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Theorising and Researching Difference in PE: The Challenge of Intersectionality

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Theorising and Researching Difference in PE: The Challenge of Intersectionality.
Introduction

> Arguably, PE and sport have still a long way to go before they can be regarded as embracing the insights that research has provided in relation to, for example, sexuality or ethnicity, or the identified need to explore and respond to differences within identified groups as much as those between them. In part, researchers themselves have to take some of the blame here. In frequently focusing upon a single 'issue' researchers may be inhibiting the development of understandings, policies and initiatives that privilege the individual with their inherent multiple identities. (Penney, 2002a, p.115)

The challenges of theorising and researching 'difference' have been a central focus in feminist and critical work for well over two decades. Indeed, Mary Maynard has recently argued that 'difference is one of the most significant, yet unresolved, issues for feminist and social thinking at the beginning of the twentieth century' (Maynard, 2002, p.33). By taking Dawn Penney's view as its starting point, this paper analyses how difference has been addressed in PE. It explores the contribution of what she has called 'single issue' research on difference in PE, and whilst highlighting its strengths and limitations, argues for the development of a more complex understanding and theorising of difference. We suggest that PE might draw on some of the insights from the debates on 'intersectionality' within wider feminist and critical work. Although its use is not straightforward, like Pheonix, we have found the term intersectionality a useful shorthand term to describe 'the complex political struggles and arguments that seek to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it' (Pheonix, 2006, p.187). Drawing from this literature, we highlight some key issues in theorising and researching intersectionality, and the questions these raise for politics and practice. In the final part of the paper we argue that, as a particular 'bodily' practice carried out within specific contexts and spaces, research and theorising in PE has the potential to make an important contribution to these debates, not least because it is through the body that social differences and identities are both 'lived' and 'accomplished' (Archer, 2004; Valentine, 2007).

Given its complexities, it is not surprising that debates about how best to research and theorise 'difference' in social life have been equally complex. At issue is not just the development of 'better' theory, but the implications for 'better' practice that emerge from this different engagement. How differences are conceived; which differences get noted and why some and not other differences are viewed as significant or relevant, and by whom, are important questions for those wishing to make a difference in education (Penney, 2002; Figueroa, 1993). Debates in feminism and critical work in education around difference have a long history centred on these questions (see e.g. Barnes, et al, 2002; Danforth and Gabel, 2006; Dillabough, 2006 for overviews). As Archer (2004, p.459) has noted, the trajectory of feminism has seen a shift

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from a position of asserting the differences between women and men, to addressing the differences between women (and men), to the current 'state of play' where a central question remains: 'how 'we' might 'best' conceptualize, talk about, represent (and mobilize around) commonalities and differences between diverse women (and men)' [our emphasis]. Influenced strongly by the critiques of black and disabled feminists (e.g. Carby, 1982; Lloyd, 1992; Mirza, 1997; Morris, 1991; Thomas, 1999) and those working within postmodernism and poststructuralism (e.g. Kenway, et al, 1998; Walkerdine, 1987, Allan, 2006) the use of the category 'woman' or other universalistic terms such as 'black' or 'disability' are now recognised as inherently problematic [1]. Critiques of categorical thinking have led to recognition of multiple and fluid nature of individuals' identities and the complex ways in which enduring inequalities are produced through social relations of difference. However, many questions remain. How to best theorize the relationships between different axes of identity? What are the implications of centralizing intersectionality for our research practice? And importantly, how do we work across difference to challenge enduring inequalities?

Although more established within sports sociology and sports feminism (e.g. Boyle, Millington and Vertinsky, 2006; Dewar,1993; DePauw, 1997; Hargreaves, 2004; 2007; Huang and Brittain, 2006; Kay and Lowrey, 2003; Kay, (Messner and Sabo 1990)2006; Messner and Sabo, 1990; Messner, 1992; McKay, Messner and Sabo, 2000; Scraton, 2001; Scraton, Caudwell and Holland, 2005; Sparkes and Smith; 2007; Smith and Sparkes, 2004; Watson and Scraton, 2001) there has been much less attention to these debates and questions within Physical Education (PE) (Azzarito and Solomon, 2005; Flintoff, 2007). Instead, as noted by Dawn Penney (2002a) cited above, feminist and critical work in PE has largely tended to focus on difference through 'single issue' research, where the focus has been on either gender, or race or disability, for example, rather than addressing the complexity of their interrelationships. In this way, PE could be characterised as being 'one step behind' the wider feminist and critical debates (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005) that have addressed the complexity of differences; individuals' *multiple* identifies (e.g. Archer, Hutchings, & Leathwood, 2001; Mac An Ghail, 1994); and engaged in the specific discussions about intersectionality (but see Azzarito and Solmon, 2005).

