Intersectional Plays of Identity: The Experiences of British Asian Female Footballers

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Abstract

Debates regarding intersectionality have been widely held in the U.K. and elsewhere for over a decade. However, the value of intersectionality has been questioned as researchers struggle to analyse intersectionality-in-practice. That is, how and why social identities connect in the ways that they do in the everyday lives of women and men. In this paper I argue that the concepts of 'performativity' and 'ontological complicity' offer a useful way of exploring the articulation of identities. I specifically draw on empirical research about the experiences of British Asian female footballers, to signal how their particular identities articulate in and through the spaces of women's football. I argue that by playing-up some identity dispositions and concomitantly playing-down others, British Asian females are able to negotiate inclusion within the spaces of women's football. However, this does not mean that they automatically become valued insiders. At other times, and in other spaces, their marginalisation from within the game is clear. I suggest that considering the intersectional plays of identity captures the complex and nuanced operation of discrimination, which is often rendered invisible in women's football.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Performativity, Ontological Complicity, 'Race' and Gender, British Asians and Women's Football

Introduction

1.1 Intersectionality has been a 'buzzword' of feminist theory ever since its inception and has become critical to exploring complex relations of identity and power (Davis 2008; Nash 2008; McCall 2005). Crenshaw (1991), who introduced the term, argued that an intersectional approach is crucial to addressing the oppression of black women as their experiences and political struggles have been neglected by mainstream feminist movements. Additionally, their experiences are rendered invisible within anti-racist discourses as the focus of these debates tends to be about the lives and identities of men. Since then, feminist researchers have used intersectionality to explore gender as a complex construction, inter-related to other social divisions such as class, nationality, sexuality, age and (dis)ability (Yuval-Davis 2006; Shields 2008). Research that advocates an intersectional approach whilst widely debated remains at the level of conceptual - to frame the idea of identities as multiple and inter-connected - very few researchers have actually forwarded knowledge about how intersectionality can be critically applied to doing research as well as to understanding how and why identities connect in the ways that they do (Davis 2008; Lewis 2009; McCall 2005; Valentine 2007; Watson and Scraton 2012). In this article, I argue that the means through which intersections are produced in a sporting context are based on whether individuals can develop 'a feel for the game' or not. Moreover, I suggest the theoretical framework developed by Puwar (2004), who synthesizes the works of Butler and Bourdieu, is valuable to understanding how intersectionality operates-in-practice. By drawing on the oral testimonies of British Asian girls and women, this paper aims to elucidate the intersectional plays of identity in and through the cultural spaces of women's football.

The Research: Representations of Gender and Race in Women's Football

2.1 Women's football is recognised as one of the fastest growing women's sports in England, more so than sports like netball and hockey (FA 2011b, WSFF 2011). Recent changes to women's involvement in football indicate that despite dominant gender conventions of earlier times, notions of femininity are perhaps becoming more open and fluid (Heywood and Dworkin 2003). Young girls and women are no longer tied to strict codes of non-participation in traditional men's sports like football, rugby and cricket. Yet, persisting inequalities are still evident in the game (Caudwell 2011). For instance, in terms of the hegemony of males in positions of power, homophobia and the general heteronormative culture of the sport. However, what is significantly absent from debates about women's sport is the history and sociological analysis of *Black* women's experiences (Hargreaves 1994; Scraton 2001). The 'whiteness' of sporting spaces are often taken-for-granted (Long and Hylton 2002; Scraton 2001). As a result the impact of 'race' upon the sporting experiences of women (and to a lesser extent to those of men) has often been neglected. Hence, sport is popularly perceived as meritocratic and anyone with the right talent and determination is able to filter to the highest levels of play (Burdsey 2007, 2011; Long and McNamee 2004; Lusted 2011). Relatedly, the lack of participation by ethnic minority groups is therefore seen as a reflection of their indifference to sport, and not because the predominant culture of sport is unequal (Burdsey 2007, 2011). It is commonly thought British Asian girls and women are not allowed to play sport as it is antithetical to their religious and cultural beliefs. It is also thought the inappropriateness of sport is linked to their gender roles; that is, young girls must learn how to become 'good' daughters and eventually 'good' wives rather than to play sport (Ratna 2011; Walseth 2006). Ratna (2011) argues that these stereotypes are false and do little but reproduce ideas about the backwardness of British Asian cultures. Consequently, by focusing on the peculiarities of British Asian culture, the inequalities operating in the spaces of sport are ignored (Carrington and McDonald 2001). Thus, research which draws upon the concept of intersectionality is urgently needed if the racialised and gendered arena of sport is to be understood and challenged.

