work by negatively coercing those who are subjected to it, but rather it shapes them to fit within its needs (Foucault, 1991). For Foucault, discourse is comprised of knowledge, social practices, power relations and forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Discourses, according to Foucault then (1972a) are part of the operation of power wherein they construct, define and produce objects of knowledge.

Discourses are enabled by many sources, both social and institutional such as law, medicine, and education (Weedon, 1987) and offer new ways of conceptualising ideology and the relationship between power and social structures (Mills, 1997). Discourse is a set of statements, sanctioned by institutional forces which have a profound effect on the way individuals think and behave (Mills, 1997). Dominant discourses are therefore promulgated through popular institutions in society and often promote what comes to be widely accepted as “truths” (Hall, 2001; Weedon, 1987).

Foucault also viewed discourse as a system of representation on the production of knowledge through language (Hall, 2001). Foucault states:

Western thought has seen to it that discourse be permitted as little room as possible between thought and words. It would appear to have ensured that to discourse should appear merely as a certain interjection between speaking and thinking; that it should constitute thought, clad in its signs and rendered visible by words or, conversely, that the structures of language themselves should be brought into play, producing a certain effect of meaning. (1971 p. 20)

That is to say discourse is about both language (what one says) and practice (what one does). More specifically discourse is a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about, representing knowledge - of a particular topic in a particular historical moment” (Hall, 1992, p. 291). For Foucault, the important point was how discourse, knowledge, “truth” were historically specific which produced forms of knowledge, subjects, regulated speaking and served to sustain power relations important to that period of time (Hall, 2001).

Within poststructuralist theory, a common factor of analysis is language (Weedon, 1987). Language is a place where subjectivity is constructed and where possible forms of organization are defined, accepted or contested (Weedon, 1987). Language does not reflect reality but gives it meaning, and is always historically and culturally specific (Foucault, 1972a; 1972b; Said, 1978; Weedon, 1999). For poststructuralists, there is no reality that is independent of ideology and language and thus, language is central to the construction of one’s reality. Foucault maintained that it is through the power of discourse that we continually devise categories and norms that specify position and define people in different ways. Moreover, meaning can never be static and is constantly changing. Muszynski (2000) states that, “language provides structures through which we construct ourselves and the reality around us” (p. 119). For example, the word “Islam” itself means peace, and to Muslims it may be seen as such. However, in Western context Islam is coupled with fear, Jihad and terrorism. Thus, “language is not a nomenclature or way of naming things that already exist, but a system of signs whose meaning is relational” (Loomba, 1998).

Moreover, feminist poststructuralism is influenced by the Foucauldian notion that language is always located within discourse, and is constantly competing to structure society and govern its subjects (Weedon, 1997). For feminist poststructuralism, it is language which

allows an individual to think and give meaning to the world and from there act upon it (Weedon, 1987).

Power and Knowledge

The concepts of knowledge and power as discussed by Foucault (1972a, 1972b, 1980) have been and continue to be recognized as crucial. In a lecture, Foucault (1972b) explains the concept of power:

there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation circulation, and functioning of a discourse...we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (p. 93)

It is through discourse that power relations are established and maintained. Power is therefore, a key element in the production of knowledge as well as discussions of discourse. Foucault believes that through power, knowledge creates so called “truths,” and these “truths” are associated to dominant discourses (Shiner, 1982). However, alternative discourses are also available and they contradict dominant ones, thus empowering oppressed groups.

Foucault also believes that power is exercised through ordinary, everyday activities (Hale, 1995). For Foucault, power does not function in the form of a chain rather he believes that we are all, to some degree caught up in the circulation of power – the oppressor and the oppressed (Hall, 2001). Power relations permeate through all levels of social existence and therefore are found in sites of social life – in private spheres of life such as family and

sexuality, and in public spheres such as economy, politics and law (Hall, 2001). It is not the institutions or spheres themselves who hold power, but power is located in specific techniques of dissemination. For example, a school is a site where power is produced in the teacher-student relationships, through discipline and forms of assessments as well as power produces knowledge and “truths” (Shiner, 1982; Wright & Burrows, 2004). Moreover, power is not simply repressive and negative, it produces things and power induces pleasure and forms of knowledge (Hall, 2001).

Foucault’s subject is created through power and particular forms of knowledge (Weedon, 1999). Foucault writes that “...human beings are made subjects...it is a form of power which makes individuals a subject” (1982, p. 208). Power is thus exercised rather than held and can be both productive and repressive (Rail et al., 2002). This generates questions about how power is exercised in the construction of knowledge about physical activity, about what kinds of knowledge are accepted and about how Muslim women position themselves within mainstream and alternative physical activity discourses of the West.

Subjectivity

Central to poststructuralist theory, is the concept subjectivity. According to Weedon, subjectivity is the “conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (1987, p. 32). Foucault suggests that the “subject” and “subjectivity” cannot be separated (McLaren, 2002). This notion of subjectivity suggests that individuals, although free agents, are only free in so far as their choices are dependent on the different discourses available to them within a certain space and time. Subjectivity includes the thoughts and emotions, which account for the relationship between an individual and the social institutions we enter such as family, school,

and pop culture (Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralism also theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict, central to the process of change as well as preserving the status quo (Weedon, 1987). For example, competing meanings which are part of a broader relation to power have implications for both men and women (Weedon, 1999). They affect femininity and masculinity as forms of lived and embodied subjectivity and constitute women and men's positions within society as well as define what is natural, moral or good (Weedon, 1987). This positioning of subjectivity allows us to understand how it is constituted through the gendered, heterosexualized and racialized discourses to which one has access (Rail & Dumas, 2008). At the same time, an individual may actively participate in or resist certain discursive practices (Weedon, 1997).

For instance, much of what is expected from women in Canada comes from interactions and particular situations in which women are expected to know what to feel when, for example, being in a romantic encounter or dealing with children. Yet when the subject position and the mode of subjectivity are resisted in a patriarchal society, this speaks to the presence of an alternative discourse or femininity. And so, everything is signified by compliance or resistance (or a little of both) to the dominant norms of what it is to be a woman (Weedon, 1987). In making our subjectivity the product of society and culture, feminist poststructuralism insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically and change depending on the discursive fields and discourses which encompass them (Weedon, 1987, 1999). As an individual acquires language and gives meaning to experiences, particular discourses have already occurred and pre-dated her entry into language. The way an individual positions herself in relation to such discourses becomes how she structures herself as well as her subjectivity (Weedon, 1987).

Performativity and Identity

Many feminist poststructuralists have incorporated performativity into their work on the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, space and place (Nelson, 1999). It has been suggested by Butler (1997, 1999) that the formation of identity and subjectivity and the process of mapping by which an individual becomes a subject is assumed through pre-existing constructions of sexed/gendered/racialized identities. Butler (1990) discusses the concept of performativity to speak to the compelled performance of dominant discourses through gendered, sexualized and racialized identifications. The concept of performativity has become a way to examine differentiated subject formation with practices that sustain lines power and its effects (Bell, 2007). Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1997; 1999) discusses gender in terms of “citational performativity” and explains that it is produced through regulatory practices. Butler (1990) presents gender as a performative act, wherein women and men engage in performing dominant notions of femininity and masculinity. Women then perform their gender requirements through repetitive practices structured by dominant discourse (Butler, 1990, 1997, 1999). Of course, if they are exposed to alternative discourses they may engage in alternative forms of femininity.

A few scholars have explored whether or not performativity can be transposed to race (Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1993). Butler (1999) argues that gender and race work in the background of one another. Omi and Winant (1993) argue that without racial identities we have no identity at all, as it is deeply rooted and linked with our sense of self. In racialised thinking, the physical characteristics of individual bodies and their skin colour serve as a guarantee for racial classification (Weedon, 1999). However much as an individual may want to escape racial categorization and be seen merely as an individual she

finds herself confined by implicit and explicit definitions of whiteness or racial otherness (Weedon, 1999). Butler (1999) argues that the gender and race categories always work in conjunction with one another. To Butler (1993), femininity is not a product of choice, but the result of a norm that disciplines and regulates bodies and punishes those who transgress cultural norms. Subject formation is dependent upon pre-existent gender norms. According to this perspective, one comes to accept the 'truth' about one's gender identity through engaging in regulatory and gendered practices structured by discourse. In the act of performing our identities (gendered or otherwise), fictionalized actions are performed which appear to be natural and necessary. By enacting such conventions, we make them "real" to some extent but that does not make them any less artificial. Through the power of discourse, bodies that transcend the limits imposed by cultural norms are subjected to exclusion (Butler, 1990).

A distinction between identity and subjectivity must be made. Butler (1988 p. 519) would argue that that identity is not stable and is constituted in time and instituted through "stylized repetition of acts." Whereas subjectivity is continually being reconstituted in discourse each time we speak or think (Weedon, 1999). We may believe that our subjectivity is the source of our actions but Butler (1990) challenges that our sense of subjectivity is a construction that comes about only through the enactment of social conventions: "gender cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an 'act,' broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority" (Butler, 1990, p. 279).

A feminist poststructuralist theorization of identity argues that identity is not a singular, fixed or static phenomenon, but is multiple and shifting, determined by the competing discourses in which the individual is placed (Weedon, 1996). Brah (1992) conceptualizes difference as a social relation constructed within a system of power (race, class, gender, sexuality) that transpires in the experience of diversity in the everyday lives of women. And so it is important to recognize that identities are complex and sites of contested representations (Wray, 2002).

Deconstructing a woman's identity is fraught with problems. Issues of representation, formation of collective identities may be labeled as "misplaced essentialisms" and to speak of "cultures" or "communities" reproduces essentialist discourse (Wray, 2002). Previous works have questioned "the subject" as both a candidate for representation as well as liberation, however very little agreement what constitutes or should constitute the category of women (Butler, 1990). Foucault notes that systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent. Keeping this in mind, Butler (1988) argues that "woman" is a historical idea and "becoming" a woman requires conformity to this historical idea.

Understanding identity through Foucault's concepts of discourse and subjectivity suggests that identity is constructed, historically specific and is constantly changing to the discourses available. For Foucault, the process of producing oneself as a subject is sustained through discourses and power relations in which one moves (Bell, 2007). Butler (1990) argues that a gendered subject's outward performance is sustained without the necessity of an inward act, and so one "performs" or produces their cultural identity through ritualized repetition.

Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonialism is far from being a unified field and the word itself can create many differing opinions and divergences. To understand postcolonialism, one must try to decipher the word. "Post" colonial carries with it two meanings: one representing, the chronological order of things, and the second, colonialism's legacy (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). For the first meaning, there is an automatic assumption that having the word "postcolonial" implies that colonialism and the formal control over colonized countries is over. However, control over and the oppression of people is still occurring through other forms of power struggles, as certain Western nations feel the necessity to control and influence the economic, political and ideological livelihoods of these newly independent countries, creating a "new" type of colonialism (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). For the second meaning, the legacy left behind by colonialism and its destruction is still resonating through many "Third World" nations (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988).

Postcolonial theory has been influenced by a number of theorists. Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) have enabled a radical reconceptualization of the relationship between nation, culture and ethnicity (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Significant contributions toward antiracist and feminist postcolonial thought have been influenced by these revolutionary authors. Within postcoloniality, the conceptualization of 'race' ethnicity and ethnic identity has also been a major concern (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Brah (1996) discusses the colonial sandwich in which women are placed, oppressed first by the native man and then by the colonizers. In addition, Brah (1996) speaks of the balancing act the immigrants face: the pull to assimilate to Western society and the desire to maintain their cultural identity. Grewal (1996) also notes that nationalist and colonial patriarchies continue to oppress women. She

remarks that these patriarchies promote certain prescribed roles for women such as reproducers of the “nation” and therefore as subjects of the social, cultural and gender colonization that denies them equality and justice.

Furthermore, deconstructing gender and ethnicity has led Spivak (1988) to challenge Said’s (1978) effects of colonial discourses. In her widely-read essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1988), Spivak argues that homogeneity and uniformity cannot exist due to the difficult position of the female “subaltern” – a position characterized by silence. The marginalised Indian woman, for example, is oppressed by both the white (referring to the West) and native (referring to the Occident) man through the hierarchy of gender and the strength of colonialism (Brah, 1996; Williams & Chrisman, 1994). The “re-presentation” of the Other (in this case, the oppressed women), in art, philosophy, media and theory “speaks for” the Other without actually understanding who the Other is (Spivak, 1988). Most importantly, Spivak explains that there is a tendency for the experiences of minorities, women and the Other to be homogenized and classified as one. As scholars, writing on behalf of and for the Other, Spivak (1988) notes that there is a need to be “conscious” of our role in perpetuating the subaltern’s “silence.”

The colonial legacy and its after-effects are still being felt across many nations and its people. The latter may try to break free of colonialist ideas within their homelands or confront them as migrants who now reside in Western countries (Handa, 2003). The manner in which ‘immigrants’ and the Orient view themselves was never discussed until Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Said (1978), looked at colonial discourse and the ways in which the West constructed and wrongly depicted the “Orient”/Other as different and exotic. Other authors have argued that colonialism can create damaging effects on the colonized subject in the form of political,

psychological and moral damage (Fanon, 1967; Loomba, 1998). The authors have submitted that “psychic trauma” is experienced by colonized individuals who come to realize that they never attain “whiteness” (which is desired) and never shed “blackness” (which is devalued) (Fanon, 1967; Loomba, 1998). This psychic trauma causes agony, desire and alienation for both the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha, 1994).