In addition to addressing difference through a focus on one (or sometimes two) specific difference(s), particular differences, such as race or disability, have also been marginalized or ignored in PE. Arguably, it has been gender that has being a key 'lens' of difference. This means that our understandings of gender have been largely constructed (although not exclusively) by exploring the lives and experiences of white, middle class, heterosexual and non-disabled girls/women (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Cockburn and Clarke, 2002; Hills, 2006; Rich, 2001). Black girls and women's experiences have mostly been ignored in the small amount of work focusing on race in PE which has tended to focus on the experiences of boys (e.g. Fleming, 1991; Bramham, 2003; Light and Kirk, 2002). White women, including ourselves, have failed to seriously address the marginalization of black girls and women's experiences in PE, and have failed to problematize their own

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whiteness. In the same way, we have also marginalized issues of disability in mainsteam theorising in PE, and this, together with tendency of much of the existing work about disability studies to downplay differences between disabled youngsters (Barton, 1992; DePauw, 1997), has limited our understandings of how ableism and disability are constructed through the practices and discourses of PE. Finally, although Evans' work (e.g. 2006a, b, c,; Fitz, Davies and Evans, 2006) is a notable exception for its consistent focus on class inequalities, the resurgence of class as a focus of analysis evident elsewhere in education (e.g. Reay, 2001; Reay, Ball and David, 2002) has been largely absent in PE except for a few, distributive, survey analyses (but see for e.g. Wright, et al, 2003, Collin and Buller, 2000).

In exploring difference in PE, we need to say a little about how we position ourselves as researchers and practitioners within these debates, and reflect on our identities, biographies and positions, and their impact on our own contributions to this field. As Louise Archer (2004) notes, it is important to reflect on how our own work can contribute to producing differences through the issues we choose to research and those we ignore (see also Dewar, 1993). In addition, we acknowledge that our position as English speakers has limited the range of research and ideas accessible to us in our work. We have also each held different occupational positions that have influenced our choice of research questions, as well as the theoretical lenses we have drawn upon. Anne and Sheila's research and writing, for example, started with a clear 'gender' lens, drawing on feminist theories, and class, sexuality and age are differently fore-grounded in their data and analyses in their work (e.g. Flintoff, 1993a; 1993b; 1994; Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Scraton, Fasting, Pfister, & Bunuel, 1999; Scraton, 1992). It is in Sheila's more recent work that issues of race have been centralized (Watson and Scraton, 2001; Scraton, 2001; Scraton, Caudwell, and Holland, 2005. Hayley's work to date has centralized disability, drawing on the disability studies' literature, participatory approaches to research, and specifically on the theoretical work of Bourdieu. Her work has focused on the often invisible or marginalized experiences of disabled young people (e.g. Fitzgerald and Jobling, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005; 2006; 2007a, b) and it is only through our shared discussions with her that Anne and Sheila have become more aware of this 'gap' in their own work. Similarly, Hayley is beginning to further explore the differences between disabled youngsters, in relation to the nature of their disability, and the impact of gender and race (Stride and Fitzgerald, 2006). As white, non-disabled, women, we are particularly conscious of the need to address the gaps in our work around race and disability, amongst others, and indeed highlight this as a concern for PE, more generally, later in the paper.

We came together to write this paper through conversations about our shared commitments to improving PE. One important issue we have faced, and perhaps not altogether satisfactorily resolved, is how to ensure that our different lenses on difference have been adequately addressed, and not simply 'tagged onto' each other as in the additive approaches we go onto to critique. Even the language used to discuss difference is significant, and often it is through the lack of alternative terminology that we may inadvertently reproduce categorical thinking. For example, we have used the terms

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'feminist', 'critical work' or 'disability studies' to indicate the range of different theorizing that has been important to us, but recognise that by doing so, we are perhaps contributing, as well as positioning ourselves in relation to, what are, in fact, somewhat artificial and changing boundaries of knowledge. In addition, Anne's current position on study leave has provided her with the space to take responsibility for drafting the paper, and this has inevitably resulted in her theoretical understandings and limitations taking centre stage.

However, despite our differences our focus on PE means we also share the experience of being positioned as 'Other' in much of the academic discourse of education that too often marginalizes or ignores PE (Flintoff and Scraton, 2005), or from within PE, that marginalizes social theory about the body (Whitson and Macintosh, 1990; Hall, 1996). The writing of this paper – indeed of much of our work – has therefore also been about challenging this marginalisation, and about identifying the contribution that research in PE- not least because of its focus on the body where 'social differences are marked, inscribed and produced' -can offer to theorising and researching difference (Archer, 2004, p.462). Lastly, and importantly, we are cognizant of the importance of acknowledging the specific historical, cultural and political contexts of our discussions about differences and inequalities in PE, and how these are differently experienced and challenged across different countries, including Britain and Australia.

Before turning to the main body of the paper, we agree with others who suggest that it is more helpful to see PE has a complex social process that occurs in a wide variety of settings, including families, peer groups and the media, rather than limited to activities happening in particular places, like schools or other educational institutions (Evans and Davies, 2006b; Macdonald, 2002). We keep this wider conception of PE in mind, even though some of the studies on which we draw have used a more traditional, modernist, view of PE.

Theorising difference in PE

Difference, what difference?