Cultural Spaces and Performativity

3.1 Valentine (2007) provides a useful lens through which to analyse intersectionality. She argues that people view themselves differently according to the spaces they inhabit, and that in some spaces they are more likely to feel accepted and valued than they do in other spaces. Valentine bases this premise on the notion that those who are dominant within a particular space have the power to construct the hegemonic culture of that space, marking out those who belong and those who do not (see Watson and Ratna 2011). Valentine (2007) further explains, using stories about Jeanette - a 'white', middle-class, deaf woman - that in the spaces of home, work and leisure, at certain times, Jeanette de-prioritizes particular identity positions and/or she chooses to prioritise other identity positions. It becomes apparent that by using this performative technique (see below), Jeanette is able to negotiate her entry and acceptance into different social spaces. Therefore understanding which intersectional positions are advantageous, in different social spaces, enables individuals such as Jeanette to negotiate their identities in potentially more favourable ways. However, I argue that people are not simply free to choose which identities to play-up or play-down as they wish; as this ignores the impact of determining social structures. I argue that a structure agency approach to understanding the complex intersectional play of identities, is central to exploring how and why people prioritise some identity positions over others. Importantly these choices are made within the parameters of wider social conditions.

3.2 The idea of de-prioritising (and prioritising) identities resonates with Butler's (1990) theory of performativity. Butler argues that the presentation of the individual self in everyday interactions is not seen to be a reflection of an 'innate' identity, but a parody that gives the illusion of a particular identity. That is, in the performance of identities people disrupt traditional categories of gender to create and re-create a proliferation of new ways of being that go beyond the set binary (Butler 1990; Saih and Butler 1997). However, Butler tends to over-privilege gender above other social categories including those of 'race' and ethnicity. It is important to note that 'race', like gender, is also a social construction that is made and re-made (Byrne 2006). Alexander and Knowles (2005) argue that racial identities can be produced either by the external 'racial' ascriptions given to groups of people and/or people claiming attachment to a particular 'racial' grouping. In reference to speech acting, Butler (1997) argues that 'race'

is also performed by the way it is constituted in discourse, for example, in terms of the supposed binary between 'white' and 'black' individuals and groups. Goldberg (1993) notes that the historical context is important as over time western science and tradition have influenced the way we see racial groups, for example marking superior 'white' races against those who are deemed to be different or 'other'.

3.3 Butler (1993) further explains that speech acting brings a person into being by the claims they make about their own identities. This speech acting is still considered performative as in and through discussions about the constitution of their racial identities, people may express their social positions in new and different ways (Bell 1999). However the performativity of 'race' and gender is not just about what is said and by whom, it is also about how performances are 'read' by others. Depending on the audience, the reading of racial identity may be seen as fitting or not (Rottenberg 2003). Hence, the appropriate performativity of 'race' can enable non-white people 'to pass' as 'white' (Rottenberg 2003). Fraser (1999) argues that although the stylistic possibilities of doing and re-doing gender and 'race' are fluid, and centralise the agency of individuals within this process, individuals may not simply choose who they want to be in particular social situations as they see fit, as this ignores the continuing impact of dominant ideologies pertaining to gender and 'racial' differences.