Orientalism

Edward W. Said’s revolutionary work titled *Orientalism* focuses on the interaction and relationship between the Orient/Other and the Occident. Said derived his method from the writings of Foucault and Gramsci and created his own argumentation (Bhatnagar, 1986). Through Foucault’s knowledge, power and truth triangle, Said considered how knowledge is produced in terms of a power relationship: the Occident over the Orient and the representation and representations (so called truths) they have created. In Said’s (1978) portrayal, Western discourse about the Orient was an enterprise designed to conceptualize, manipulate and eventually dominate the non-West.

Said (1978) argues that literature and culture have often been seen as historically innocent, however this is not the case. Early European texts have negatively represented the Orient as the “Other.” With the invention of the printing press, many histories and religious texts have been modified or changed altogether (Bhatnagar, 1986) thereby, erasing and modifying histories of the East. Consequently, the knowledge disseminated by the West perpetuated a dichotomy between Western and non-Western people and their culture.

More specifically, Said (1978) examines the way in which the West has wrongly depicted the Orient as being strange and exotic. The Orient had been romanticized, sexually charged and associated with exotic women, scents and spices (Said, 1978). The West viewed

the Orient as the “Other”: the exotic, the different and the unknown. People of the Orient began to see themselves as the Westerners saw them—as being foreign and different. They have accepted this as a “truth” and now view themselves as being exotic and unique (Said, 1978).

Through Orientalism, prejudice and racism was created and directed towards those from the Middle East and Asia because they were seen as different. From the writings of the pioneer Orientalists, the Occident viewed people of the Orient as being barbaric (Said, 1978). There was a prominent theme of teaching the Orient the meaning of liberty which they felt Oriental Muslims, especially, knew nothing about. Oriental Muslim women, their restrictive clothing, and their submissiveness were one of the focal points in this movement. Liberty was romanticized and through the civilizing (Christian) mission, the Occident tried to change the “backward” ways of the Orient (Said, 1978). Since September 11, 2001, Muslims (in the Orient or not) have increasingly been viewed as the “Other,” reinforcing the idea that the Occident is superior to the Orient.

Parts of the East, especially Arab countries with Islamic association, have long been signified and symbolized as danger and represented in negative terms (Said, 1978). Within more recent views, there has been the reinforcement of stereotypes regarding the Orient (Said, 1978). Television, films, the internet and other media reinforce these standardized views. Within Western media, anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudices have exploded (Said, 1978). Racism and cultural stereotypes dehumanize Orient-associated Muslim individuals and reinforce ideas of hatred in the Occident. Through this, certain “Othered” groups believe the constructed stereotype and their constructed future (Said, 1978).

The search for identity by the colonized people has been met with heavy opposition by the colonizer (Bhatnagar, 1986). In many “Orient” societies, bruised by years of colonial domination, there is an intense questioning of self-identity, a process which gives rise to a profound identity crisis (Dallmayr, 1996). For Muslims, identity has often been reduced to a religious category. Muslims are thus confronted with stereotypes associated to the oppression of women, Jihad and terrorism (Khan, 2000; Said, 1978). Muslim people find themselves thrust into predetermined discourses and practices that shape their agency, and at times determine their strategies of resistance.

Postcolonial Thought

Postcolonialism is a broad term that recognizes that representations common to colonialism still exist regardless of the fact that decolonization has occurred (McLeod, 2000). While postcolonialism is important in examining individuals living in countries with a history of colonialism or colonial legacy, it is imperative to discuss individuals who have come from migrant families and migrated from countries with a history of colonization (McLeod, 2000; Handa, 2003).

Through the course of dislocation, migration and integration into the West, Oriental Muslims have had to redefine their identity within the host society (McGown, 1999). However, much of the integration of immigrants in the West is dependent on the political culture of a country (McGown, 1999). Appadurai (1993 p.173) suggests that various immigrant communities have been able to manufacture what he calls “delocalized transnations” that retain special and recognized links to the place of origin but are otherwise diasporic collectives. Agreeing with Appadurai, Behdad (2005) however, suggests that in a post 9/11 climate within the West (referring to the United States), the immigrant/foreigner

(for example, brown skinned individuals, South Asians and Middle Eastern among a few) is observed more closely as a threat. The representation and “re-presentation” of Islam in a Western context has had major implications for the Muslim diaspora (Brah, 1996; Said, 1978). Diaspora describes the displacement and migration to a new country, while still acknowledging “the old country,” its customs, languages and traditions (Brah, 1996; Handa, 2003). Brah (1996) has introduced the term “diaspora space” to speak to this intersection, to discuss, as he points out, “the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested” (p. 181).

South Asian Muslim women are located within various competing gendered, racialized and regulating discourses such as those of religion and colonialism (Ahmad, 2003). Historical as well as contemporary views continue to essentialize and provide “fixed” embodiments of the oppressed “Other” (Ahmad, 2003). Within a diaspora context, these embodiments are just as prevalent through fiction, media, narratives, and academic endeavors. For example, clothing is often assumed to be congruent with histories of “national origin” as a representation of culture and tradition (Mani, 2003). Wearing the Kurti with jeans or sporting a nose ring becomes a way in which individuals identify with their ethnic and cultural identity. Ethnic identity, then, has a performative aspect as individuals act through their clothing practices and this causes a situated reading of diaspora as a localized cultural form (Mani, 2003).

The idea of diaspora also attempts to account for a community’s acknowledgment of the “old country” through language, religion and customs in their new country, individuals create an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of belonging with others of the same background (Cohen, 1997; Handa, 2003). Diasporic identities can be

influenced for generations after the original migration and thus generational differences along with gender, race, class, religion and language differences create diasporic spaces that are constantly contested, shifting and reproduced.

Conclusion

The approach employed in this study was consistent with an interest in listening to Shia Muslim Canadian women while, at the same time, using feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories to investigate where and how meanings are constructed through language as well as to connect the women's responses to a wider social and cultural context. Research that is available on Muslim women has implied that they belong to a fixed homogenous group with unchanging identity. The present study rejects this idea and recognizes that Shia Muslim Canadian women are rather heterogeneous and constantly changing. Using a poststructuralist stance that focuses on the politics of difference allows me to challenge fixed meanings (Weedon, 1987, 1999). Moreover I was interested in looking at how women construct their realities based on resisting or assimilating to dominant discourses. Using the term "construction" reflects my poststructuralist notion that reality is made and constructed through language and cultural practices (Rail et al., 2002).

For feminist poststructuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting discourses that allows a woman to think and give meaning to the world and, from there, act upon it (Weedon, 1987). Such a perspective provides a useful foundation that seeks to deconstruct language and draw attention to social, historical and cultural specificity. Using a poststructuralist framework will provide a better understanding of how Shia Muslim Canadian women construct their ideas of physical activity in relation to power, knowledge, language and subjectivity.

CHAPTER VI

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter outlines the methodological issues and concerns that frame the present study. I have chosen to work with feminist qualitative methods. The increase in qualitative research on the sensitive issues associated with marginalized and ‘silenced’ populations has become a predominant concern due to the political, ethical, and methodological implications involved. The rising awareness of these implications has sparked debate among feminists on honoring the voices and visibility of marginalized (hooks, 1989; Jansen & Davis, 1998; Reinharz, 1992; Valdivia, 2002). Feminist researchers also focus on methodology that humanizes both the researcher and the participant and provides a “gentler” manner of conducting research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). More specifically, I have borrowed elements from feminist ethnography and feminist interview research for my collection or narrative materials and elements of feminist poststructuralism and postcolonialism for my analysis of such materials. The primary goal of this chapter is the presentation of a methodology that allows a deeper understanding of the constructions of physical activity among young Shia Muslim Canadian women, as well as to explore such constructions’ relationship with culture and religion.

Borrowing from Feminist Ethnography and

Feminist Interview Research

For the purposes of this study, I have borrowed elements from feminist ethnography. Traditionally, feminist ethnography has been used to understand the experiences of marginalized socio-cultural groups and is grounded in three principles: (a) documenting lives

and activities of women, (b) understanding women and their experiences and point of view, and (c) conceptualizing women's practices and experiences as an expression of social contexts (Reinharz, 1992). Although not involving myself in ethnographic research per se, I am committed to such principles for the study of Shia Muslim women and their constructions of physical activity.

Along with feminist ethnography, I have borrowed from feminist interview research. Feminist researchers find interviewing appealing for many reasons. For one, it allows researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992). In this way, interview research explores participants' views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory and possibly uncover previously neglected or misunderstood experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

Specific to feminist ethnography, DiIorio (1980) has explained that feminist fieldwork is important in reforming fields such as the sociology of sport. By employing ethnography, deconstruction of some patriarchal assumptions within sport could occur. As well, ethnographic research could help ascertain which women and girls are participating in physical activity and their identities (1980). Certain field sites are particularly accessible to female ethnographers that are either inaccessible or uninteresting to male ethnographers (Reinharz, 1992). For this particular study, accessing Shia Muslim women would have been difficult if I did not have access to the sites of social interaction such as mosque and the Muslim student association (MSA) and if I was not a Muslim woman.

Within feminist ethnography, the women studied by researchers do not always trust them, particularly when there are differences of social class, race, ethnicity or sexual preference (Reinharz, 1992, p. 65). While differences may exist, it is important to be able to

overcome them and “earn” the bond of sisterhood (Reinharz, 1992). A feminist perspective on research analysis also includes components such as understanding women in their social contexts and using women’s language and behavior (Reinharz, 1992). Keeping in mind the Shia Muslim women of this study and their social contexts, language and behavior will be important components in the study.

In addition to this, feminist interview research suggests open-ended research and asking participants what they feel is important for female researchers as it can draw on performed “roles of femininity” (Reinharz, 1992 p. 20). As well, recognizing and being able to talk about sensitive issues in a non-threatening environment as equally as important. Interviewing can also help develop a sense of connectedness with participants, rather than control over them (Reinharz, 1992). Having participants be “actively involved” and “constructing data about their lives” (Graham, 1990) is important for these connections and a manner which can reduce alienation of researcher “from the researched” (Reinharz, 1992). Also consistent in interviewing is paying close attention both verbal and non-verbal communication.

The versatility of feminist interview research is evident in the numerous topics studied, where interviews can take place, how they will be recorded, along with other various ways in which feminist interviewing is conducted. This variety reflects that feminist research methods are both rooted in mainstream disciplines while simultaneously rejecting them (Reinharz, 1992). For example using “participant” rather than “subject” as a signifier suggests that the researcher is operating in a feminist framework that recognizes the power to name or rename (Reinharz, 1992). At the same time feminist researchers who interview women frequently discuss topics that are typically not part of mainstream academic or public

discourses. Therefore it becomes even more important for a researcher to listen with care so a participant “can develop ideas, construct meanings and say what she means” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24). Concurrently, a researcher’s emotions can affect what she hears or understands and therefore it is important to be aware of the active role she plays for participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Bhopal (2001) explored the issues of gender and racial identity on South Asian women of East London, and argues that racial identity *can* and *does* affect the research process in which women have some shared experience with researchers. Furthermore, Bhopal (1997; 2001) argues that when considering the insider/outsider status within the research process her racial identity as a South Asian woman enabled her to gain access to the South Asian community. In the research process some South Asian women discussed their comfort levels and felt they could identify with someone of the same racial/cultural background. However, they suggested that they may not want to speak or be interviewed by white researchers because shared experience is not revealed (Bhopal, 2001).

By virtue of being a female and a Shia Muslim, access to participants particularly those who are more traditional and who refrain from being in private spaces with men who are not their immediate relatives (i.e., father, brother or uncle) was granted because of familiarity and cultural affinity. Reinharz (1992) explains that familiarity may enable the researcher to have more focused and productive interviews. Most important, researchers who conduct feminist interview research try to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women and therefore take the question of ethics into consideration (Reinharz, 1992). Researchers must take extra caution ensuring that confidentiality is achieved and that a comfortable environment to share is available for participants.

Placing Myself in the Research:

An Insider/Outsider Perspective

As a Muslim woman of South Asian descent born and raised in Canada, and belonging to the Shia sect of Islam, I live in a tri-polar world. I constantly juggle my Western, Islamic and East Indian/African ideas, values, and expectations and use them in conjunction with each other. This is the case with physical activity, where values and expectations from both my secular and religious/cultural worlds collide. Neither I nor the women who participated in the conversations belong to a “homogenous” group, though many would assume that our experiences would be similar in terms of exclusion, oppression and racism. In fact, South Asia is known for its many different languages and regions, all of which follow different cultural practices. Therefore I do not wish to speak on behalf of all Shia Muslim women, but rather consider diversity of the Shia Muslim Canadian women who will be involved as participants in the study.

Being a Shia Muslim Canadian myself, and as a “researcher” of Shia Muslim Canadian women, my hope is to work alongside with the women of my community. However, I understand that I may be viewed as both an insider (because of my connection with the community) and an outsider (because of my Western education, my sect within Islam, the way I practice my religion, my personal choice not to wear the Hijab and even the dialect I may speak). While I may be a Shia Muslim, I am part of a smaller sect known as Ismaili. Some participants could possibly belong to another subsection such as the Shia-Ithna ashari or the Shia-Zaidiyyah who may have different religious practices. While the conversations will be conducted in English, at times certain words from different languages and dialects of South East Asia may be used as descriptors to help explain events/experiences

in their lives. I am not fluent in Arabic, Punjabi, Hindi or other language that the women may choose to use besides English and therefore this may peg me as an outsider to the community or to the experience (Watson, & Scraton, 2001).