Firstly, we should note that physical educationalists are not well renown for their sensitivity to difference. PE teachers are a remarkably homogenous group – mostly white, young and non-disabled - and with a history of successful involvement in physical activity themselves, they often struggle to empathise with others less talented or motivated in their subject area, and are often resistant to equity issues (Armour and Jones, 1998; Macdonald and Tinning, 1995). The predominance of the bio-behavioural theories of the body over the social sciences within school, university, and teacher preparation courses (Dewar, 1987; Flintoff, 1993a; Macdonald, Kirk and Braiula, 1999) does little to disrupt these positions or practices. PE teachers, therefore, feel justified in continuing to plan for 'Mr Average' and find targeting provision around any differences, difficult or unfair (Morely, et al, 2005; Fitzgerald, et al, 2004; Flintoff, forthcoming; Penney and Harris, 1997). Alongside the marginalisation of the social knowledge within PE, it is also the case that PE

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has been omitted from wider critical debates in both education (but see Paetcher, 2000; 2003; Kenway et al, 1998), and in work centred on the body and embodiment. These two points have been significant for the development of theorising around difference in PE considered in the next section.

Difference as category, relations, and deconstruction

Whilst comprehensive reviews of the nature and findings of research on different differences in PE exist elsewhere (eg. Evans and Davies, 2006b; Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2006; Clarke, 2006b; Gard, 2006), in this section we aim to identify some of the defining features of this still developing field. Focusing on difference entails addressing complex questions about conceptualization, methodology and method, and their implications for policy and practice. We recognize that theorising around difference in PE has not stayed still, and that theories do not have clear boundaries or should be viewed as totally distinct from each other. Elsewhere we have suggested that theories should best be viewed as 'waves' (Flintoff and Scraton, 2006), where new ones do not totally replace existing ones, but like waves in the sea grow out of and contain aspects of the wave that started further out from the shoreline. Whilst different explanations have developed to address new and emerging questions, nevertheless, these do not totally replace existing ones, and many of the 'old' questions remain equally relevant to contemporary life. So we have used terms such as 'categorical', 'relational' or 'post modern/post structural' to describe research that has drawn on these broad theoretical trajectories, whilst recognising the limitations of categorizing individual authors' work in this way.

A key development in theorizing difference was to establish difference as fundamentally about hierarchy and value – about relations between different groups, rather than simple characteristics held by different groups. As Evans and Davies (2006b, p.798) suggests in their discussion on class,

> The label social class....implies not just a categorization or classification of some people with reference to some "quality"…but an invidious, hierarchical ranking of people which is inherently value laden….

Similarly, in early debates about gender, and girls' and boys' differing experiences of PE, it soon became clear that it was the activities and attributes associated with masculinity that were most highly valued (Leaman, 1984; Scraton, 1992). Discussions about mixed PE rarely focused on the lack of boys' opportunities for traditionally 'girls' activities, such as dance, in quite the same way as they did for improving the opportunities for girls (Talbot, 1993). Groups are not just different, but different and unequal, and it is through social relations and practices that differences are constructed and experienced as inequalities. It is the quest to challenge and change these inequalities in PE that has motivated many to develop 'better' theory about difference, and yet the relationship between 'good' theory and practice/social

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change is not always evident nor straightforward (Macdonald, 2002; Walby, 2000; The London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004).

However, despite the general acceptance of the premises of such relational analyses (Francis, 2006; Kirk, 1999; Penny and Evans, 2002), 'categorical' or 'distributive' research on difference in PE remains common. In categorical research differences between categories, such as boys and girls, are emphasized, with distributive research seeking to identify inequalities through statistical reviews of opportunity, access and distribution of resources. More often using quantitative survey methodologies, individuals are grouped as different by drawing on one (or sometimes more) aspect, such as age, or sex, which are then treated as 'variables' in the research methodology. In doing so, patterns of differences between the groups can be highlighted, but only at the expense of suppressing those within groups. So, for example, surveys of sports participation consistently show girls' lower participation rates compared to boys (Sports England, 2003) and disabled compared to non-disabled youngsters (Sport England, 2001). Evans and Davies (2006b) have suggested that it is these conceptions that remain dominant in research on social class in PE.

Whilst weak on explanation, distributive analyses are useful for describing and highlighting patterns of inequality, and point to the need for action. They also remain significant not least because these kinds of analyses are the ones most often used by politicians and policy making. For example, the success of the recently introduced national strategy for PE and school sport in England is measured annually through young people's participation rates in PE and sport, gathered by different age groupings, from each school (DfES/DCMS, 2003) [2]. The most recent survey shows that whilst younger age groups (5-14 yrs) are showing an increase in the amount of time participating in PE and school sport, for 14-16 year olds, this has remained the same, or seen only small increases from the previous years (Quick, 2007).