Bourdieu and 'Playing the Game'

4.1 Some researchers have suggested that extrapolating Bourdieu's ideas about class, to other social identities, may help to explain how spaces are marked by various cultural markers of belonging and non-belonging (see Adkins 2004; Huey and Berndt 2008; Lovell 2000; McLeod 2005; McNay 1999; Mennesson 2000; Puwar 2009; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Thorpe 2010). These cultural distinctions may relate to class as well as to those relating to gender, 'race' and ethnicity. For example, Skeggs (1997, 2004) appropriates Bourdieu's work to examine how girls and young women use and accumulate social and cultural capital in order to negotiate and/or cope within spaces where they feel unwelcome. Bourdieu's (1990a) 'game' analogy is important as he argues that a sense of belonging can stem from an individual's ability to understand and develop a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990a; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Huey and Berndt 2008; Tomlinson 2004). For instance, a tennis player may use a stroke to play the game in an instinctive and spontaneous manner, but it is nevertheless a practiced and learnt stroke that is automated in the game context. For Bourdieu, gender identity does not simply pass through consciousness; it is a learnt form of behaviour that becomes so deeply ingrained within the bodily hexis of an individual, that it can be enacted, at a pre-reflexive level, instinctively and spontaneously. As women have begun to enter various public spaces including those linked to sport, their ability to 'pass' in these spaces is often dependent on whether they can have a 'feel for the game' or not. By this, Bourdieu (1990b) means whether women can practice forms of behaviour, dress and speech that match the hegemonic culture of that particular space. Bourdieu (1990b) crucially poses the question of how can women who have limited prior knowledge of the habitus of men, as women who have been historically excluded from the male spaces of sport, know how to perform an appropriate identity?

4.2 Bourdieu's term 'ontological complicity' further helps to explain belonging: when people find themselves in a place where or which their habitus is a product of, they are like a 'fish in water' (cited in Grenfell and James 1998: 14). They simply need to be who they are to feel included and valued in this space (McLeod 2005). Individuals who find that their identities are a mis-match within a certain social space find that they must - consciously and/or subconsciously - use whatever power they have to negotiate their entry and acceptance. Puwar (2004) elaborates on Bourdieu's use of ontological complicity arguing that individuals who find themselves in the latter group are like a 'fish out of water', desperately trying to keep up with the habitual flow of a cultural space which is not instinctively 'theirs'. Puwar (2004) applies the concept of ontological complicity to the analysis of intersections. She argues that there are degrees of ontological complicity and class as well as gender and 'race' are crucial differentiators. It is worth quoting Puwar (2004) at some length in order to elucidate this process:

Race, class and gender do not simply interact with each other. They can cancel each other out (Pinar 1982, 1990; Brah 1996) and, in fact, one can compensate for the others. For instance, women who enter predominantly male environments with an elite familial or scholastic background will be inclined to have a habitus that allows for a greater degree of ontological complicity than those who have not had the same social trajectory. At the same time, their gender in a predominantly masculine environment puts them out on a limb... (S)imilarly, those racialised minorities who have had an elite background will have a habitus that is much more in keeping with the demands of the field than those who have not been immersed in this environment. This will occur even while they may 'feel the weight' of the whiteness of organisations and, in this respect, will have occasions where they feel like a 'fish out of water', while whiteness is invisible to others, male and female (pg. 127).

4.3 Intersections of 'race', gender, class and other social markers of difference are significant to understanding the vagaries of inclusion and exclusion. Whilst the application of Bourdieu's work is gaining popularity in regards to studies about gender, sexuality and 'race', some researchers have been critical of his over-deterministic stance which suggests individuals have little control over their own lives (McNay 1999; McLeod 2005). However, his later work about habitus does more clearly centralise the role of individual agency. That is, how habitus is constantly changing as individuals move through a greater number as well as greater array of social spaces during their lifespan, enabling them to learn and acquire knowledge about how to 'play' according to the hegemonic rules of any given cultural space. In this way, individuals are not perceived to be inevitably doomed by their prior class, 'racial', gender and sexual positions of identity. They can perform identities in certain ways, and at certain times, in order to constantly negotiate their inclusion. Hence, recognising that individuals can assert a degree of oppositional agency to determining social structures.