As a Shia Muslim Canadian woman who has pursued her education in a Western context, I realise that revealing the experiences of some Shia Muslim women can be seen as an act of intellectual colonialism because in the past, many communities and people have been exploited and misrepresented (Smith, 1999; Vertinsky, Batth, & Naidu, 1996). It is not my intention to do “research through imperial eyes,” nor is it my intention to marginalize or exploit these women’s individual experiences. But I am aware that the word “research,” as Smith (1999) explains, is at times synonymous with “insolence” for the Muslim community and its people. Shia Muslims through colonialism, have been studied, classified, stereotyped, and taken advantage of for many years. Yet, as Roman (1993) suggests, taking the risk of speaking *with* rather than *for* these women may be better than the risk of silence. Nevertheless the issue of researcher responsibility will be of utmost importance, as well, the importance of a nonexploitative relationship between researcher and researched will be stressed to ensure that issues of power, honesty and ownership are addressed (Ahmed, 2003; Seibold, 2002).

As a Shia Muslim, speaking with other Shia Muslim women who come from South Asian descent may provide a way for these women to share their experiences. Because of the specific timing of some of the conversations (the month of Ramadan – when Muslims fast for 30 days, from sunrise to sunset) and because I do not wear the Hijab myself (especially during that month), it may make me seem and feel like an outsider and an intruder (Bhopal, 2001; Watson & Scraton 2001). While I agree that it is the personal choice for every woman

to choose to wear and support the Hijab, I may be viewed as someone who will “not be able to understand” and ultimately be cast as an outsider, which may make them less inclined to share their experiences with me. At the same time, no doubt that as a Shia Muslim Canadian woman, my racial, ethnic and cultural identity may help me connect with the women I will interview (Bhopal, 2001).

Participants

As the primary focus of this research was to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the participants, only a small number was recruited and involved. Prior to the study, I struggled with whether I should focus on a small sub sect within the Shia Muslims population of young women in the Ottawa and Toronto regions. However, I found that this would not have been sufficient, and therefore have decided to look at Shia Muslim women in general. The core of this study thus involved 10 Shia Muslim Canadian women of South Asian descent between the ages of 18 and 28 from either Toronto or the Ottawa region.

The Shia Muslim Canadian women who elected to participate in the research project were contacted through word of mouth. With my personal ties with the Shia Muslim community in both the Ottawa and Toronto regions, specific individuals were contacted and given the opportunity to participate. Once the initial recruitment phase was completed, participants were asked to forward names of one or two individuals who may be interested in participating in the research. The prospective participants were contacted directly by the researcher via email or phone. The Ottawa and Toronto regions were chosen because of the strong presence and access to the Shia Muslim communities, as well as my familiarity with these communities.

In addition to this, I looked for participants who were residents of Canada and whose parents had ancestry rooted in India/Pakistan. The Shia Muslim population in both Ottawa and Toronto is quite diverse in terms of socio-economic status, class, religion (sub sect within Islam), country of origin and involvement within the Muslim and South Asian communities. Such characteristics were considered in order to maximize the differences between the participants. Finally, participation in the research was limited to those who self identified as Shia Muslim.

The conversations took place in one of three locations: the participant's home, the researcher's apartment or a coffee shop located near the University of Ottawa. The conversations with the women took place between September 2007 and September 2008. A presentation of a small text (please see Appendix B) was used to highlight the purpose of the study and its main components. The text was also used to distinguish and gauge the interest within the subject matter. All Shia Muslim Canadian women who showed an interest in participating were then provided with a recruitment form (see Appendix C) that provided a space for the participant to write down her contact information such as a phone number. Once the recruitment form was completed by interested women, these potential participants were contacted by phone and were asked to participate in an in-depth conversation lasting between 1 and 2 hours (see Appendix D). The participants were then asked to choose a time and place of their convenience and comfort level for the conversations.

During my fieldwork, recruiting participants proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Brah & Shaw (1992; p. 53) indicate that there are just reasons for South Asian women having reservations about taking part in research: "it is understandable that Asian women, about whom all manner of stereotypes abound, should be cautious about giving

information to strangers.” Some of the difficulty in recruiting participants occurred with partial research conducted during the month of Ramadan. This was due to Ramadan falling at the same time approval from Ethics was granted, in addition to Ramadan falling on the lunar calendar which changes each year. In addition it was partly due to participants fasting and partly because of strict rules that must be followed within the month of Ramadan (i.e. maintaining purity, their ideas of what “Haram” (bad) they may say). Though women who were approached were interested in the topic, some would not even allow discussion of it as they did not want it take away from their religious practices. In addition to this, some Muslim women who were approached to participate were extremely shy and did not want to speak to someone they did not know well. While I ensured that anonymity and confidentiality were paramount they shied away from the opportunity. As a result, elements of the study were modified, providing women an opportunity to participate in the study at alternate times when they were not fasting, such as sundown and thus was ultimately not a significant barrier. In addition, some women who said they were interested and took recruitment forms or said yes, were reluctant to set or confirm a concrete date for the conversations. Although I engaged in extensive follow up via email and phone, it was difficult to get some women to commit.

Conversations

The primary instrument used for this study was a “conversational guide” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Questions from the conversation guide were used to provide general conversation topics and participants were encouraged to take the conversation in the direction of their choice within the general topics (see Appendix A). The questions in the conversation guide were open-ended and regrouped in four different sections: (a) discursive constructions of physical activity, (b) sources of discursive constructions of physical activity, (c)

integration of physical activity and the Hijab in day-to-day life (d) culture, physical activity and the Hijab (Please see Appendix A for further details). The first two sections of the conversation guide focused on the constructions of physical activity and their sources. The questions were tailored to help the researcher understand how the participants understood and constructed their own meanings of physical activity. Following this, section three focused questions how physical activity and the Hijab could be incorporated into everyday life. The questions focused on whether physical activity and recreation was a priority on a day to day basis within Shia Muslim Canadian women, as well as the limitations and the restrictions they may have felt in being able to access or participate in these programs. This section also focused on whether the women were satisfied with their overall physical activity standards and what needed improvement. Section four was created to understand how culture and religion play a role in the constructions of physical activity. Questions related to parental influence, the impact of their communities, the Hijab and religion were asked in order to gain further understanding of their impact on constructions of physical activity.

The questions focused on the constructions of physical activity and where their constructions come from. At all times I was aware of the nature of research, my role as a researcher and made it a point to make sure that the questions posed, did not compromise the comfort level of the participant. To ensure that this was maintained, the questions were all posed using layman's terms and clear language. I made every effort to ensure their comfort by offering to conduct the conversations at their convenience, and a location designated by the participant and by creating an empathetic and respectful atmosphere. I was also acutely aware that the Shia Muslim Canadian women had entrusted me to tell their stories, while maintaining their anonymity. I also worked hard in keeping true to their personal boundaries

of culture, religion, race and personal situations. My role as the researcher was to ensure that the participants felt inclined to share, all the while feel at ease.

Participants were encouraged to ask questions at any point to ensure that a conversational format was maintained. To encourage participants to feel comfortable and relaxed, I provided chai (tea) and cookies, which is considered the norm within Shia Muslim and South Asian communities. This was also done because some conversations occurred during the month of Ramadan, after fast-breaking hours, and therefore participants were grateful for the gesture.

An important aspect of the research process was ensuring that the participants felt safe in sharing their experiences with their constructions of physical activity. This was achieved through involvement and interaction with the research process. Reinharz (1992) states that:

In general feminist observational or interview-based studies include a strong connection between the “researcher” and the “subject” that develops during the course of the study and lasts beyond it, sometimes only in memory, sometimes in actuality. (p. 263)

In this study, I understood that the women would be divulging information from previous experiences and that I would be a part of their personal lives. By achieving a rapport with the interviewees, and creating a safe and non-threatening environment ensured that they were treated in a non-exploitative manner (Reinharz, 1992).

Transcription and Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Materials

Qualitative materials collected through the conversation guide were transcribed verbatim. I personally transcribed each conversation directly after to allow complete

immersion of the information gathered. This also allowed me to make further notes and comments about the conversational process without forgetting what had happened if I had done so at a later date. In addition, the written notes taken during the conversations (of participant's body language and emotional reactions) were incorporated into the transcripts to provide a comprehensive approach to the research. With this in mind, and understanding that a transcript of text is open to various interpretations with every reading, I employed the use of a notation system that borrowed ideas proposed by Maynard (2006). All verbal and nonverbal cues and moments in the conversation were recorded. For example pregnant pauses, the "uhms" and "ahs", the increase of volume in voice, interruptions, and laughter were documented. When participants were loud or quiet or visually or verbally upset, I inserted cues in the text. The transcript also included silences, emphasis, laughter and breathing.

Once the conversations had been transcribed verbatim, they were sent back to the participants to ensure the accuracy of the text. Participants were sent the transcriptions via e-mail and were given two weeks to make changes and/or additions to the transcription. Following the two week period, participants were asked to return the transcripts with their alterations so they could be used within the analysis process. In addition, written notes, non verbal moments and other nuances were recorded within the transcription process to provide a more accurate picture.

Thematic Analysis of the Qualitative Materials

Transcriptions were analyzed according to feminist poststructuralist and post colonialist frameworks outlined in Chapter V. A thematic analysis was conducted by looking at the transcripts of the ten participants and the regrouping of themes and sub themes that

emerged. Some of these included cultural and religious practices, modes of dress, community functions, notions of physical activity, the Hijab and gender.

Once qualitative materials were collected, transcribed, and reviewed by the participants, I began the process of coding, classifying and interpreting the results. Fragments of narratives were regrouped into themes based on their semantic affinity (Rail & Dumas, 2008). Narratives were analyzed vertically and then transversally to compare between participants (Rail & Dumas, 2008). It was felt that thematic saturation in analysis would be achieved with 10 Shia Muslim Canadian women and their conversations. However, if thematic saturation could not be achieved, additional conversations would be conducted.

Discourse Analysis of the Qualitative Materials

The narratives will also be analyzed via discourse analysis and will be informed by feminist and poststructuralist theory (Denzin, 1994; Lupton, 1992; Minh-Ha, 1989; Rail, 1998; Weedon, 1997; Wright, 1995). In terms of thinking about discourse as having effects, it is imperative to consider the factors of truth, power and knowledge and its relation to society (Mills, 2004). Generally, the analysis will help to locate the “truths” that shape the participants’ understandings and constructions of their social realm. More specifically, this method highlights the ways in which differences are constructed and maintained within a binary (either/or) system, and where “the nature of the first term is superior to and depends on the definition of the second” (Rail, 1998, p. xiii). Discourse analysis will allow me to explore the narratives to document how the participants, as “subjects” (Butler 1990, 1997), position and construct themselves within dominant or alternative/resistant discourses, particularly in regards to physical activity. Lastly, the analysis of women’s narratives has been selected to identify how young Shia Muslim Canadian women reproduce and/or resist

discourses in relation to gender, religion and the Hijab as well as how meaning of physical activity is constructed.

Trustworthiness of the Results

Finally to improve the trustworthiness and authenticity of the results once the qualitative materials collection and analysis had been completed, participants were sent via email, a copy of a portion of the thesis (article portion) depicting a certain aspect Shia Muslim Canadian woman and her experiences with physical activity. Participants were invited to offer feedback on the accuracy of the article to ensure that the results were correct. This enabled the participants to view the results in a non threatening manner, while at the same time, help contribute to the results of the research.

Ethical Considerations

Approval from the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics board was sought and received on September 21st, 2007 (see Appendix E). In compliance with their regulations, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured from the commencement of the study. During the recruitment stage, participants were approached directly and each received written documentation outlining the premise of the study (see Appendix B). As well, a recruitment form provided participants a chance to provide information about themselves and a chance select a time for a conversation at their convenience (see Appendix C). Once recruitment forms were given back to the researcher, participants were contacted to set up a meeting time. Participants were aware that their involvement was strictly voluntary and were allowed to withdraw from the research at any point. At this time, if participants agreed to move forward with the conversation, a specific location was agreed upon to meet to conduct the conversation. After having explained all the

details of the study as well as the consent forms, I asked the participant if they had any questions (see Appendix D). If the participants at this point were still ready to proceed with the conversations, a formal signing of two copies of the consent form occurred. The consent forms comprised of a form complying with the requirements of the University of Ottawa Ethics Committee, which explained in detail the basis of the participation (see Appendix D). Two copies were signed to ensure that both the participant and the researcher had a copy. The copy of the consent form given to the researcher (myself), was secured and placed in a locked cabinet. Participants were offered an opportunity to select a pseudonym (or have one assigned). Confidentiality was ensured through careful handling of all documentation, including a secure storage of all research notes, transcriptions, consent forms etc.

A conversation guide (see Appendix A) was prepared to ensure that questions were unbiased, easy to understand and related to the research topic. Participants were also ensured that they did not have to answer *any* questions that caused discomfort. At no time did the participants indicate discomfort with any of the questions that were asked. Finally I remained sensitive to the participants' cultural, and religious definitions and understandings of gender, religion, the Hijab and their constructions of physical activity.

In the end, it was my hope that the participants were treated with the utmost respect and dignity. As well I hope that they were able to gain some perspective from their participation in the study, which I am confident was achieved as comments and gratitude were offered for being allowed to share their unique stories and experiences. At the end, each participant was provided with a copy of the article summarizing the results of the study for their reference.