However, since distributive accounts are not explanatory, they open up the possibility of specific groups of young people becoming 'labeled' as under-achievers, or as 'problems' for their low participation, as measured as deficit against a so-called 'norm' or 'target' (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). So, for example, South Asian or girls' under-representation in participation figures in PE and sport have been explained as a result of their problem culture or religion (e.g. Carroll and Holllinshead, 1993), or as the result of low self esteem, or motivation (see for example, Shropshire and Carroll, 1997). By constructing boundaries around one aspect of identity, such as age, or ethnicity, such research can operate to essentialise and reproduce differences. Although commonly assumed to be an unproblematic category, even sex categories do not adequately account for everyone (Hall, 1996); attempts to categorize ethnicity or disability are more contentious (e.g. Carrington and Skelton, 2003; Pfeiffer, 1998; Watson, 2002). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that surveys are often based on incomplete data, since many individuals are wary of completing them either because they don't identify themselves in the pre-determined categories used or are uneasy about how the data might subsequently be used.

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Some categorical research attempts to consider the impact of more than one variable (usually two). Since age is a key difference by which schools organise their provision, this is often used as the baseline variable that can then be considered in relation to one other (e.g. age and disability in Sport England, 2001). Others use categorical data at different levels to describe broad patterns of inequality to try to provide a more nuanced picture. For example, the earlier example used of the school sport survey in England cross referenced the age-related data collected at the level of the individual, with the social characteristics of school populations collected as a whole. In this way the report was able to make some general comment about the impact of class, gender, disability and ethnicity on participation rates, and highlight the differentiation that exists between schools (see also Smith, Thurston, Lamb and Green, 2007 who uses similar methodology).

In contrast to distributive analyses of difference, relational analyses focus on the social relations within and between different groups, and how these are historically and culturally variable (Hall, 1996; Kirk, 1999) . Relational analyses centralize power, and seek to understand how inequalities are produced and reproduced through difference in and through everyday practices and discourses across different contexts. More usually drawing on qualitative methodologies, such analyses centralize specific groups' lived experiences as the starting point from which macro structures and processes can be referenced and fore-grounded (Brah, 1994). Relational analyses seek to highlight the socially constructed nature of behaviours and characteristics, and challenge the essentialism of biology-based theories (so, for example, the social model of disability centralizes the social construction of disability and challenges the focus on impairment adopted by medical model advocates (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, 1999); feminists talk about femininities/masculinities/gender rather than sex, and so on. However, the separation of the biological/sexed body from the social body is neither straightforward, nor universality accepted (e.g. Butler, 1990; Francis, 2006). It is clear, for example, from studies of disability that people's impairments *do* matter in their everyday lives (Hughes, 2002; Thomas and Corker, 2002). The role of embodiment within the theorizing of difference remains a central problematic, and one to which we will return.

Gender has been the dominant 'lens' of relational accounts of difference in PE (see Flintoff and Scraton, 2006; Gard, 2006; Penney, 2002 for overviews), with many studies taking such a 'single issue' focus, and paying insufficient account of the ways in which other identity markers intersect with those of gender. This is particularly the case, we argue, with race and disability [3]. In reviewing existing literature for the chapter on girls and PE for the recently published, international Handbook of PE (Kirk, Macdonald and Wright, 2006), the marked absence of research that centralized the experiences of black and minority women and girls' experiences became all too obvious to us (but see Benn, 1996; Benn and Dagkas, 2006; Kay 2006; Oliver and Lalik, 2004). Some time ago, Sheila (Scraton, 2001) reflected on a similar lack of attention to race within feminist work on sport. She argued that this reflected both the lack of black women within sports feminism in the academy, and the

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marginalization of sport by black feminists. We would argue the same is true in PE; most of the work on gender and PE has remained centrally concerned with white girls and women, ours included (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Rich, 2001; Hills, 2006; Cockburn and Clarke, 2002) and black feminists and others focusing on race in education, have ignored PE as a specific context (Stevens, 2007; Ward and Robson Wood, 2006). Tansin Benn's work (1996; 2000; Benn and Dagkas, 2006) made a key early contribution, and by highlighting the struggles of Muslim women to access PE as part of their primary initial teacher education course, showed the complex interplay of gender, race and religion. Others have developed this work by going on to explore Muslim girls' and young women's experiences of Western models of PE (Kay, 2006; Knez, 2007). However, there remains a dearth of research exploring black or other minority girls' experiences (but see Oliver and Lalik, 2004), leaving the few studies centering race very much on the periphery, and the enduring effects of racism largely unexplored within mainsteam theorizing in PE.

In addition to race, we would argue that disability too, has been absent as a key 'lens' of difference in PE. This is not to say that issues relating to disability are not addressed in PE research as there is an abundance of bio-behavioural research (e.g. Pyfer, 1986; Broadhead and Burton, 1996). However, this remains categorical and underpinned by medical model understandings of disability. From a relational perspective, few PE researchers have concerned themselves with issues centering on disability. There are a small number of notable exceptions including the work of Brittain (2004a and 2004b) which provides some valuable insights of elite disabled athletes' reflective accounts of PE. In addition, Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) explore disabled young people's experiences of PE, and similarly, Hayley's work has sought to centralize their perceptions and understandings in her attempt to show how 'disability' is socially constructed through PE (Fitzgerald, 2005). Again, these few accounts of disability serve to illustrate the many gaps in our understandings. In part, we would suggest this is compounded by data generation methods that preclude and are exclusionary in their design; if we are to be more attentive to difference, we argue that we need to pay serious attention to the use of different methodologies.