Methodology and Method

5.1 Scraton (2001) and Scraton et al (2005) recognise the contribution of Black feminism to the study of sport and football as a way of making sense of the interconnections between 'race', ethnicity and other social markers of identity. In keeping with the traditions of Black feminist research and critical studies of 'race' and ethnicity (Alexander 2004; Collins 2000; Gunaratnam 2003; Bulmer and Solomos 2004) in this paper I focus on the voices of the research participants. Hence, the interviews were semi-structured and adopted a life history approach. Tierney (2000) suggests that life histories are particularly valuable when the research participants are from minority/disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities women or particular racial/ ethnic minorities. Life histories can provide insights into the 'meanings' that these groups attach to their sporting experiences (Birrell 1989; Sparkes and Templin 1994). This is because they have the opportunity to speak about their lives in a way that makes sense to them as members of a minority group.

5.2 The participants were encouraged to explain how they saw their careers and identify what they saw as pertinent issues within the game. At various stages, the participants were asked to comment on their relationships with other players as well as their family, friends and significant others. Through this questioning, I sought to explore the participant's sense of 'who they were' in relation other social groups of people. This enabled me to identify how the intersections of gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity operated in their lives, in the sporting spaces that they found themselves in, during different phases of their careers. I also spent six months with a pre-dominantly British Asian Football Club (BAFC) attending training sessions and socialising with them on and off the football field. This gave me the opportunity to note dialogues and interactions between these female players, which further elucidated the operation of intersectionality-in-action.

5.3 The research participants constituted of nineteen British Asian girls and women. The players were similar and different to each other in terms of their cultural and religious affiliations. The research participants had mainly played for either predominantly white teams or for predominantly British Asian teams. Fourteen of the research participants were playing/had played at various elite levels of the Women's Football Pyramid, the mainstream structure of the game in England. In fact one of the players in this group had played for the England women's under-16 football team; another had also played football for England at student level. In a different international setting, five girls and women were representing or had represented the UK futsal^[1] squad at the Islamic Women's World Games^[2] in Iran. Furthermore the research participants were similar and different in regards to their age, generation and geographical location of home. The players did not explicitly state how they saw their class identities, so it was difficult to ascertain any general commonalities between them in regards to this and their involvement in the game. Also, as I did not ask the players to disclose their sexual preferences, the sexual identities of the participants were not known. However, some of the players explicitly and/or implicitly conferred their heterosexuality. It is important to mention this fact, as their performances of heterosexuality are likely to affect their views about the culture of the game (see below).

5.4 To appreciate several intersections of identity at once is a huge feat without a central focus of debate. Therefore, for the purpose of this article I draw out a number of examples that illustrate the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Although I recognise this is only a snapshot of the multiple and complex ways these identities articulate together in and through the spaces of women's football, I begin the analysis by focusing on British Asian girls and women's intersectional plays of identity as both women and football players in the pre-dominantly 'white' spaces of the game. I suggest that 'race' is de-prioritised whilst gender is concomitantly prioritised. I then show how British Asian women have come to understand the heterosexual culture of women's football and the implication of this on their performances of gender and sexual identities. I reveal how within a pre-dominantly British Asian club, the intersections of being a footballer and being a 'girly-girl' is important to distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Lastly I

explore the intersections of gender, sexuality and ethnicity by showing how British Asian women use their cultural heritage as a means for re-producing their femininity. Whilst the experiences of gender and sexuality are not unique to British Asian women, how they re-act and respond to the dominant heterosexual and 'white' culture of women's football, from their positions as ethnic minority women in this field, adds to this body of sociological research.

The Intersections of Gender and Football: De-prioritising 'Race'

6.1 In the spaces of sport, becoming 'one of the girls' requires individuals to constantly construct and manage their identities in order to negotiate their inclusion and tackle forms of exclusion. For these British Asian players, I suggest that some had been able to break in to the top levels of the sport by aligning their beliefs about the game to those of the dominant group. For example, like the views of many players, coaches and administrators of women's football, some British Asian players have argued that racism does not exist within the game (Ratna 2007). A number of the players in this study support women's football as a meritocracy, arguing that 'race' does not matter as much as sexism, which they saw as more likely to hinder their decision to play the sport. For example, Player 4, a girl of Sikh-Indian heritage who has always played for mainly 'white' teams explains:

That's what I mean about 'race' not being a problem kind of thing, as we're still proving we're girls. I mean that there's a lot of stereotypes like female footballers have to be butch or a lesbian to play women's football (laughs)...So 'race' doesn't really come into it.