CHAPTER VII**ISLAM, HIJAB AND YOUNG SHIA MUSLIM CANADIAN WOMEN'S
DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

**Islam, Hijab and Young Shia Muslim Canadian Women's
Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity**

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the results of a study exploring young Shia Muslim Canadian women's discursive constructions of physical activity in relation to Islam and the *Hijab*. The aims of the study were primarily informed by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. Poststructuralist discourse analysis was used to analyze the transcripts of conversations with 10 young *Hijab*-wearing Shia Muslim Canadian women. The results show that the participants discursively constructed physical activity in terms of being physically active (involved in fitness activities rather than sport), feeling good about themselves (i.e., being physically and mentally healthy), and losing weight or remaining "not fat." The participants mentioned that they would choose Islam over physical activity if they had to make a choice between the two. Wearing the *Hijab* while participating in physical activity was seen by most as difficult and limiting but, in the end, neither Islam nor the *Hijab* were considered barriers to physical activity. Participants strongly resisted the Islamophobic discourse present in Canada, they constructed themselves as modern Muslim subjects yet they located themselves within a dominant gendered/religious discourse on women and physical activity. In the end, the young Shia Muslim women appropriated an intersectional discourse that legitimates their refusal to choose between their right to religious freedom and their right to physical activity.

Islam, Hijab and Young Shia Muslim Canadian Women's

Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity

In recent years, there has been a series of much mediated incidents regarding young Muslim Canadian women and their sport experiences. At the center of the controversies, we often find the much-maligned *Hijab*. In a number of cases, young women or girls have been told to either remove the *Hijab* or remove themselves from the game (“Group Mulls”, 2007; “Hijab,” 2007; “More athletes,” 2007; Omar, 2007; Ponting, 2007). While much has been written in mainstream Canadian media about the *Hijab*, young Muslim women and sport, in-depth knowledge of this topic is inexistent as very few sport scholars have endeavored to research this issue.

At first glance, young Muslim Canadian women interested in physical activity or sport seem to confront a multifaceted problem. For many of them (especially those who wear the religious headgear), the constant (re)negotiations of a “safe” space to practice physical activity coupled with the experiences associated to being a Muslim woman in Canada seem difficult to juggle. To date, however, little is known about such negotiations and experiences. Early research on race/ethnicity and sport has been criticized for being ethnocentric (Raval, 1989; Fleming, 1994), for homogenizing Muslim women, and for contributing to (rather than dispelling) the stereotypes regarding Muslim women's oppression and lack of physical activity (Walseth, 2006b).

In light of the gaps in the literature and given the importance of filling such gaps for appropriate actions on the part of institutions and communities intent on improving Muslim Canadian women's physical activity experiences, the main purpose of the present study is to

further our understanding of Muslim Canadian women's discursive constructions of physical activity. In addition, this study aims to further our understanding of their: (a) reasons for partaking (or not) in physical activity; (b) views of physical activity in relation to Islam and the *Hijab*; (c) appropriation, accommodation or resistance to dominant social discourses on gender, culture and religion; and (d) involvement in physical activity and its perceived impact on gender, religious and cultural identities.

Sport Studies and Muslim Women

Within sport scholarship, research on Muslim women has had a timid start but a few researchers have contributed to the body of literature on Muslim women by helping to dispel stereotypes and furthering our understanding of the barriers they face within sports and physical activity (Sfeir, 1985; Carrington, Chivers & Williams, 1987; Fleming 1994; Nakamura, 2002; Tess, 2006; Walseth; 2006, Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Dagkas & Benn, 2006). Early research suggests that due to gender differences, Muslim girls face more problems than Muslim boys in the context of physical activity. According to Carrington and his colleagues (1987), these problems are due to religious and cultural traditions that assign men and women particular roles, and institute dress codes that restrict access to or movement within physical education classes. Other researchers such as Fleming (1994) as well as De Knop, Theeboom, Wittock and DeMartelaer (1996), have focused on the low value placed on physical activity by Muslim youth in Western Europe. Thompson (1990) has further argued that in Australia and New Zealand, Muslim women have been more interested in getting their children involved in physical activity than being involved themselves.

Though some studies have hinted that the Islamic religion furthers negative attitudes towards physical activity, a number of others have illustrated Islam's positive views towards,

and encouragement of physical activity for all Muslims, including women (Khan, 2002; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Zaman 1997). In their study of Egyptian Muslim women, Walseth and Fasting (2003) have suggested that those who supported the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam strongly agreed with women's participation in physical activity. For instance, many Muslim women quoted *Hadiths* (i.e., sayings of Prophet Mohammed) that demonstrate the importance of physical activity (Walseth & Fasting 2003). While Islam as a religion has not always been seen as a barrier to women's participation in physical activity (Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan & Guerin 2003; De Knop et al., 1996; Sfeir, 1985), the lack of appropriate facilities and opportunities as well as negative associations with the *Hijab* (e.g., the *Hijab* not being received well by others, the impracticality of the *Hijab* in some sports) have constituted barriers to the point that many Muslim women tend to restrict their participation in physical activity or to restrict it to spaces exclusive to their cultural and religious groups (De Knop et al., 1996; Nakamura, 2002; Taylor & Toohey, 2002; Tirone, 2000; Zaman, 1997).

In her research involving 21 young Norwegian Muslim women, Walseth (2006b) has found how involvement in physical activity influenced the women's constructions of identity. Some participants situated themselves mostly within their ethnic identity while others challenged the boundaries of ethnic identity and still others focused on their religious identities. Walseth found that Muslim women's ethnic identities created specific challenges to physical activity because the latter was not associated to a "respectable femininity." In contrast, among those who regarded religion as a more important source of identification, being physically active was seen as important because of Islam's health injunctions. Some of the participants who challenged normative femininity by participating in physical activity experienced disapproval or harassment; sanctions ranged from being the object of gossip or

being described as “too Norwegian” to direct harassment leading to disengagement from certain forms of physical activity (Walseth, 2006b). Interestingly, some women who wore the *Hijab* experienced more freedom from their parents who were not worried as much with cultural maintenance.

Dagkas and Benn (2006) focused on the experiences of both Greek and British Muslim women. The Greek respondents were from the northern part of Greece where there is a large minority group of Turkish origin while in Great Britain, the respondents were predominantly of Pakistani origin. Dagkas and Benn’s research has suggested that Greek and British Muslim women held positive views towards physical activity but were restricted in their participation due to their communities’ requirements in terms of dress codes, gender segregation, and fasting during the month of Ramadan. Overall, the Muslim women’s attitudes toward physical activity were positive, with recognition of physical activity’s benefits (i.e., fun, health, success).

Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan and Guerin (2003) used interviews, observations and conversations with 37 Muslim women of Somali origin in New Zealand to explore the barriers to physical activity and the solutions to facilitate access to fitness and exercise opportunities within their community. Guerin and his colleagues have found that culturally- and religiously-appropriate physical activity opportunities benefited both the women and the community. They noticed the benefits of positive social interactions and the possibility of social interaction with other women in the community who were neither Islamic nor from Somalia. Most importantly, they found that the Muslim women’s self identification of *their* needs was important in creating and contributing to successful physical activity programs.

Only one study so far has dealt with physical activity and Muslim women in Canada. In this study, Nakamura (2002) has suggested that within an Islamic framework, women's physical activity is distinct in two main ways: the dress code (modest) and the space (sex segregated and with controlled access). Nakamura has found that when such distinctions were not respected by administrators of the physical education system or the recreational facilities, Muslim women compromised their beliefs, reverted to participating solely within their religious community or stopped participating altogether. Nakamura also found that time constraints and lack of skill or interest contributed to a diminished involvement in physical activity. Finally, Nakamura found that parents were positive agents who facilitated physical activity programs for these Canadian Muslim women.

In brief, literature on Muslim women and physical activity has generally focused on issues of barriers and solutions for access. Cultural practices, which differ quite significantly between Muslim sects and communities (a fact rarely acknowledged by authors who rather tend to homogenize Muslim women), have been the object of limited research in relation to physical activity. We now briefly turn to this literature, focusing more specifically to studies involving participants whose religious and cultural characteristics are closer to those of the participants in the present study (i.e., young Shia Muslim Canadian women of South Asian origin).

Physical Activity, Culture and the *Hijab*

Historical encounters with both Muslim and "brown" (e.g., South Asian) women have been recounted through cultural and religious frameworks that cast them not only as oppressed figures of victimhood but also as sexualized Others (Ahmad, 2003; Said 1978). More recent research shows continued victimization in the diaspora. For example, Tirone's

(2000) study has illustrated incidents of racism encountered by South Asian Canadian teens and young adults as they pursued recreation and leisure. In this qualitative study including children of immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Tirone found that many experienced blatant forms of racism (e.g., verbal abuse) and felt discrimination in the workplace, in schools and in other social institutions because of their clothing and, more specifically, because of the *Hijab* or the *Shalwar Khameez*. There is no doubt that dominant (Western) meanings of such garments are associated to Muslim women's oppression--a meaning which at times contrasts with the women's own meanings. For instance, in a study involving veiled and unveiled Muslim women in Texas, Read and Bartkowski (2000) have highlighted how cultural discourses are both reproduced and contested in relation to the *Hijab*. These authors found that veiled respondents' accounts of wearing the *Hijab* conformed to a gendered Islamic discourse as various motivations for veiling were offered (e.g., a Quran commandment, a commitment to Islam, a symbol of worship, a form of Islamic identity). Unveiled participants were reluctant to judge their veiled sisters but some suggested that the *Hijab* was a cultural component and not a religious one. In any case, contra the assertion of oppression, the themes of individualism, tolerance for diversity, and "choice" to veil or remain unveiled were implied by both those who chose to wear the *Hijab* and those who did not (Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

Ruby's (2006) study illustrates the ways in which immigrant Muslim women in Canada provide diverse meanings for the *Hijab*. Her article highlights the gap between dominant understandings of the *Hijab* as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression and the self-expressed positive experiences of wearing the *Hijab* in the participants' lives. Among other things, participants stated that the *Hijab* helped them confirm their Muslim identities

and offered them the status of being a “respectable person.” Ruby has discussed the participants’ use of the *Hijab* to negotiate spaces within the Muslim community as well as within the larger Western culture but has shown how multiple meanings given to the *Hijab* by the participants are not the ones given currency in Canadian society.

In addition to clothing, Muslim women’s self-identified “culture” is produced through family connections with the “homeland” and is part of their identities (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). Scholars have shown how family life and values are still highly respected within many immigrant communities (e.g., Basit, 1997). This seems to be the case for a number of South Asian communities. For instance, in a study of British Muslim women of Asian origin, Basit (1997) has shown how family ties and obligations are of utmost importance, including respecting elders, maintaining the honor of the family and restraining from having relations with the opposite sex. Family life and values have also been shown to influence physical activity among young women from minority communities (Tess, 2006). For instance, researchers have found that Muslim girls in Britain (who are mostly associated to minority communities) were more likely to enjoy leisure activities with family members than with peers from dominant groups (Tirone, 2000; Tess, 2006). Reasons for this included the parents’ active role as companions, as supporters of physical activity choices, as spectators for events and games, and as providers of transportation to and from venues (Tirone, 2000). Family expectations of young women have also been shown to impact on the choice of physical activity undertaken (Tess, 2006). In a qualitative study conducted by Vertinsky, Batth and Naidu (1996), young Indo-Canadian women were found to participate in physical activity but families tended to gear them toward “feminine” activities (e.g., badminton, dancing) since these non-contact activities upheld the values of modesty and conventional

femininity dear to traditional Indian culture. Apparently, many young women are receiving positive encouragement from their families to be physically active but away from home, when they are expected to partake in co-educational activities or wear revealing clothing, they tend to lose interest (McKenzie, Alcaraz & Sallis, 1994; Vertinsky et al., 1996). Vertinsky and her colleagues added that the young Indo-Canadian women's choice not to participate was often interpreted by recreation providers as a refusal to integrate or a lack of physical ability, which only reinforced stereotypes about these young women.

George and Rail (2006) completed a qualitative study on the discursive constructions of health among young South-Asian Canadian women. Not surprisingly, the young women constructed their notions of health in multiple ways, including by speaking of being physically active and eating well. More disturbing was the finding that for them, health *mostly* meant "looking good" and physical activity seemed to represent a mere strategy to reach this goal. George and Rail have drawn attention to how the young women subvert the stereotype emphasizing passivity, docility and un-cleanliness often associated to women of South-Asian background. At the same time, these authors have shown how these young women locate themselves, as subjects, within dominant discourses on conventional (white, bourgeois) femininity and heteronormativity, and how such positioning leads to some dubious practices (e.g., dieting, electrolysis, bleaching) to "look good" and thus "be healthy." In a number of ways, these young South-Asian Canadian women were not that different from other women who try to conform to the ideal as suggested by Markula (1995): "firm but shapely, fit but sexy and strong but thin." That being said, Markula has provided a more nuanced picture by noting that women who participate in aerobics classes often promulgate mainstream dominant discourses of femininity and want to improve their appearance but, at

the same time, they have other important reasons for partaking in physical activity: enjoying a safe space, enjoying physical activity, and experiencing increased energy to carry out daily work.

In conclusion, we can say that there is quite a bit of literature on physical activity but that most of it has involved large scale quantitative studies that focus on participation rates. Within such research, little has been said about religious or cultural characteristics of participants. There has been consideration of religion, and notably of the Islamic religion, in a number of qualitative studies although it must be pointed out that most have focused on barriers to participation in physical activity. With respect to the Canadian situation, some knowledge has been gained about Muslim women and physical activity through a few isolated studies focusing on South-Asian Canadian (but not necessarily Muslim) women and recreation programs or discursive constructions of health. Despite such studies, many questions are left unanswered. Our study constitutes a modest attempt to contribute to knowledge by investigating how young Muslim Canadian women construct physical activity and how such discursive constructions are related to culture, religion and the *Hijab*. Links between such constructions and wider discourses at work in their communities, at school or in the media will be drawn upon in an attempt to understand why certain meanings are favored over others. Our study relies on poststructuralist theories and methods, which are presented in the following sections.