Alongside these gaps, we should also note that relational accounts in PE have rarely, as Michael Messner (1996) called for some time ago in his analysis of sexuality and sport, 'studied up' – that is, studied up in the power structures. So, for example, the concerns with boys' so called 'underachievement' in schooling generally (e.g. Epstein, et al, 1998; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Skelton, 2001) have not resulted in any similar, sustained, attention to boys' experiences of PE (although there appears to have been more attention to this in Australia, than the UK, see Hickey and Fitzclarence, 1999; Gard and Mayenn, 2000). Similarly, we have few studies that have extended the work of, for example, Stephen Ball (2003) who have shown how the middle class seek advantages in an increasingly market driven education system, to the specific contexts of PE (but see Light and Kirk, 2000; Wright, et al, 2003); how ability is constructed in particular ways,

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(see special edition of Sport, Education and Society, 2006; Evans, 2004) or how whiteness operates within PE, particularly in the UK (see Long and Hylton, 2002; Watson and Scraton, 2001 for analyses within sport and leisure).

Despite these limitations, relational research on difference in PE is developing, and, informed by insights from postmodernism/post structuralism discussed below, has increasingly recognised the need to explore the complex nature of identities, and their relationship with structural power relations. For example, Wright et al (2003)'s longitudinal work exploring the place and meaning of physical activity in different young people's lives is attempting to grapple with some of these theoretical and methodological challenges.

Alongside these theoretical and methodological challenges, comes equally complex questions about how increasingly sophisticated analyses of difference can help to bring about change. As Weiner (1985; 1994) has noted, one of the attractions of the early 'implementary' or 'girl-friendly' theories of liberal feminism was their link to clear action strategies. More 'fundamental', anti-sexist, theories, which centralize the complex power relations of patriarchy, capitalism and racism - by their very nature - are more challenging to identify frameworks for action. By highlighting the differences within groups the basis for mobilizing around shared characteristics of a group becomes more problematic. Several authors have warned of the dangers of highlighting difference at the expense of inequalities (Walby, 2000; Hargreaves, 2004; Corker and Shakesphere, 2002). However, on the other hand, Brah, 1996, p.112 rightly suggests that

> 'although critical in mobilizing specific constituencies, the single-issues struggles as ends in themselves may delimit wider-ranging challenges to social inequalities'.

This is a point that we will return to later in the paper.

For those working within post modernism and post structuralism, a key task, however, has been to deconstruct and problematise the categorical thinking and the binaries central to modernist research on difference. Poststructuralists have sought to establish power as fluid, multiple and constructive, and challenge repressive and 'top down' conceptions. In addition, it is argued that individual identities should also be seen as multiple, shifting and contingent on particular contexts (Wright, 2006). Jan Wright's comprehensive overview of 'post' theorising – drawing from postmodernism, poststructuralism and post colonialism - however, shows the limited uptake of these perspectives in PE to date. As with relational analyses, here too, gender has been a central focus of studies adopting this perspective in PE (e.g. Azzarito, et al, 2006; Garrett, 2004a; b; Hills, 2006; Webb and Macdonald, 2007a; 2007b; Wright, 1996). In highlighting discourse, culture and identity/self, these studies seek to rebalance the tendency to overplay the impact of structural inequalities within relational analyses. However, not all agree that such analyses are helpful, warning that an over-emphasis on

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difference and diversity should not be at the expense of ignoring enduring, material inequalities that remain evident (Francis, 1999).

We would position ourselves with Archer and her colleagues, et al, (2002) who suggest,

> …..within the 'applied' education arena, researchers share a general treatment of 'race', class, gender, sexuality and disability as social constructed, fluid, shifting and non discrete identities <u>and </u>hold a common awareness and commitment to addressing the associated very 'real' inequalities (Archer, Hutchings, & Leathwood, 2001, p.42 [our emphasis]

It is in the social theorizing around the body that we suggest some useful insights into this problematic can be found, including those who have drawn on the theoretical tools of Bourdieu and Bernstein to provide the 'theoretical bridge' between earlier materialist approaches and those drawing more on postmodern/ poststructural ideas (e.g. Hay and Hunter, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2005; Evans and Davies, 2004).

The Challenges of Intersectionality

The previous section provided an overview of how difference has been theorized and researched in PE. In this section, we identify some key issues raised in complex debates about difference and intersectionality from wider feminist and social theory. In doing so, we aim to highlight some of the ways in which future research on difference in PE might be developed. The section addresses the three questions raised earlier: How to best theorize the relationships between different axes of identity? What are the implications of centralizing intersectionality for our research practice? And importantly, how do we work across difference to challenge enduring inequalities?

How to best theorize the relationships between different axes of identity?