6.2 Player 4 shares the opinion of many British Asian female footballers, that women who play are seen as gender deviants, meaning they are lesbian (Caudwell 1999). Many of the British Asian players articulated the view that as women *they know* what it feels like to be discriminated against, and therefore they would not dream of discriminating against any other group of women. Without devaluing the impact of sexism or other forms of discrimination, 'race' still matters and racism does exist in women's football. Indeed, racisms evident in women's football (as in men's football) are often ignored, reduced to the ignorant acts of individual players or trivialised as team banter (Ratna 2007).

6.3 The process of denying racism and focusing on sexism was a coping mechanism for many players included in the research. When pushed to explain her opinion, one of the oldest players in this study, of Sikh-Indian heritage, who had played for many top women's football teams throughout her career, explosively remarked that even though she is aware of racism in women's football, and at times incidents are really bad, she cannot (or will not) recite any examples. She dismisses them and prefers to use other excuses as she hates to play the 'race' card:

...I am one of these people that I don't want to accept that 'race' is an issue because it shouldn't be that way. As soon as you start sayin' 'race' is an issue, if you don't get into the team on the weekend you're sayin' it's because 'race' is an issue. I think that there might be a point where it absolutely is and you're just not getting in the team because you're 'Asian'. But I don't think it does you any good. I think you just have to think I wasn't good enough and use every other excuse under the sun until it's just obvious that 'race' is the issue... When it actually comes to the stage that it's really becoming difficult it's much easier to give up if you've got that excuse. 'Yeah it's out of my control, I'm good enough but I'll never get there. It's because I'm 'Asian'...' I think at the moment we just expect it to be there so if something doesn't go your way it's very easy to call the 'race' card. I hate, I mean there is lots of racism as well, but I just think that sometimes we need to start from the other side... (Player 5)

6.4 Player 5 argues that it is more beneficial for her 'to start from the other side' and focus on positive rather than negative things. Negative things only de-motivate her, and other British Asian players like her, from making it at higher levels. The players that do not make it or those who use the 'race' card in her belief have not worked hard enough. Like the arguments utilised in previous research, she perpetuates the meritocratic nature of football by choosing to blame British Asians as individuals, rather than the detrimental impacts of racism. More realistically though, I would suggest that a number of the players in the research have not only made it due to their talent, self-determination and sheer hard-work, but also as a result of their ability to tolerate racism and 'get on with it' (see quote below). For someone with the playing credentials of Player 5, she knows quite clearly what it takes to play the game at elite level:

I mean look, as a British-Asian player you have your own problems whether they be one of racism or something else, but you just got to get on with it for the sake of your own sanity...

6.5 Hence, behind the centralisation of gender and sexuality in the testimonies of the British Asian players, racial identities were nevertheless inter-connected and in the background. To further unravel the intersections of gender and 'race', as will become evident in the discussion below, many of the players – both established and relative newcomers – were able to negotiate barriers to their exclusion and foster a sense of inclusion, despite their racial and ethnic differences, precisely because they understood the *heterosexual* norms and values associated to the women's game. In other words, they had gained enough knowledge about gender and sexuality through their early socialisation to use it as a form of cultural capital as their careers progressed.

The Intersection of Gender and Sexuality: The Socialisation of British Asian girls into the spaces of sport and women's football

7.1 British Asian female footballers, like their 'white' counterparts, understand the pre-dominantly heterosexual construction of women's sporting spaces. The early involvement in the sport illustrates the tensions faced by those interviewed. For example, whilst many of them claim to have been 'tomboys' during their childhood, they began to understand that as a 'girl' this identity would not be acceptable when they reached adolescence (Paechter and Clarke 2007). Player 3 acknowledges that as a young girl playing a pre-dominantly 'male' sport, she was not like the other girls, suggesting that:

I was always seen as a tomboy from the start (by other girls)...it didn't actually surprise them that I wanted to play football...I never did what they were sort of doing...I never used to join in...I kinda found it boring...I just wanted to run around and be a bit more active...