Theoretical Considerations

The aims of our study are primarily informed by feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial theories (Brah, 1996; Bhabha, 1994; Butler, 1990; 1999; Foucault, 1972a, 1977, 1980; Rail, 2002; Said, 1978; Spivak 1988, 1995; Weedon, 1987, 1999). As Weedon asserts,

feminist poststructuralism can provide “an understanding of how gender and power relations are constituted, reproduced and contested” (1987, p. vii). Indeed, by recognizing gendered power relations, awareness may be developed and, with it, challenges to dominant discourses. Feminist poststructuralism presupposes a number of key concepts. To start with, a woman’s *subjectivity* is made possible through the already gendered, ethnicized and racialized discourses to which she has access. We thus endeavor to not only map the discourses to which young Muslim Canadian women have access in constructing their meanings of physical activity but also to investigate how they position themselves in relation to these discourses, how they constitute themselves within such discourses, and how they become *subjects* of such discourses by “subjecting” themselves to their meanings, *power/knowledge* and regulations. For example, do these women passively accept and appropriate the physical activity messages promulgated in mainstream (white, Christian) media? How do these women construct meanings for physical activity alongside discourses about what it means to be a Muslim woman? The poststructuralist perspective provides a useful foundation that draws attention to the social, historical and cultural specificities and as such, is interested in how these young women discursively construct their “reality” (Weedon, 1987).

Feminist poststructuralists have been particularly attracted to the work of Foucault (Hall, 1996) and the concept of *discourse*. For Foucault, discourse is comprised of knowledge, social practices, and power relations (Weedon, 1987). Discourses are part of the operation of power wherein they construct, define and produce objects of knowledge (Foucault, 1972a). Discourse refers not only to the meaning of language but also to the effects of the use of language. For Foucault, the exercise of power cannot be possible without

discourse and the production of “truth” cannot occur without exercising power. Discourses are enabled by many sources, both social and institutional (Weedon, 1987). Dominant discourses are promulgated through social institutions and often promote what comes to be widely accepted as the *truth* (Hall, 2001; Weedon, 1987).

Within feminist poststructuralist theory, *language* does not reflect reality but gives it meaning (Foucault, 1972a, 1972b; Said, 1978; Weedon, 1999). Language provides structures through which we construct ourselves as subjects as well as reality around us (Muszynski, 2000). Discursive constructions of our *reality* are thus always historically and culturally specific, and meaning can never be static. For example, the word “Islam” itself means peace, and to Muslims it may be understood as such. However, in Western context, Islam is coupled with fear, *Jihad* and terrorism. Thus, as Loomba suggests, “language is not a nomenclature or way of naming things that already exists, but a system of signs whose meaning is relational” (p. 35).

Feminist poststructuralists have considered Butler’s (1997, 1999) concept of *performativity* to speak to the intersections of sex, gender and sexuality. Butler (1990) has presented gender as a performative act, wherein women and men engage in performing dominant notions of femininity and masculinity. In the case of women, they perform their gender requirements through repetitive practices structured by dominant (i.e., sexist, heterosexist, racist) discourses. According to Butler, performativity is not a voluntary choice as she locates the construction of the gendered, sexed, desiring subject within what Foucault (1977) calls “regulative discourses.” Such discourses include disciplinary techniques which, by inviting subjects to repeatedly perform actions that are socially permitted to appear as coherent or “natural,” establish the appearance of an essential or “core” gender. Butler has

further discussed the concept of performativity to speak to the compelled performance of dominant discourses. For many theorists, performativity has become a way to examine subject formation -- through gendered, sexualized and racialized identifications -- along with practices that sustain power and its effects (e.g., Bell, 2007).

With respect to *postcolonialism*, we see it as a broad concept recognizing that representations common to colonialism still exist regardless of the fact that decolonization has started. Postcolonial theory has been influenced by a number of theorists. For instance, Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) have enabled a radical reconceptualization of the relationship between nation, *culture* and *ethnicity* and have argued for understandings and expressions of identity that move away from static representations. Rather, they claim that an individual's daily interactions illustrate her *cultural* expressions (Khan, 2000). *Ethnicity* is best understood as a dynamic, evolving property of both individual identity and group organization. The construction of ethnic identity and culture is the result of both structure and agency as ethnic groups continuously (re)shape their self-definition and culture (Nagel, 1994).

Within postcolonialism, the conceptualization of gender, race, ethnicity, and identity has been a major concern (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Deconstructing gender and ethnicity has led Spivak to challenge Said's (1978) ideas on the effects of colonial discourses. In her widely read essay entitled "Can the subaltern speak," Spivak (1988) has argued that homogeneity and uniformity cannot exist due to the difficult position of the female *subaltern* -- a position characterized by silence. The marginalized Indian woman, for example, is oppressed by both the white and native man through the hierarchy of gender and the strength of colonialism (Brah, 1996; Williams & Chrisman, 1994). The re-presentation of the *Other*

(in this case, the oppressed woman) in art, philosophy, media and theory “speaks for” the Other without actually understanding who the Other is (Spivak, 1988). Most importantly, Spivak has explained the tendency to homogenize and classify as one the experiences of women, minorities, the Other. As scholars, writing on behalf of and for the Other, Spivak notes that there is a need to be conscious of our role in perpetuating the subaltern’s silence.

The colonial legacy and its after-effects are still being felt across many nations and their people. The latter may try to break free of colonialist ideas within their homelands or confront them as migrants who now reside in Western countries (Handa, 2003). The manner in which immigrants and the Orient view themselves was never discussed until Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Said looked at colonial discourse and the ways in which the West constructed and wrongly depicted the “Orient,” the Other, as different and exotic. Other authors have argued that colonialism has created damaging political, psychological and moral effects on the colonized subject (Fanon, 1967; Loomba, 1998). For instance, through the course of dislocation, migration and integration into the West, Oriental Muslims have had to redefine their identity within the host society. The representation of Islam in a Western context has had major implications for the Muslim *diaspora* (Brah, 1996; Said, 1978), understood here in relation to displacement and migration to a new country, while still acknowledging “the old country,” its customs, languages and traditions (Brah, 1996; Handa, 2003). Brah (1996) has introduced the term *diasporic space* to speak specifically to “the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are contested” (p. 181). In relation to diasporic spaces, Brah (1996) has written about the balancing act immigrants must face: the pull to assimilate to Western society and the desire to maintain their cultural identity.

Methodological Considerations

With regards to methodology, our study is influenced by our feminist poststructuralist and postcolonial stance. In terms of our collection of narrative materials, we have used methodological strategies that borrow elements from both feminist ethnography and feminist interview research (Reinharz, 1992) to investigate how young Muslim Canadian women construct physical activity and how such discursive constructions are related to their meanings of culture, religion and the Hijab. With regards to the analysis of the qualitative materials, we have used both thematic and poststructuralist discourse analyses. As researchers, we were interested not only in *what* these young women had to say about physical activity, Islam and the Hijab, but also in *how* they constructed such reality around them and how, through language, they constructed themselves as subjects.

Our study involved conversations with Muslim Canadian women. In discussions about our sample, we were struck by the problematic tendency of homogenizing Muslim women and were (and are still) acutely aware of the impossibility of having a sample that “made sense.” We were confronted with the multiple interpretations of the Islamic faith, the incredible number of sects involved and the endless religious variations brought by diasporic spaces (for instance, Shia Muslims may identify with three or four homelands on different continents). In the end, given the first author’s role as conversationist, her connections to Shia Muslim communities and her ethnic identity, we decided to select participants who were young *Hijab*-wearing Shia Muslim Canadian women who had ancestral ties to India. This is not to say that the first author could be seen simply as an insider (because of her connection with the Shia Muslim community and her gendered, racial, ethnic and cultural identities) since many times she felt as an outsider because of her own sect within Islam, because of the

manner in which she practices her religion and because of her personal choice not to wear the *Hijab*. As Canadian women who have pursued our education in a Western context, revealing the experiences of some Shia Muslim women can be seen as an act of intellectual colonialism (Smith, 1999; Vertinsky, Batth, & Naidu, 1996). Yet, as some suggest (Roman, 1993; Spivak, 1988), taking the risk of speaking *with* rather than *for* these women may be better than the risk of silence. So we did take this risk but emphasized, throughout our study, the importance of a non-exploitative relationship between ourselves and the participants (Ahmed, 2003; Seibold, 2002).

Recruitment and participation conditions (e.g., consent forms) were approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. The young Shia Muslim Canadian women who elected to participate in our study were contacted through word of mouth. With the first author's personal ties with the Shia Muslim community in both the Ottawa and Toronto regions, a few individuals were contacted and informed of the study. The snowball method was then used as these young women were asked to forward names of individuals who may be interested in participating in the study. Potential participants were contacted directly by the first author via email or phone. In the end, our study involved conversations with 10 Shia Muslim Canadian women, all between the ages of 20 to 26 years and a large majority still attending university. Within Shia Islam, there are many sub-sects and a few were represented in our study as four identified as Shia-Ithnashari, three as Shia-Bohras, two as Shia-Zaidiyyah and one as simply Shia (she could not identify her sub-sect). A majority of the participants were somewhat involved with their Shia Muslim community, however, some did not attend mosque on a regular basis. All women came from nuclear or extended families and all had one or more siblings.

Conversations with the participants lasted between one and two hours. Our Conversation Guide was used to provide general conversation topics and participants were encouraged to take the conversation in the direction of their choice within each of four topics: (a) discursive constructions of physical activity; (b) sources of such discursive constructions; (c) integration of physical activity and the Hijab in day-to-day life; and (d) culture, physical activity and the Hijab. The conversations were digitally recorded and then transcribed. To insure anonymity, self chosen pseudonyms were used in the transcriptions (the same are used in this article).

Once transcripts reviewed and corrected by the participants, we began the interpretative process. *First*, we attended to the thematic analysis, which consisted in coding and regrouping fragments of narratives into “themes” (*what* participants said) based on their semantic affinity (Rail & Dumas, 2008). Narratives were analyzed vertically (i.e., one participant after another) and then transversally to look for similarities and differences between participants. *Second*, we submitted the narratives to a poststructuralist discourse analysis (George & Rail, 2006; Lupton, 1992; Rail, 1998, 2002; Weedon, 1997; Wright, 1995). This analysis allowed us to further explore the narratives to document how participants used language (*how* they said things); how they positioned and constructed themselves within dominant and/or alternative/resistant discourses related to physical activity, gender, Islam and the *Hijab*; and finally how they subjected themselves to the rules, meanings and power of such discourses. Generally, the analysis helped us to locate the “truths” shaping the participants’ understandings and constructions of their social realm.

Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity

The results of our thematic and discourse analyses are presented in the next sections. We first discuss how young Shia Muslim Canadian women construct physical activity, the importance physical activity has in their lives, the meaning of place in relation to their physical activity practices and, finally, how physical activity is traversed by Islam and the wearing of the *Hijab*. We then discuss how young Shia Muslim Canadian women rearticulate discourses on gender, religion, and other social phenomena to convey their meanings of physical activity.

Constructions of Physical Activity

In our study, the conversations with the young Shia Muslim Canadian women began with a question about what physical activity was for them, what it meant to them. Five main themes emerged from such conversations. To the young women, physical activity meant, in order of importance: (a) being physically active; (b) feeling good; (c) participating in sports; (d) losing weight; and (e) being involved in “a chore.” With regards to the first theme, we note that most young women’s constructions of physical activity are closely linked to gendered ideas promoted by many mainstream media outlets as well as health and physical activity classes (Rail & Lafrance, 2004). The participants’ narratives most often suggest that being physically active can be equated with “moving,” “fitness,” “going to the gym” and “working out.” This is well illustrated by Farah’s assertion that physical activity is “anything from when you’re walking to work from 15 to 20 minutes, to actually joining a gym, uh, to taking part in community teams.” Samia further describes the meaning of physical activity by reiterating the tendencies seen with young Shia Muslim Canadian women: “anything that involves actually moving your body and sweating it out or not, just like, walking, exercise,

sports.” In their narratives, both Farah and Samia emphasize the importance of body movement (e.g., exercise, work out) as well as specific prescriptions often associated to standard views of exercise (e.g., sweating, moving for a specific amount of time).

In the second theme, the young women construct physical activity in relation to a bodily feeling (“feeling good in your body”), a “psychological” feeling (“feeling self-confidence”) or both (“feeling good, feeling healthy”). A few women use a holistic approach to suggest that “feeling good” is linked to mental and physical wellbeing. For instance, Sarah’s meaning of physical activity encompasses this description: “I think it’s important for many reasons, mental health, physical health and a lot of the two are very linked together. It’s important for energy and just personal balance in your lifestyle.”

The third theme emerging from our analysis is centered on notions of “being athletic” and “doing sports.” We observe, however, that only a small number of participants discuss physical activity in connection to sport participation; clearly, the preferred reading of physical activity involves fitness and going to the gym. Although the fourth and fifth themes take less importance in the participants’ narratives, some of the young women also link physical activity to losing weight and others see physical activity as a chore or an unpleasant task.