Intersectionality [4] has become increasingly used as a shorthand to describe 'the complex political struggles and arguments that seek to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it' (Pheonix, 2006, p.187) (see also the special Issue of European Journal of Women's Studies, 2006); Brah and Pheonix, 2004; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; McCall, 2005; Wilkinson, 2003; Thomson, 1997). Several authors have traced the trajectory of theoretical work on difference within feminism, and these highlight the differences within the debates, including the use of the concept intersectionality (see Archer, 2004; Brah and Pheonix, 2004). For example, Yuval Davies (2006) points out that one of the differences in approaches to intersectionality has been the focus on particular positions by some authors (what she calls the major divisions of race, gender and class) and the use of the term in more general terms as an analytical tool to study stratification more widely. Archer (2004), too, suggests that race and gender have been a central focus, and that debates over other dimensions of

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difference, such as age, class or sexuality, whilst evident, have continued 'mostly in parallel with one another'. Interestingly, whilst Archer does not mention disability specifically here, it appears that work that centralises disability has largely developed in this way too. Meekosha's (1998) highlights the marginality of disability in feminist debates around difference, and lack of attention to difference within disability studies:

> Over the last decade, disabled women have criticised the failure of feminist theory in broad terms to include disability, while the masculine bias of the disability movement and the ungendered theorizing around disability has been highlighted (Meekosha, 1998, p.164)

So whilst the importance of addressing the relationships between different axes of oppression - particularly those of race, gender and class - emerged from black feminists challenging their invisibility in white feminists' work (e.g. Brah, 1996; hooks, 1982; 1984; 1989; Hill Collins, 1991; Mirza, 1997), and more recently within debates around postmodernism and post structuralism (e.g. Butler, 1990), so too, disabled feminists argue against their invisibility in both feminist and disability studies. By ignoring their experiences, black and disabled women argue that feminist knowledge is necessarily limited and distorted in much the same way as feminists had earlier critiqued the nature of 'malestream' knowledge for ignoring the experiences of women (Lloyd; 1992; Wendell, 2002). Significantly for our work in PE, Meekosha (1998) notes,

> Nowhere is the problem more acute than in feminist discourse on the body, their claim to universality corrupted by their unselfconscious exclusion of disability from their world views. (Meekosha, 1998, p.164)

Both groups argue that it is only through centring the experiences of black and disabled women that the impact of racism and ableism can be highlighted, and the limitations of existing theory exposed.

A key dilemma has revolved around how to conceptualise the inter-relationships between different axes of oppression. 'Additive' accounts, where, different axes of oppression, such as race or class are 'added' to those of gender, so that black women, for example, are seen as experiencing the 'triple' oppression of being a woman, black, and working class, are strongly rejected (e.g. Hill Collins, 1991). As Brah (1996, p.109) has noted,

> structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality are experienced simultaneously, and cannot be reduced to independent variables…. The oppression of each is inscribed within the other – is constituted by and is constitutive of each other.

The struggle to adequately theorise such multiplicity has resulted in the use of terms such as 'cross cutting' or 'intersecting' and 'intersectionality', but the use of these terms, too, have been questioned [5] (e.g. Francis, 2001; Archer et al, 2001). Archer (et al) (2001) for example, are critical the terms 'cross-cutting' or 'intersecting', since they continue to suggest fixed, observable realities and homogenised social categories that are added together in some

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way, which can, at some later stage, still be separated. Similarly such conceptions raise questions about whether all categories are equally important at all times. Several authors (Brah, 1994; 1996, Yuval Davies, 2006) have suggested that part of the problem lies with confusion over the level of analysis of difference, rather than just a debate on the relationships between the divisions themselves. Brah (1996) argues, for example, for an acknowledgement of difference as experience; social relation; subjectivity and identity, and questions what she sees as the tendency to theorize the macro and micro levels as separate, almost independent, levels. Instead, in her research on South Asian women's position in the labour market, she presents a useful framework that foregrounds the interconnectedness of the macro and the micro. She argues that

> analysis of women's narratives must be framed against wider economic, political and cultural processes in non-reductive ways. In the framework I propose structure, culture and agency are conceptualized as inextricably linked, mutually inscribing formations (Brah, 1994, p.152).

Using this framework she shows how interviews with women can provide instances of how individuals' biographies intersect with the changing, socio-economic and political conditions in contemporary Britain. Drawing on Brah's framework in their work on South Asian women and leisure, Scraton and Watson (1998) conclude that in analysing difference, 'we need to address the construction of power relations, how they are manifest in practice and how individuals.. respond to and negotiate these relations'. They argue that centralising and exploring the differentiated and heterogeneous lived experiences of women highlights the complex and shifting, rather than stable and given, nature of identities. However, this 'middle way' theorising (Archer, et al, 2001), between modernism and postmodernism, conceives identities as 'situated accomplishments' (Valentine, 2007) in relation to material and discursive structures of inequalities.