7.2 At this age, Player 3 parodies an identity style that is most commonly associated to being a 'boy': that is, using their bodies in physically active and powerful ways (Young 1990). Bourdieu (1992) argues that in some spaces, like the conditions found within primary school, it is possible for girls to refuse femininity long enough to acquire a masculine habitus. But, as the players grew older they all tended to agree that their tomboyism waned. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggest that as young girls grow older, gender behaviours at school are reinforced through subjects, in particular PE, which teach girls and boys what they are allowed to do and what they not allowed to do with their bodies (cited in Skeggs 2004). These players' comments demonstrate how, at this early age, they were learning wider structural regimes of gender practice that would inform their social habitus (Gorely et al 2003).

7.3 Later in an interview with Player 3, whilst justifying her tomboy identity, she also felt it was necessary to declare that she 'wasn't a lesbian y'know?' One of the older players in this study also seemed keen to remove the lesbian tag associated to the game, suggesting that:

There's a lot of stereotypes like female footballers have to be butch or lesbian to play women's football... But, like the new generation are coming in and they are more feminine than the older generation of female football players. The short-haired butch kind of girl is not there anymore (Player 4).

7.4 By stating this, she is implying that she (and by inference her team) are not lesbian. Rooke (2007) suggests that a lesbian identity is assumed through various behaviours relating to body deportment and ways of walking or using bodies, a sense of confidence (or lack of confidence) about sexualities and significant distinctions related to ways of wearing one's hair, clothes or accessories. In the spaces of women's football, because a pre-dominant culture of heteronormativity exists, this has led to players being judged on their gender performances. Acceptance and belonging are likely to ensue if it appears that there is a relative absence of a lesbian habitus. The strategic performance of Player 4 is interesting as she specifically uses language about a 'new generation' of players to articulate her heterosexual, and not homosexual, identity. She includes herself, as a British Asian woman amongst her 'white' and straight teammates, within this 'new generation'. It is clear that through this story she is performing an image of herself as feminine and straight. Similarly, Player 3 suggests that the 'butch' image of women's football has disappeared and that women who do 'look like a man' are out of place. Significantly, Player 3 reproduces a stereotypical binary of butch/ femme identities. Studies by Caudwell (2003; 2006) found it was important to note that women who play the game actually display forms of identity that do not necessarily fit this binary. However, it becomes apparent that through the complex intersections of identities relating to gender and sexualities, for some British Asian football players, the performance of feminine identities is clearly more advantageous to their acceptance in women's football than lesbian/ butch identities. They too, like their 'white' female counterparts, understand the pre-dominant heterosexual culture of women's football (Cox and Thompson 2000, 2001; Drury 2011; Mennesson and Clement 2003; Scraton et al. 1999). Whilst their 'racial' identities in other circumstances may mark them out as visible 'others', by using a performative technique that infers their heterosexuality, they are not deemed as total outsiders. The appropriate intersectional play of their gender and sexual identities guarantees their acceptance within the spaces of women's football.