Importance of Physical Activity

When discussing physical activity, the young Shia Muslim Canadian women also spoke about its importance within their daily lives. For most of them, physical activity seemed quite important although they acknowledged that, overall, young Shia Muslim women like them were not that involved in physical activity. In Sarah’s own words:

I don't know very many Shia Muslim girls here, uhmm... If you're looking at just my particular sect, I would say that, uhmm, not many are very physically active. By "not many," I mean less than 10 percent. If you broaden it outside of the sect and keep it in Shia Muslims, uhmm, I'd say maybe 25 percent are physically active on a regular basis.

For the participants, two main themes or concerns emerged from the discussion on the importance of physical activity: (a) healthy and balanced lifestyle; and (b) body shape and size. With respect to the first theme, many of the participants' narratives speak to physical activity in terms of its importance for a "healthy" or "balanced" lifestyle, which they consider as inclusive of mental and physical health. Some locate physical activity within an even larger picture. Samia, for instance, describes how it makes her feel:

It makes me feel better about who I am, a better Muslim and, uh, just emotionally, I feel, you know, I feel good about myself. That's how I apply a workout or stay active along with everything else, like including my career or running my life. It just completes everything like finishing the whole picture. So, physical activity is a part of me being happy.

A second theme emerges from the narratives and it centers on the importance of physical activity as a means of losing weight and maintaining or achieving a "good body." The young Shia Muslim Canadian women recuperated some elements of the dominant discourses surrounding femininity and the imperative to "look good." For some, it was about not being "fat" or "chubby" while for others it was more about maintaining a certain body size or weight. The following excerpt illustrates this concern:

It's actually been very important to me in life. I've always been the fat kid so I don't blame myself. I blame genetics so, uh, all of my life... And my father was great: I got to eat whatever I wanted and things like that. But... I think I realized that, when I was 16, people were taking me for 26 or 27 and it kind of really hit me hard. And so, from then on, when I started university, my best excuse was that I was paying this gym fee out of my tuition that I don't use so why not take advantage of it. Plus all that just came into play at the right time and it's always been important to me. (Farah)

Farah speaks of how others perceive her and she discursively constructs physical activity as a means to get away from being known as "the fat kid." For some other participants, the concern is not so much about losing weight, but about remaining thin and fit.

Laila's narrative is illustrative in that respect:

I think [the message regarding obesity] reinforces the importance of physical activity. I mean, the rates are alarming in health. As a future health professional, I know what the impact will be on the population, on the health care system. But to me, it's just kind of... It reinforces the importance of physical activity to me. It makes me feel good about going to the gym. It's like, "O.K. I don't want to be a part of *that* statistic. What I'm doing for me is good and I shouldn't stop."

As can be seen in the last excerpt and in the narratives more generally, constant links are made between physical activity and staying in shape or losing weight. Physical activity is constructed less as something that is good or positive in and of itself and more as a means, an

instrument, to obtain an ideal body shape, to maintain or lose weight, to achieve a balanced lifestyle or to be healthy.

Place of Physical Activity

Analysis of the conversations with the young Shia Muslim Canadian women yielded three major themes in relation to the “place” of physical activity: (a) physical activity places are not very present within Shia Muslim communities; (b) when physical activity places are provided within Shia Muslim communities, physical activity is rarely the main purpose; and (c) “proper” physical activity places are rarely present within the larger Canadian community.

In their discursive constructions of physical activity, some of our participants discuss the location of their physical activity practices and note that it is rarely within their Shia Muslim community. Some participants explain this by speaking of generational differences within their community; they suggest that the younger generation is more physically active than the older one who is not that interested in physical activity or setting up places for it. The following excerpt from Nisara’s conversation with Laila speaks to this issue:

I don’t get the impression that they’re physically active. I don’t think they’re against physical activity, but they’re just not. . . . I don’t see them pushing physical activity. So I don’t know how they do it but I don’t think they’re against it. I just don’t think... They’re another generation and, to them, it’s all about... Uhhh... They’re more religious than I am. Well the last generation, I’m sure they’re all immigrants, like the mothers, they grew up in Africa, in East Africa, in small villages, physical activity wasn’t something girls did. I’ve seen pictures from back home and it’s a lot of work living in a village so

that's probably... They see that as enough work, going to the oasis to get water, going to the market to get food. Yeah, uh, it's just that physical activity is when they came to North America. I don't know... It's physical activity, you guys all do it, all ages kind of thing but back home, it was: "What do you mean by physical activity?" Like go to the gym, play volleyball: "it's what the kids do." They're just, they're too busy for physical activity; it's not something that's in their mind.

As Laila explains, physical activity is not a preoccupation for older generations. It seems to be perceived by them (and, to a certain extent, by Laila when she adopts a different subject position to say "*you* guys all do it") as something typically reserved for North American "others," something not typically associated to the culture of Shia Muslim immigrants. In addition to generational differences, many participants alluded to the lack of place for physical activity in their community when discussing the importance of religion:

For the community, there are a lot of things that are important, I mean, you can't really say one thing. It's just priorities. It's like, I don't remember in Islamic functions anyone saying, like the Imams saying, "oh, go workout and be fit and eat a healthy diet" [laughs]... You know? I just... It doesn't happen. It's more like: "be well mannered, be good to people, don't swear, don't steal." It's more about the manners and the intangible things than about physical activity. (Samia)

As Samia points out, religious community leaders are not focused on physical activity as much as they are on the basic aspects of religion. That being said, Samia is quick to point out that Islam is no stranger to the idea of taking care of one's body:

I know in Islam you're supposed to take care of your body and your health, and you're supposed to be skilled and take care of your body and be physically fit. But they don't really commit to that that much. If you didn't read it or look for it, you probably wouldn't have heard of it. So, I think that, sometimes, culture goes over religion and overshadows it.

The second theme emerging from the discussions on the place of physical activity relates to the young Shia Muslim women's suggestions that while physical activity places do exist in the community, they seem to have implicit functions that are not directly related to physical activity. For instance, physical activity places and activities may be offered but the underlying motivation has to do with "socializing" factors. For example, such places may allow younger boys and girls to see each other, they may offer an opportunity for mothers to "check out" boys for their girls or they may satisfy parents who want their girls to lose weight. The following narrative illustrates how most participants perceive the underlying purposes for physical activity places:

It's just to get the community together. It's not for physical activity purposes or promotion of health and physical activity: it's more getting communities together, you know. Like, this was across *Jamats* [communities], it was inter Canada and the United States and just being involved in their *Jamats*. And so that's important cause you're meeting others. Like, say you go to New York and there are aunties there and they're watching your demeanor and they have sons. You know, that's more for that kind of thing too: meeting people. Although, like, the girls can go watch the guys right? It's just guys can't come watch girls cause there's other girls there that are non-*Mahrims* [non-family

members] to them so, um, when games are over for girls, a lot of girls went to the guys. Like my priority wasn't to watch the guys cause I don't even care.

(Fatima)

The third theme that emerged from our analysis focused on the lack of “proper” physical activity places outside Shia Muslim communities. The participants were unanimous in their assessment that women-only facilities are rarely available in the larger Canadian society and that, consequently, their own community *has* to provide them. In that regard, consider the following statement from Karima:

Well, because they're not offered in, well, they're not offered enough in the regular society so we have to provide them for ourselves. It's, like, we have to be self-dependant kind of thing and if it's not provided then we have our own facilities. Sometimes we meet up either at somebody else's house or we just play games or just do again, like, yoga or anything that we are doing in our environment, like a women-only environment that we are not gonna find outside or elsewhere. So, I think that's why it's important to have those facilities that provide us those services.

Physical Activity, Religion and the Hijab

Beyond the issue of place, the young Shia Muslim Canadian women discursively constructed physical activity in reference to the *Hijab* and to religion in general. The major themes emerging from the participants' narratives are: (a) religion's precedence over physical activity; (b) physical activity as a means to become a better Muslim; and (c) the difficult combination of physical activity and the *Hijab*.

With regards to the first theme, the narratives point quite clearly to religion's greater importance when compared to physical activity. At first glance, this appears like a non-issue since people in most religions do not have to choose between religion and physical activity. However, our young Shia Muslim participants often felt confronted with such choice when trying to integrate physical activity places outside of their Shia Muslim communities. In the conversations, they agree that they would choose Islam over physical activity if they had to choose. The following fragment of Fatima's narrative is a good illustration of this:

To me, it was very... Like my religion comes before sports or, like, sports is so important but religion is, like, it's RELIGION! Like you can't compromise that just because, you know? [...] It depends on what your priorities are and if I had to choose, and it was a life and death choice between sports and religion? Sorry sports, but religion is there.

The next conversation fragment further illustrates the dominant view that religion takes precedence over physical activity:

Our religion is very important and, to an extent, if I had to stay at home just because I wore the *Hijab*, I would. . . . I find that religion is what straightens your afterlife but what am I going to do with physical activity if I'm not going to have a good afterlife? Like our belief is a good afterlife. . . . It's very important for you to make sure that whatever you're doing in your life doesn't in any way cause your afterlife to be bad. So, yes, definitely, I wouldn't even think about it twice and I would always choose my religion upon anything else. (Sana)

While the issue of choice is very present in the narratives, all participants confide that they can and they do combine physical activity and religion. A majority feel that neither the Islamic religion nor wearing the *Hijab* are barriers to participating in physical activity and some actually feel that participating in physical activity makes them *better* Muslims, as is the case for Samia:

As a Muslim, I'm always thinking about how I can improve myself and better myself and that's part of it. And being successful, educated, and there's a physical side, like, there's my self physically. I try to be active, I try to be, uh, well rounded, you know, play sports. I know how to play squash; I know how to play basketball. So, it's kind of like, trying to be a better Muslim.

A third and last major theme emerging from our discussions about physical activity and religion is related to the challenge posed to the young Shia Muslim Canadian women in terms of combining physical activity with wearing the *Hijab*. About half of the participants state that the *Hijab* is not a barrier to physical activity in general but recognize that wearing it decreases their physical activity options and makes physical activity difficult for a number of reasons including getting hot and uncomfortable, feeling discomfort from the stares coming from the general public, and feeling discriminated against. Samia's narrative provides an example of some of the issues discussed by the participants:

I can't lie and say that it doesn't affect it at all. Because if I wasn't wearing the *Hijab*, I would probably be able to just wear a jogging suit and run on the canal. And I live right next to the canal and I never jog on the canal. I've always wanted to jog on the canal but it was always too warm and with the *Hijab*, it's just, it's a killer. I mean, you'd probably sweat a lot and lose a lot

of weight but... [laughs]. So, I couldn't do things, everything that I wanted to do, I couldn't just go to Mooney's bay and just play volleyball. Uh, not because I can't but because I feel self-conscious. I mean everyone there is in swimsuits and you come wearing everything from head to toe, sitting there. Yeah, it just doesn't look right on the beach [laughs]. So there are things that I can't do. Like I said, I can't go to the gym right next door. I have to go to a gym that's 10 minutes farther because it has a women's section. . . . There are things that I can't do or I don't feel comfortable doing because of the *Hijab*.

In the above statement, Samia conveys the various downsides of wearing the *Hijab* and being physically active. Later, she even goes as far as to suggest (as a minority of participants did) that she would consider removing her *Hijab* if wearing it meant that she could not be involved in physical activity at all ("if it wasn't possible for me, then maybe. Like if there were no women's gyms, no anything") although she confirms that this is not the case ("to do physical activity with a *Hijab*, it's just a bit harder in Canada [but] I can manage to actually do some physical activity with the *Hijab* on; I'm doing fine so far"). Other participants feel, like Samia, that they can "manage" to do physical activity in various places, although they feel better in "proper" places. Zainab, for instance, suggests that though she does not feel uncomfortable wearing the *Hijab* in mainstream coed gyms or workout spaces, she experiences an "increased" sense of comfort in women-only spaces.

One of the telling moments in the conversations with the young Shia Muslim Canadian women was when they were asked to discuss their "ideal" or "dream-like" physical activity situation. Among other things, they were asked whether they would still wear the

Hijab. Half of the women reveal that, in such hypothetical situation,¹⁴ wearing the *Hijab* would not be required but three confide that they would still wear it. For most participants, the *Hijab* appears as a crucial part of their identity and, for some, it is a way to be brought closer to *Allah*. More generally, the narratives are explicit about the feeling of “exposure,” the sense of nakedness, when the *Hijab* is not worn. Contra the mainstream view of obligation and oppression related to the wearing of the *Hijab*, all young women express their “personal choice” in that regard, while two of them state that they wear the *Hijab* even though their mothers do not and one even discloses the difficulty of getting her family to accept her decision to wear the *Hijab*.

Discussion

In the following sections, we discuss our results. In addition, we explore the discourses at play in the young Shia Muslim Canadian women’s narratives and attempt to uncover how these women position and construct themselves within dominant and/or alternative discourses related to physical activity, gender, Islam and the *Hijab*.

Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity

In our study, the young Shia Muslim women discursively constructed physical activity and a first important result is that such constructions were not about physical activity in general but rather about what *they* liked and what physical activity meant to *them*, in *their* daily lives. For instance, they discussed working out and going to the gym rather than practicing sport. In doing so, we note the young women’s appropriation of a *dominant*

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that in hypothetical “ideal” situations, most participants alluded to a wider variety of physical activities as well as to a “no fee” or “no cost” situation. A majority of the women also expressed the wish to participate in physical activity with both men and women, and to have spectators from both sexes. Half the women also suggested that, in an ideal-like situation, there would be no sweating and that the *Hijab* would not be required. While these were the dominant views expressed, three of the women suggested that they would still prefer to wear the *Hijab*, and a few conveyed the need to maintain sex-segregated spaces.

discourse about sport and physical activity; a gendered discourse that stipulates that sport has more meaning to men than women and that assumes that physical activity can be ideally marketed to women when it rearticulates a conventional discourse of femininity. Our findings coincide with Markula's (1995) suggestion that a majority of women engage in activities such as exercising and dieting to resemble the narrowly defined beauty ideal within Western culture. Certain forms of physical activity and the manner in which young women speak about them clearly appeal to the *dominant discourse on conventional femininity* and the responsibility women have to take for achieving its standards (Markula, 1995). George and Rail (2006) found similar results in their study of young South-Asian Canadian women. They describe how their participants construct notions of "health" as "looking great" and "feeling sexy," a finding that can be read as a re-articulation of this discourse on conventional femininity. Through particular discourses about femininity and gender, more generally, the young Shia Muslim women in our study construct themselves as normalized "subjects" and offer no resistance to the noted gender differences in relation to physical activity and sport.

A second main result from our study is related to the participants' constructions of physical activity in terms of "feeling good," something they often associate to "holistic health" or "being physically and mentally healthy." Such constructions were echoed by George and Rail (2006) who found that, for a majority of the young women in their study, fitness or physical activity was not associated to movement, pleasure, fresh air, leisure, down time, freedom, social encounters or friendships as much as to "health." Similarly, Dagkas and Benn (2006) as well as Guerin and colleagues (2003) found that overall, individuals were quick to recognize the health benefits of physical activity. In all cases, it is easy to note the

strong presence of a *dominant neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility for one's health* and its direct link to the notion of self-responsibility for one's lifestyle (Rail, Holmes & Murray, 2009). The young women from our study construct themselves as "healthy" subjects who are mindful of the link between physical activity and health. In doing this, they recuperate elements of a *healthist discourse* (Crawford, 1980; Rail, 2008) that tends to obfuscate social, occupational or environmental determinants of health and blame individuals who fail to "perform" health.

A third important finding is that a number of young Shia Muslim women discuss physical activity in terms of body shape and size. In relation to this, Markula (1995) suggests that women accept "disciplining" their bodies since they are lead to believe that after achieving an ideal body size, their lives will become better. Guerin, Abdi and Guerin (2003) also gave some indication that Somali women in New Zealand were concerned about weight gain and George and Rail (2006) found that South-Asian Canadian women were involved in physical activity mostly as a way to ensure that they would not become overweight or "fat." Like their South-Asian Canadian counterparts, the young women in our study tend to reproduce dominant messages about fat bodies. In the last few years, such messages have been fueled by a multiplication of epidemiologically-based studies recuperated by the media to suggest the rapid acceleration of obesity rates in Canada and, more generally, in the Western world. Many observers have recognized a mixture of science and consumer culture forming a dominant obesity discourse. This discourse focuses on the assumed relationship between inactivity, poor diet, obesity and ill-health; in the same breath, it presents obesity in terms of moral and economic costs to society (Gard & Wright, 2005). Obese bodies are constructed as lazy and expensive bodies that should be submitted to expert investigation and

monitoring (Wright & Harwood, 2008). The young Shia Muslim women in our study certainly construct themselves as subjects within such *dominant obesity discourse*. They construct themselves as individuals who are subject to its proposed regulations and controls, particularly those occurring via physical activity.

The Place of Physical Activity

A fourth important result is related to the young Shia Muslim Canadian women's narratives on the place of physical activity. They generally speak about the shortage of physical activity places in the larger society -- the assumption being that physical activity places exist but that very few are women-only places and that the latter are the only places they will enter. This finding is not unlike that of Nakamura (2002) about Muslim women in Southern Ontario (Canada). Taylor and Toohey (2002) as well as Walseth and Fasting (2003) have similarly reported that Muslim women experience a marginalization of their recreation needs when physical activity places are designed to cater to the general population. Mainstream places translate, for our participants, in the idea that minorities are expected to conform to the norms of dominant society: mix with men and/or wear the *Hijab*, the *Niqab*, the *Shalwar Kameez* or the 4-piece swim suit (Yilmaz, 2000). In the young Shia Muslim women's narratives on the place of physical activity, the overall discursive tenor is one of citizenship and entitlement (e.g., to women-only spaces, to the larger society's acceptance of their religious identity and how it translates in what they wear). For a number of participants, such entitlement is viewed not necessarily as a goal in and of itself, but as a means of engagement in, and integration to, the larger society. While they construct themselves as Canadian subjects who deserve the same benefits and rewards as those of other citizens, the *discourse of entitlement* they reproduce is rather discreet since they recognize that

opportunities are currently limited in the larger Canadian society, that they can accommodate to this state of affairs, and that focusing on physical activity places within their own communities is an interesting strategy for many reasons: they feel less embarrassed to do physical activity while wearing the *Hijab*, they feel safer as they can participate under the watchful eye of community members, and they can take part in the networks and social encounters for which physical activity places seem designed, at least in part. This last explanation is very similar to that given by Bhopal (1997) in her study of British South-Asian women who very much valued family traditions and community connections. Other authors have found that parents often deter their children from joining groups outside of the “ethnic” community and are less supportive of participation in “outside” physical activity programs (Tirone, 2000; Tess, 2006). In contrast, most participants in our study suggest that their parents are supportive of their participation in physical activity in places both inside and outside the community, as long as rules pertaining to the Islamic faith are respected (e.g., sex-segregation, wearing the *Hijab*).

A fifth important finding is that while the participants recognize that physical activity places and programs are limited within their own communities, they are not upset at community leaders for this shortage. Rather, they seem to accept the notion that, for the community, religion is more important than physical activity and, furthermore, that those in the community who are in a position of power may come from a different generation and a different cultural environment within which physical activity is non-existent or reserved for either children or boys. This thinking is not unlike that found by De Knop and colleagues (1996) who note that while younger Muslim women who have been brought up in the West often have a “modern religious attitude,” they still uphold traditional values. De Knop and

colleagues (1995) as well as Fleming and Khan (1994) also found that young Muslims express positive attitudes toward sport and physical activity but routinely give religion a higher priority. Fleming (1994) investigated Muslim communities and found a related factor: the strong parental influence on choices made by children, particularly the choice of additional schooling over physical activity. All such views are echoed by the young Shia Muslim Canadian women in our study. What is noteworthy is that in discursively constructing “appropriate” physical activity places for them, they make no appeal to a *gender equity discourse* that would make evident the fact that, within their communities, boys get more opportunities than girls. Rather, the participants constructed themselves as “normalized” subjects within a *conventional discourse on gender* that underlies the acceptance of whatever is allotted to women in terms of physical activity. Although interpretations of the Quran are varied with respect to physical activity participation for women, the most common interpretation is that physical activity participation is not prohibited for women so long as it is not done at the expense of caring for the family (De Knop, et al., 1996). The young Shia Muslim women in our study appropriated this *dominant religious discourse on women and physical activity*; a view within which religion is put above physical activity, and particularly so for young women¹⁵.

Physical Activity, Religion and the Hijab

A sixth important finding is that the young Shia Muslim women in our study felt that physical activity was good for them as women but also as Muslims. Their narratives re-articulated a *discourse dominant in their own communities that presents a relatively*

¹⁵ If a choice had to be made, there is a strong possibility that most religious people would put religion above physical activity, which is why we are not suggesting that this choice is specific to those who follow the Islamic faith. Thankfully, for most people, such a choice does not need to be made. However, for women who value the “visible” aspects of religiosity and who equate wearing the *Hijab* to being Muslim, the choice needs to be made at times.

progressive interpretation of the Quran in the sense of encouraging a variety of physical activities for young men and women. This has to be contrasted to particular sects within the larger Shia Muslim diaspora. Indeed, because of their sexual connotations, various sects prohibit certain types of physical activity (e.g., dancing) or certain types of music (e.g., those with suggestive lyrical contents) accompanying physical activity (Nakamura, 2002). Participating in physical activity (and particularly working-out at the gym) enabled the young women in our study to construct themselves as modern (i.e., participating in modern forms of physical activity) Muslim subjects (i.e., wearing the *Hijab*).

A last important finding in our study is a mixed one. For some women, participating in physical activity whilst wearing the *Hijab* was seen as difficult while for others, physical activity and the *Hijab* were a good combination. Most authors exploring this issue have focused on the problems with the *Hijab*. For example, Sfeir (1985) suggests that despite the fact that the Quran itself says nothing about an obligation to wear a *Hijab*, some interpretations of the Quran are such that they limit women's physical activity participation. Guerin and colleagues (2003) note that dressing differently from other participants (e.g., wearing a *Hijab* or a *Shalwar Kameez*) can constitute a barrier for Muslim women to engage in some forms of physical activity. In our own study, the young women do acknowledge these issues but nevertheless feel that the *Hijab* and physical activity need not be separated. On this issue, their narratives are underwritten by two very different discourses. Most of the women appropriate and subject themselves to a *gendered discourse dominant in certain Muslim communities* where the Quran is interpreted in ways that place restrictions on women's clothing and behavior. Simultaneously, their narratives reflect a *strong resistance to a dominant Islamophobic discourse in Canada*. A number of authors (see Nesbitt-Larking,

2006) have reported how Canada's proximity to the U.S. (in an era of homeland security, the war against terrorism and the invasion of Iraq) has conditioned a complex of actions and reactions. Social representations of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular have undergone profound reconfigurations that are reflective of anti-Muslim hostility. Within various competing gendered, racialized and regulating discourses (e.g., religion, academy, media), representations of Muslim women are unsurprisingly "fixed" (Ahmad, 2003). Muslim women are invariably seen as oppressed and stifled by their *Hijab* (Farooq, 2007). In contrast, the young women in our study are quick to construct themselves in ways that contest the stereotypes that we so often see in the media in regards to veiled women. Physical activity constitutes, for them, one of the ways to resist these views of Islam and the *Hijab*. Many of the young women also appeal to a *strong discourse of entitlement* in the sense that they have a "right" to participate in physical activity with the *Hijab* on. The participants are adamant that changes need to occur so that more Muslim women can reap the benefits of physical activity. Such changes include developing sex-segregated spaces, lowering the cost of participation, and making education regarding Islam available to recreation providers, health educators and the public in general.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to further our understanding of young Shia Muslim Canadian women and their constructions of physical activity in relation to gender, Islam and the *Hijab*. Our results show that the participants construct physical activity mostly in terms of being physically active (and, to them, this means activities that are closer to fitness than sport), feeling good about themselves (i.e., being physically and mentally healthy), and losing weight or remaining "not fat."

A number of conclusions can be drawn from such findings. A first conclusion is that participants prefer day to day activities (e.g., walking, jogging, working out) that are less structured and require less resources than organized sports and physical activities. Their meanings of physical activity show that they resist conventional ideas (i.e., associated to sport) and favor activities that are more accessible to them (as Muslim women) and that may help them sustain their involvement in physical activity in the long term. However, the participants suggest that increased sex-segregated spaces could significantly increase Muslim women's involvement in physical activity.

Second, we may underline the paradox existing between the meanings of physical activity and the participants' subjectivities. Indeed, many young women report being involved in something positive like physical activity yet construct themselves as subjects who have a negative relation to the self: subjects who desire a thinner body. In addition, the young women's subjectivities seemed structured by their appropriation of a conventional femininity discourse that constrained their meanings of physical activity and therefore limited their opportunity to explore pleasure and physicality beyond normalized and institutionalized configurations of gender domination.

Third, for many young Shia Muslim Canadian women, physical activity is directly related to health and engaging in physical activity is solely under the responsibility of the individual. When reciting such healthist discourse, they tend to look down on or even blame those who are not active; those who fail to achieve or maintain health. This seems rather problematic when we know that gender, class, and religion greatly influence one's access to important resources that are necessary to achieve and maintain health.

Fourth, the participants' narratives point to an active engagement in the pursuit of normative gender subjectivities. Discussions on appearance and the fear of becoming fat or fatter seem to reflect a conceptualization of women's bodies as an object to be "gazed" upon (though they are "veiled") rather than an entity allowing them to experience physical activities as varied, enjoyable and transformative technologies of the self. This leads us to point to the need for fitness and health promoters to consider alternative gender discourses and new subject positions, particularly in their interventions targeting young Muslim women.

Fifth, we found that the young women, as subjects, locate themselves at the intersection of competing discourses to construct their notions of physical activity in relation to health, community involvement and religious regulations. It is also at the crossroads of these discourses that they construct their (however temporary and fluid) subjectivities and positions as "healthy" subjects who adhere to the practices of the Islamic faith. For the young Shia Muslim Canadian women in our study, such re-articulations seem to constitute a valuable strategy since hegemonic understandings of physical activity can be used as resources through which they may construct their own sex/gender/religious identities and, for those "hyphenated" Canadians, their own identity as "Canadian", "Muslim" and "Hijabi" women.

Sixth, the participants locate themselves within competing discourses on mainstream Western feminist thought. As McDonald (2009) has mentioned, Canadian mainstream feminist ideas are associated to a Western model of women's emancipation that celebrates individuality and modernity. For "brown" women in the diaspora, this has meant an exposure to "unquestioned narratives of progress" (McDonald, 2009, p. 13) and North American solutions. As Mohanty (2004) suggests, mainstream Western feminist thought has presumed

that Third World and diasporic women lead a sexually-constrained life based on their feminine gender and their being from the “Third World,” which often reads as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic and victimized. This image of the repressed “brown” and/or veiled woman in need of Western-style protection or liberation is quite present in Canada. Our participants, however, offer a very different point of view as they do not feel sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic or victimized. They rather offer resistance to the usual way Canadian discourses construct brown and/or veiled women and they offer a different view of “solutions” to better their lives.