In PE, it is clear that if we are to beyond the limitations of a single issue focus, we need to develop the work that has begun to centre the experiences of those experiencing political exclusion and discrimination (such as black and minority ethnic and disabled young people (e.g. Benn, 2000; Kay, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2005) and by so doing, address their marginalisation within academic theorising too. However, since PE is 'done' through the body, we argue that a focus on individuals 'lived experiences' within our subject area can make (and indeed, has made) valuable contributions to these wider debates and research on difference. We are interested to note that in the re-emergence of interest in material inequalities, there is now a questioning of the role of the material (sexed) body in education (Francis, 2006; Paechter, 2006). However this makes little reference to the specific context of PE, reminding us, again, of the marginalisation we highlighted in our introduction of this paper. PE research centres on these concerns, and has, for example, identified the important relationship between physical and social power relations (Scraton, 1989; 1992); how discourses surrounding muscular, slim, radicalised, classed or able+ bodies continue to influence young men's and

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women's choices to be more or less physically active (e.g. Evans and Davies, 1993; Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Gorely, et al, 2003; Rich, et al, 2004; Harrison, et al, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2005), and how differently embodied individuals negotiate their (sometimes fragile) identities within PE spaces in and out of school [6]. Different bodies *do* matter in PE; how they move and how they 'look' is central to whether individuals feel comfortable, and are judged as having 'ability' in the subject. Agreeing with Valentine (2007) who calls for further analysis of how identities are accomplished within specific spatial contexts, we argue that PE is an important space for continued research. These studies would show how different individuals see themselves across different spaces (e.g. in the PE class compared to other subject areas; physical activity contexts in and out of school and so on), but also, importantly,

> ..the ways that specific spaces …are produced and stabilised by the dominant groups who occupy them, such that they develop hegemonic cultures through which power operates to define ways of being and to mark out those who are in place or out of place (Valentine, 2007, p.18).

Drawing on the debates above, we suggest that such an analysis is urgently needed of one group who is very much 'in place' – that is, PE teachers, trainees and teacher educators – a group that remains overwhelmingly white, at least in England (Flintoff, 2007; Turner, 2007). In building on the developing research elsewhere (e.g. Allard and Santoro, 2006; Solomon, et al, 2005; Gaine, 2001), there is a real need for physical educators, at all levels, to critically reflect on the privileges that accrue from their own whiteness. As Brah (1996, p.105) notes,

> There is a tendency for people in Britain to see racism as 'something to do with the presence of 'black' people. But it is important to stress that both black and white people experience their gender, class and sexuality through 'race'. Racialisation of white subjectivity is often not manifestly apparent to white groups because 'white' is a signifier of dominance, but this renders the racialisation process no less significant .

What are the implications of centralizing intersectionality for our research practice?
The theoretical debates about difference raise important questions for our research practice and politics. How do we reconcile the complex theoretical debates with the practicalities of doing research and its application? Mary Maynard's (2004) study on women and ageing illustrate some of the practical concerns that arise from addressing difference in empirical research practice, not least - who should be involved and how are they to be accessed and selected? In choosing qualitative research as methods best suited to explore the meanings of old age, she accepts that the findings will not be generalisable, but nevertheless, acknowledges factors such as socio-economic, housing and marriage patterns and other factors such as working and domestic practices will be important to these experiences and significant

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in trying to obtain a balanced sample. But, as she stresses, it is one thing to recognise these, another to operational them – for example, is it possible to include all of these in a meaningful way? Are some more important than others? How are the boundaries of differences to be drawn? Inevitably, she argues, the final judgement will inevitably be pragmatic, with consequences for the overall project outcomes. For example, she highlights some of the practical dilemmas of having to use pre-determined categories at least initially in her research and the problems this raises when people's self-definition may not rely on these at all, a point we highlighted earlier. Quantitative methods may compound these issues still further (but see Steinbugler, et al, 2006).

The methods we choose to use for researching difference will each have important implications for our practice. Above we highlighted the advantages of attending to the lived experiences of individuals as the starting point for researching difference, and this would tend towards the use of qualitative methods. However, regardless of the method chosen, it is important to acknowledge the implications of those choices for the outcomes of research, and how (or whether) these might be subsequently used. Choice of method, as with other stages of the research, including the interpretation of the data that is collected is never a simple or straightforward process (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Indeed, it may be that in choosing to make visible the experiences of particular marginalised groups, as in the case of, for example, Hayley' work with young people with learning disabilities, that we are pushed to thinking innovatively about how best to work with particular respondents to understand their experiences (Fitzgerald, 2007a).