The Intersections of Gender and Ethnicity: Emphasising Femininity

8.1 As evident in the testimonies of several players, girls and young women seek pleasure in fashion and beauty images which are tied to the identities that they are seeking. In this way, they are able to move themselves away from ideas about young women who play football being butch and lesbian, to their preferred images of women as feminine and straight. Many of the participants referred to this type of femininity as being 'girly-girl'. During the time I spent with members of BAFC, I noticed that various aspects of their interactions positioned the 'girly-girls' (feminine players) as insiders and the 'the lads' (unfeminine players) as relative outsiders to the team. The 'girly-girl' group used their identities to prove that they could play football and still be girls. Player 14 explains that, 'quite a few of us are really girly actually... we don't like getting our nails dirty or knotting our hair'. In this case, hair and nails are viewed as a valued feature of women's bodies, a form of symbolic capital to prove the femininity of members of BAFC. Some feminist critics have suggested that fashion and western ideals of beauty are practised in order to construct, produce or 'perform' a feminine self (Hollows 2000: 139 and 152). As noted by Cox and Thompson (2000: 14), in their study about female football players, hairstyle and length are significant markers of gender in western cultures. It is not surprising that these British Asian female footballers, as residents of a western county, understand and use these cultural practices to re-produce their own feminine identities (see Wilson 2006: 26).

8.2 To further elucidate upon the performance of femininity by this particular group of British Asian football players, one Friday night when I went to squad training with them, we were waiting for the team football coach to arrive. At this time, I realized that I had lost my hair band and asked some of the girls standing next to me if they had a spare one so I could tie-up my hair for training. One of them handed me a hair band and at the same time suggested that 'the lads', who were waiting to the side of us, were unlikely to carry such things. The girly-girl players that were standing around me all laughed at this comment. The following extract from my fieldnotes details what followed:

Player 12 ('lad') starts to mock Player 15 ('girly-girl') for wearing a hooded top tightly fixed around her face. Player 15 said that she had to wear her hood to protect her washed and straightened hair from kinking in the rain. She shrieks loudly, 'I've just straightened my hair!' In contrast, Player 12 pulls a woolly hat over her head and white football socks over her tracksuit bottoms. She declares, 'I look like a lad and I don't care!' We all laugh at her outburst... The 'girly-girls' go on to tell the coach that they are going to a fashion show that night, organized by one of the girls' elder brothers, and they ask if they can leave training early to finish getting ready. They are keen to look their best and not get their hair messed up at football training... One hour later, the 'girly-girls' leave the training ground. The rest of the team play a five-a-side game and as they leave, Player 12 ('lad') says 'Yep, you best go home and get *fixed*'. Player 10 replies that they would have stayed behind to play the game but 'they are not lads!' Player 11 and Player 12 both agree by retorting 'Yeah, we are the lads!' (Emphasis added).

8.3 Through this interaction it becomes evident that the 'girly girls' and 'the lads' see themselves as two different groups, an important distinction related to their performance of gender. The former group stigmatizes and belittles the latter group. Player 12 tells me later that evening, that sometimes these comments really get to her as she is 'girly' but in a different way from her 'girly-girl' team mates, suggesting femininities are fluid and not based on a fixed sense of womanhood. She further suggests that she has always had a good relationship with the boys at BAFC as they all 'respect' her for her football talents. She feels that the 'girly-girls', who actually founded the club, feel jealous of her as they all want the boys at the club to fancy them. Through this example, it becomes evident that the boys themselves do not impose feminine practices amongst the girls, but to various extents, these females discipline themselves, in order to promote and maintain the heterosexual and 'girly-girl' culture at BAFC. Even though Player 12 says she is not as 'stupid' and 'girly-girl' as the other girls, she has little power to impose herself on the dominant clique mainly because she lacks the social capital (network of friendships/ peer group support) and because she refuses to use forms of symbolic capital (an understanding of dominant femininity) to conform to the cultural standards of this particular group/space. This example proves that female football players who do not perform appropriate gendered images of themselves are to a certain extent, through team jokes and banter, positioned as outsiders to the established 'girly-girl' insiders. In this example, the intersections of being a football player and gender are understood and are played out by members of BAFC to distinguish insiders from outsiders.