Seventh, our poststructuralist approach has allowed us to explore not only what participants have to say about physical activity but also how they say it. On this, we can conclude that participants rearticulate paradoxical discourses. For instance, they recite a discourse of entitlement to participate in sport and physical activity, but they make no appeal to a discourse of gender equity (that would provide them more opportunities within their own communities or outside) and rather appropriate conventional discourses on gender and femininity. Furthermore, they enjoy physical activity because it makes them feel good about themselves but they draw on a dominant obesity discourse that establishes women’s individual responsibility for their health and that creates guilt by blaming those who fail to remain thin or healthy. Finally, they strongly resist the dominant Islamophobic discourse present in Canada, they appeal to a discourse dominant in their own communities that presents a relatively progressive interpretation of the Quran and they construct themselves as modern Muslim subjects, yet they locate themselves within a dominant gendered and religious discourse on women and physical activity. Clearly, in speaking about physical activity, the young Shia Muslim Canadian women are simultaneously interpellated by subject

positions existing within both dominant and marginalized discursive formations. Despite interesting moments of resistance, many of the young women are not unlike other young women in the Western world and they promulgate dominant (and not so emancipatory) discourses in relation to physical activity. In that regard, physical education and other health promotion programs should take into account not only how young Shia Muslim Canadian women view physical activity in relation to Islam and the Hijab, but also how they locate themselves within dominant bodily discourses. For physical activity to become life-long, enjoyable and positively transformative, we feel it would be crucial to introduce alternative discourses (in schools and in various media within and outside Muslim communities) presenting healthier and more varied subject positions for all women and particularly for young Shia Muslim Canadian women. In the same vein, school and city policies could be developed to offer a greater variety of physical activity opportunities, a greater accessibility to sex-segregated spaces, and a greater awareness and celebration of the diversity of women, including *Hijab*-wearing ones.

Our last conclusion is drawn from our consideration of the current literature (scholarly and popular) and our conversations with the young Shia Muslim Canadian women. This conclusion echoes a recent report presented to the Province of Quebec's Commission on Reasonable Accommodations by scholars and students from the Simone de Beauvoir Institute (2007): it seems that the preoccupation with veiled women serves to deflect from the sexism and racism that has historically pervaded Canadian society. Indeed, issues surrounding the *Hijab* have taken centre stage when young Muslim women's interests would be better served by focusing on issues of racism and sexism, and how the latter have traversed and continue to traverse sport and physical activity. It is our hope that the present

study counters the problematic visions of the “Other” promulgated in mainstream Canadian society and forwards an intersectional discourse (Baines, 2008) that legitimates Muslim women’s refusal to choose between their right to religious freedom, their right to sex equality, and their right to physical activity.

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CHAPTER VIII
STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTORS

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To whom it may concern:

The present statement is to confirm that this thesis is the original work of Nisara Jiwani. Nisara Jiwani contributed to the thesis as a whole by doing the original research (e.g., data collection, data analysis, writing of results). This is also the case for the article (Chapter V). Dr. Geneviève Rail contributed to this thesis by providing guidance throughout the thesis process and making editorial suggestions for the thesis and article. The article and thesis are part of a larger project funded by SSHRC and lead by Geneviève Rail entitled, "Young women's discursive constructions of the body and health in the context of obesity discourses and biopedagogies" (2008-2011).

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APPENDIX A

CONVERSATION GUIDE

CONVERSATION GUIDE

**Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity
Among Shia Muslim Canadian Women**

Below are examples of questions that may be asked. Because the methods call for a conversation and because conversations pretty much take the direction the participants want to, not all questions will be asked and the order of the questions will certainly vary from one participant to the other. Depending on the participant, the term Hijab/Burka/Niqab/Jilbab will be used.

1. Discursive constructions of physical activity

- What does “being physically active,” mean to you?
- What are key words that you would use to define physical activity?
- What qualities would a physically active individual have?
- How/Why is being physically active different/similar for men and women?
- Is physical activity important? Why? Is it important to you? Why?
- How do you feel when you participate in physical activity? What kind of impact does it have on your body/your mind?
- What does it mean that someone is inactive? Do you often meet people who are inactive? How do you think they got to be inactive (what are the reasons behind it)?
- What do you like the most about physical activity? What do you like the least? If you could change something with regards to physical activity, what would it be? Why?
- What are some of the best experiences you have had with regards to physical activity? Why were they the best? How did they make you feel?
- What are some of the worst experiences you have had with regards to physical activity? Why were they the worst? How did they make you feel?

2. Sources of the discursive constructions of physical activity

- Where do you think your ideas on physical activity come from? Why?
- Where do you get information on being physical active? Is there a lot of information out there? Are you interested in this information? Why/Why not? What type of information are you most interested in?
- How has the media played a role in the kind of information you receive on physical activity? The body? Obesity? Health? Recreation programs in your community? Has it helped you? Why or why not?
- How do these public messages (on body/health/physical activity/obesity) affect you?
- How do these public messages (on body/health/physical activity/obesity) affect Shia Muslim Canadian women in general? How does this affect the Canadian Shia *ummah* (community)?

3. Integration of physical activity and the Hijab in day-to-day life

- Do you care about having physical activity within your daily routine? How much? Why?
- If you could do more physical activity, would you? Why/why not?
- Is being active a priority in your life? Why/Why not?
- Why (or why not) do you engage in physical activity? How does it help you? What motivates you?
- What do you do to stay active? (Do you exercise alone? How many times a week? Where?)
- Has it been easy/difficult to access physical activity centres or programs?
- Are female-only spaces (for physical activity) important to you? Why/why not?
- If your school director or your boss or your parents or your friends could do anything to help you participate in more physical activity, what would they do?
- Do you find wearing the Hijab helps/hinders your participation in physical activity? Why/Why not?
- Has the Hijab made a difference in your participation in some types of physical activity? Why? Does it make a difference to you?
- What makes physical activity appealing to Shia Muslim women who wear the Hijab? To you?

4. Culture, physical activity and the Hijab

- Do your parents believe in being physically active the same way you do? Why do you think this is so?
- How are they the same (or different)? Why do you think this is so?
- Was physical activity an important aspect when you were growing up? Has this changed? Why or why not?
- Growing up, what were things (if any) that may have changed or confirmed your ideas about physical activity?
- What are the ideas in your Muslim community about the body, the body in movement (i.e., physical activity)? How are they the same (or different) from yours? Why do you think this is so?
- Do you think that your culture plays a role in how you view your body/physical activity? How?
- Do you think that your religion plays a role in how you view your body/physical activity? How?
- How do the media view the (male/female) Muslim body? The (male/female) Muslim body in physical activity? What are aspects you agree about? What are aspects that you disagree about?
- How do you think non-Muslim people view you when you are participating in sport or physical activity with your Hijab? How do you think Muslim people view you when you are participating in sport or physical activity with your Hijab? How important are these views to you? How do you view yourself?

APPENDIX B

PRESENTATION OF TEXT

INFORMAL PRESENTATION TEXT**Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity
Among Shia Muslim Canadian Women**

Hello,

My name is Nisara Jiwani and I am a Master's student at the University of Ottawa. I am writing you today because I am involved in a research project conducted by Dr. Geneviève Rail, a professor from the University of Ottawa. The project involves exploring the perceptions of physical activity among Shia Muslim Canadian women.

I am specifically looking for Shia Muslim women who are Canadian citizens, who wear a Hijab/Burka/Niqab/Jilbab and who are between 18 and 28 years of age to take part in a one-on-one interview that would take about 1.5 to 2 hours. The interview would be in the form of an informal conversation with me and would be about physical activity, what it means to you, where you get your ideas from and questions like that. I am looking for volunteers who would be interested in answering these questions. The interview would be confidential and I would use a fake name when I transcribe the interview. I would make sure that any element that could identify you would be deleted from the transcript. The interview transcript would be for research purposes only and would remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this interview, please fill out the attached recruitment form and return it to me via email. If you are interested, I will contact you as soon as possible to discuss the study in further detail and to see whether you would still volunteer to participate. If that is the case, then you will be able to select a place where you would want the interview to be conducted as well as a time that is convenient to you.

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have regarding this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nisara Jiwani
Graduate Student
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FORM

RECRUITMENT FORM**Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity
Among Shia Muslim Canadian Women**

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Are you a Canadian citizen? Yes:

No:

4. In what country were you born:

5. In what country were your parents born?

6. Do you wear the Hijab, the Burka, the Niqab or the Jilbab?

Yes:

No:

7. Do you understand/speak English?

Not so well:

Very well:

8. Are you interested in participating in this study?

Yes:

No:

9. When is the best time to contact you?

Morning:

Afternoon:

Evening:

10. What is your phone number?

Please answer the above questions and return the document to njiwa008@uottawa.ca

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity
Among Shia Muslim Canadian Women**

Principal Researcher:

Professor Geneviève Rail, Ph.D.
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa
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Tel: (613) 562-5800, ext. 4227
Fax: (613) 562-5149
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Graduate Assistant:

Nisara Jiwani, B.Sc.
School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5

Tel:
Fax:
Email:

Note:

Whenever a research project involves humans, the written consent of the research participants must be obtained. This does not imply that the project involves a risk. In view of the respect owed to the research participants, the University of Ottawa and the research funding agencies have made this type of agreement mandatory.

I, _____, hereby am interested in collaborating voluntarily and freely to the research supervised by Dr. Geneviève Rail and conducted with the assistance of Nisara Jiwani of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa.

I understand that the general goal of this study is to examine Shia Muslim Canadian women's ideas about physical activity. The specific objectives of this study are to explore these women's: (a) reasons for taking part (or not) in physical activity; (b) views of physical activity in relation to Islam and the Hijab; (c) experiences of physical activity and sport; and (d) perception of the impact of physical activity on their (gender, cultural) identity. Insights from this study will fill an important gap in Canadian literature on physical activity as well as inform contemporary debates on physical activity programs for Shia Muslim Canadian women.

My participation will consist of (1) taking part in a one-on-one interview session to discuss ideas of physical activity and the body. That interview will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and will take place at a time and place of my choosing. (2) If need be, my participation will also consist of taking part in a follow-up session. That session would take place if additional information and/or clarification are necessary. The follow-up session would be done over the telephone and would last 30 minutes at the most. I understand that I will be sent via email the written transcription of the interview in which I will take place. (3) I will be offered the opportunity to read these transcripts and to provide corrections/deletions/additions to them via email. (4) Finally, toward the end of the study, I will be provided with an electronic version of a 2-page story summarizing the results of the study and I will be offered the opportunity to send, via email, feedback on this story, for instance, to comment on whether the story is realistic and corresponds to my situation or that of other young Shia Muslim women I know.

I grant permission for the digital recording of my interview(s) for the purposes of this study. I understand that my interview(s) will be transcribed and that I will have the opportunity to re-read and change, remove or correct any passages of the transcript that I feel may not be appropriate.

I accept that all materials (interview transcripts, feedback sent through email) collected as a result of my participation in the study will be used strictly for research purposes, that they will be available only to Dr. Rail and graduate student Jiwani and that my anonymity and confidentiality will be protected at all times. I am assured that the digital tape and the transcript of the interview(s) will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr. Rail at the University of Ottawa. The digital tape will also be destroyed at the end of the study. I understand that I may withdraw this permission at any time and that any recordings of my participation will be erased at once upon my request without fear of negative consequences.

I have also been assured by the researcher that any information that I have shared will remain strictly confidential. My anonymity is also guaranteed. I will be assigned a fake name and this fake name will be used in the interview transcription. Should the researchers cite a portion of my interview in their study, my fake name will be used and all information that may reveal my identity will be deleted.

I acknowledge that given the nature of this research, I will be required to express or share personal information and as a result there may be a minimal level of emotional discomfort at certain moments. I have received assurance that the interviewer will do everything she can to minimize the risk of discomfort. Moreover, I will not be required to respond to any questions that may bring discomfort, and should I choose not to answer a question, there will no negative consequences for me. The interview will be conducted in a very informal manner where the questions will be posed in simple language. In the event that I do not understand a question being posed, it will be rephrased in such a manner that it can be more easily understood. Finally, I am free to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview, without prejudice.

I understand that I will be asked to sign both copies of the consent form, and that one of the copies will be for me (the other will be kept in a locked cabinet by Dr. Rail).

For any additional information, I have been informed that I can contact Nisara Jiwani or Dr. Rail at any time. For all other complaints concerning ethical conduct in this research project, I have been informed that I can address myself to the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, Office of Vice-Rector Research, University of Ottawa, at (613) 562-5800 extension 5387.

I, _____, freely and voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.

Participant: _____
Signature Date

Interviewer:

I, _____, declare having explained the objectives, the nature and any inconvenience of the study to the participant mentioned above. I commit myself to the strictest confidentiality with respect to the information received in this study.

Interviewer: _____
Signature Date

APPENDIX E

ETHICS APPROVAL



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Université d'Ottawa / University of Ottawa

HEALTH SCIENCES AND SCIENCE RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is to certify that the University of Ottawa Health Sciences and Science Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical approval of the research project entitled **Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity among Shia Muslim Canadian and Landed Immigrant Women (H 08-07-08)** submitted by Professor Geneviève Rali of the School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences.

The Board found that this research project met appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and in the Procedures of the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Boards, and accordingly gave it a Category 1a (approval). This certification is valid one year from the date indicated below.

German Zongo
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Dr. Daniel Fugère, Chair of the
Health Sciences and Science RTB

September 21, 2007

Date