A further dimension of difference in the research process revolves around the impact of differences between the position of the researcher(s) and the researched on the conduct and outcome of the research. At issue are the power relations between the researcher and the researched. For example, the power of the researcher includes the setting of the research questions; deciding on who to include in the research; how best to reduce the effects of power on the collection of data and how to analyse and present research findings. The social relations of the research process are therefore a significant factor in the research outcomes. Whilst earlier critiques from within feminism and disability studies have advocated that we try and reduce the power held by the researcher (Stanley and Wise, 1990; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Oliver, 1997; Mercer, 2002), the possibilities of achieving this in practice are now recognised as far more problematic and complex. What does this mean for researchers that are differently positioned to those with whom they work? For white women working with black women?; for women interviewing men?; for non-disabled aiming to understand the experiences of disabled young people? Elsewhere we have reflected upon these issues in detail in our own work (e.g. Flintoff, 1997; Scraton and Flintoff, 1992; Watson and Scraton, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2007b). We would agree with others who have argued for reflexivity on the part of the researcher, and for our research outcomes to be presented as contingent, and open to 'constructive criticism from those from material backgrounds different to ourselves' (Archer, 2004, p.169; see also Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Whilst space limits us here, we suggest that addressing these issues remains an ongoing challenge,

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and one which physical educators need to continue to take seriously, particularly in relation to ethnicity and disability.

How do we work across difference to challenge enduring inequalities?

In over viewing how difference has been addressed within PE, we agree with Penney (2002a) that there is a need for future research to go beyond a 'single issue' focus. However, whilst centralizing difference within groups, we must not lose the link with inequality. Drawing on wider debates around intersectionality, we suggest that Brah's (1996) framework could be useful for exploring the complexities of individuals' lives and the multiple overlapping axes of oppression. We need to acknowledge and respond to the gaps in our work, and particularly the silence that exists around the experiences of black and minority ethnic, and disabled, youngsters in PE [7]. In addition, we need to take seriously our own position as researchers and educators, and problematize our role in the racialisation and ableist constructions of PE spaces.

Whilst acknowledging the complexities involved, there will still be the need to draw what Archer et al (2001) describes as strategic, 'provisional boundaries' around particular groups, in order to engage in particular political projects. In this way, the commonalities of their experiences, as well as their differences, are not lost. But, as Penney (2002a) reminds us, power is also reflected in the process of setting research questions in the first place, and in *which* differences get noted and why. Choosing a provisional boundary should not random, but rather, Archer et al (2001) suggest, recognised as a power relation in itself. They conclude that researchers need to acknowledge the significance of drawing particular boundaries, and ensure that these are located firmly within the 'close contextual analyses' of the data, whilst at the same time being aware of the interconnectedness to macro relations and their own position in the production of theorisations.

Finally, Walby (2000) argues that researching difference, we should retain a focus on transformation – that is, not on what we are but what we want. Through dialogue and discussion that is focused on transforming practice, she argues, that it is possible to bridge some of these difficult theoretical, methodological and political struggles. Through the writing of this paper, and mapping our future collaborations, we have begun to engage in conversations about just such struggles.

In conclusion, we would agree with Valentine's (2007) call to

> …re-engage with questions of structural inequalities and power, whilst at the same time retaining a concern for theorising the relationship between multiple categories and structures. Here attention to the lived experience, through rigorous empirical work, offers an important potential tool for …to understand the intimate connections between the production of space and the systematic production of power…. (Valentine, 2007, p19).

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Whilst we have argued for a developed understanding of intersectionality, nevertheless, in centralizing the body, we suggest that a focus on PE can make important contributions to our understandings of identities, power and embodiment. Indeed, some colleagues are already beginning to do this. For example, Jan Wright and her colleagues are questioning the meaning and place of physical activity in the lives of young people over time, and across different locations, through the use of a longitudinal, qualitative study. Similarly, in the UK, Tess Kay, has illustrated Avtar Brah's framework for studying difference in her focus on Muslim young women. We need more work such as this in our continuing efforts to make a difference in PE.

Notes

1. We recognise the complex debates around terminology and acknowledge that the international audience of this conference will have different expectations regarding the way in which use terms, such as black, race, disability or disabled people. Our understandings have been influenced by a number of key authors including, for example, Maynard, 1994; Brah, 1996; Barnes, et al, 1999.

2. Qualitative assessments are also made through government inspections, and in other, larger research studies, such as Houlihan and Wong, 2005).

3. Sexuality and class are more often acknowledged than race and disability (if class is often an implicit rather than overt dimension). We suspect that others, such as Evans and Davies (2006 a; b) might disagree with us, who argue that class remains the KEY dimension of inequality. Whilst we would agree that class has not been a specific lens of difference adopted in PE, on the other hand, we would not want to argue for a hierarchy of identity markers. Again, we would point readers to the Handbook of PE

4. The term intersectionality is credited to Kimberley Crenshaw who first used it in a discussion about black women's employment in the US in 1989. Whilst not necessarily using this term, academic discourse around difference and inequality clearly has a much longer history.

5. Interestingly, as teachers, we have also be interested in how to explain these theoretical struggles to students, and have been drawn to various visual representations in the literature – including 'wheels' (Messner and Sabo, 1990); 'grids' (Evans and Davies, 2006b); 'crossroads' (Crenshaw, 1989); continuums (Archer, 2004).

6. Thanks to Shirley, a PE teacher friend, who also rightly reminded us of the increasing numbers of children who are now so overweight that planning to enable their enjoyment in PE is now a much greater challenge than ever before. This 'difference' is one that we have not been able to address in this paper.

7. Again, we stress that other 'lens', such as class or sexuality, might be equally important.

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