8.4 Another interesting aspect of this interaction relates to the fashion show mentioned by some of the 'girly-girls'. This is because, at the time of the research, after the British media had dubbed 2001 as the 'Indian Summer', British *Asianness* was increasingly becoming a new area of cultural fascination (see Puwar, 2002). At this time, in conjunction with the release of the Andrew Lloyd Webber's theatre production *Bombay Dreams*, Channel Four were particularly showing a series of Bollywood films (Ghosh 2009). Moreover, South Asian dance, culture, food and fashion were being celebrated at various local festivals across different parts of the country (Ghosh 2009). In the words of Player 5, more so than any other time in the history of South Asian migration to England, Asianness was seen to be 'kool' (see Ratna 2010). Interestingly, the colonial image of South Asian women as being sensual and exotic had been re-worked and re-used in more recent times to sell South Asian cultural commodities to an increasingly 'white' audience (Puwar 2002). Although this 'Asian kool' notion is problematic as it masks multi-racism (Sharma et al 1996; Huq 2006) as well as the emergence of public and political discourses about British Asians as representing an alien presence in British society (Alexander 2000; Brah 1994; Puwar 2002), nevertheless, for the young women at BAFC it has helped them to further legitimise their femininity. That is, wearing clothes and make-up at a fashion show that had been inspired by Bollywood film actresses meant that their South Asian identity could be used as a cultural resource to mark out their 'girly-girl' image. As noted by Puwar (2002), during the 'Indian Summer', consumption of the exotic/ orient was a 'taste' that had been given distinction, it was symbolically legitimised. In the context of football at BAFC, ethnicity is not down-played as it is by British Asian players in the pre-dominantly 'white' spaces of women's football (see above). Hence, in this particular case, ethnicity is an important variable to the intersectional play of being a footballer and a girl.

Concluding Thoughts

9.1 In this article I have used theoretical understandings of performativity and ontological complicity to illustrate how and why identities intersect. This is a much needed area of sociological research, forwarding debates about the value of intersectionality as a conceptual framework to a theoretical analysis of how people actually *experience* intersections of identity. I argue that thinking about 'intersectional plays of identity' is an especially useful way of analysing how different identities can be performed together, and at once, in order to foster a sense of belonging - or ontological complicity - within any given cultural space.

9.2 In this paper, drawing upon a selection of testimonies from British Asian players, and supported by field notes, a number of intersectional plays of identity are evident: 1) the de-prioritisation of 'racial' identities and the prioritisation of gender and sexual identities; 2) understanding and contributing to the operation of gender and sexuality in and through the spaces of women's football and 3) the intersections of gender, sexuality and ethnicity as a means of emphasising femininity. Through these complex performances of intersectional identities, some of the British Asian footballers were able to successfully enter and occupy spaces within women's football. In this respect, they were able to keep up with the habitual flow of the women's game in order to pass and progress as relative 'insiders'. However, for other British Asian players, their lack of complicity or inability to conform to the cultural markers of women's football positioned them as relative 'outsiders'. By focusing upon how intersectionality operates-in-practice, it is obvious that some intersectional positions of identity were more advantageous than others. However, the consequence of British Asian women performing their intersectional identities in potentially more favourable ways, is that the racist, heteronormative, 'white' and homophobic culture of women's football is reproduced and further normalised. Despite Butler's (1990) claim that alternative performances of identity are possible, and can disrupt the hegemonic culture of a space, this did not manifest in the research.

9.3 Arguably whilst this is one way of doing intersectional research, and there may be other examples of how to explore intersectionality-in-practice, it has illustrated the nuanced and complex operation of inequalities (see also Andersen and McCormack 2010). Without this detailed exploration of how identities are played out together, the simultaneous operation of discrimination would remain hidden and thus uncontested. By making visible the links between different forms of inequalities, they can then be challenged through further research and praxis. Therefore, in conclusion, I argue that the method and means of studying the complex operation of intersectionality must be further developed by researchers in the sociology of sport, and elsewhere, if significant challenges to inequality and exclusion are to be taken seriously at a time when some argue that they do not exist at all.

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Notes

¹Futsal is the name given to a variant of 5-a-side football. The popularity and growth of this small sided game is evident at various European and World competitions, and in this country is supported by the FA (FA, 2009)

²This competition occurs every four years and is an alternative to the Olympic Games. It is the only occasion where Muslim women can participate at the highest international level in a female-only environment. The UK team - the only one from a non-Muslim country, played for the first time in 2002. Even although officially representing the UK, all members are from England.

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