Feminism and PE: Does Gender Still Matter?

Sheila Scraton

Introduction

This chapter explores how our understandings of gender and physical education (PE) have developed since the 1980s as differing feminist approaches engage with a changing social and cultural world. The types of question that I am grappling with reflect many debates that are currently being played out in the media and academia (Banyard, 2010; Walter, 2010). These include: Is feminism still needed? Are we now in a postfeminist era where gender equity has largely been achieved? Can girls 'just do it', as Nike's advertising campaign for girls' sport suggests? Has a focus on shared inequalities been replaced by questions of difference, identities and individual choice? How do we keep feminist praxis when theory seems to have become quite divorced from practice? I am reflecting on where we are in relation to these debates in the second decade of the twenty-first century and whether the questions being asked in feminism, as highlighted above, have resonance for the world of PE.

Although feminist theories of gender and PE have become more sophisticated and engage with new and relevant questions, I am not so convinced that PE practice has changed quite so much. There is little doubt that feminist thought has contributed to our understandings of gender and physical education since the 1980s. Feminist analyses of PE in the second wave of feminism drew on both liberal and structural approaches to explore gender relations.

S. Scraton (✉)
Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

L. Mansfield et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Feminism and Sport, Leisure and Physical Education*, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53318-0_3

My work at that time, focusing on the teaching of girls' PE in an area of northern England, used a socialist feminist lens to identify key issues in the construction and reproduction of, and resistance to, dominant gender power relations (Scraton, 1992) and was influenced by the developing work of feminist sports scholars (eg. Hall, 1988; Hargreaves, 1979) and feminist educationalists (eg. Arnot & Weiner, 1987). My aim was to examine how images of femininity and the construction of gender-appropriate behaviour were reinforced and/or challenged by the structure, content and teaching of girls' physical education in secondary schools (11–18 years). My conclusions highlighted how teachers of PE had clear ideas about "appropriate" activities and behaviours for girls based on dominant notions of acceptable femininity. I argued that the teaching of PE contributed to the construction of a female physicality linked closely to a "compulsory heterosexuality" that was central to unequal gendered power relations. Whilst I took a fairly deterministic, structural approach, I also began to explore the potential of girls to challenge and resist gendered expectations and suggested that PE was an important site for the physical and political empowerment of girls and young women.

Since I conducted my research, feminists in PE have contributed increasingly sophisticated accounts of difference, identities and bodies that have moved our understandings on from the early structuralist accounts of gender inequalities. This chapter provides a brief encounter with developments in feminist theory and their application in PE. My key argument is that gender still matters, we do still need feminism and a social justice agenda but we need far more nuanced understandings of how social relations intersect and are performed in different sites and contexts. A major challenge is how we can translate our theoretical understandings into transformative practices. "Doing" gender research requires us to be more creative about how we research in order to understand complexity and think about how change for the better for all young people and PE may come about. My focus throughout is on PE in the English context, although research from a range of scholars across the world continues to inform the feminist PE agenda in the UK.

The Changing World of Feminism

From the early 1990s, at about the time I published my work on gender and PE, the argument that we were moving into a postfeminist era gained considerable credibility. In the academy, second-wave feminism with its emphasis on centralized power systems and shared oppression became strongly contested by poststructural and postcolonial feminists. Influenced by the writings of

Foucault (1980), power became conceptualized as far more fluid, with the emphasis shifting from inequalities and oppression to diversity, identities, discourse and the 'radical de-naturalizing of the postfeminist body' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 13). Centralizing language and discourse, meaning and identity is understood as fluid and enacted processes, explored through the term 'performativity' by Butler (1990, 1993). Rather than seeking one single theory or "grand narrative" such as patriarchy, poststructuralism denies the notion of a single truth or cause, rendering regimes of truth unstable and open to alternative ways of seeing. From this perspective there are endless possibilities for change, transgression and transformation allowing for agency and empowerment. Postcolonial feminist theories draw on poststructuralism, but at the same time recognize the critique of black feminists who argue that much structural feminism is written from the perspective of white, Western, middle-class women, thus marginalizing the lived experiences of black women and those deemed to be 'outsiders' or 'other' (Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1991). By giving voice to those rendered silent, dominant discourses are displaced by those seen to be on the margins (Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial feminists emphasize language and discourse and by challenging Western discourse turn attention to global and gendered power in colonial and imperial contexts.

Developments in feminist theory, particularly the move from structural and material analyses to poststructural understandings, have not been without their critics. A key debate is whether the shift to diversity, identity and individual agency de-politicizes feminism and distances it from shared inequalities (Stanley & Wise, 2000). However, a focus on diversity and identities has importantly drawn attention to the differences *between* women as well as '…how identifications and disidentifications are simultaneously experienced by subjects in specific spatial and temporal moments through the course of everyday lives' (Valentine, 2007, p. 18). Valentine goes on to remind us that identities are complex and as such are situated accomplishments. However, the ability of individuals 'to enact some identities rather than others is highly contingent on the power-laden spaces in and through which our experiences are lived' (p. 18).

Parallel to these developments in feminist sociology and cultural studies has been a growing political and cultural backlash against feminism, arguing either that feminism has succeeded and is no longer relevant or that it is unnecessary because fundamentally it was wrong in the first place (Scraton, 1994). This latter argument found expression within popular culture on the pages of newspapers and magazines of the 1990s (McRobbie, 2009) and was critiqued in the writings of academics such as Faludi (1992) and Roberts (1992). Faludi in particular coined the term "backlash" and although mainly writing about white America, gives an account of how politically and culturally, feminism is

increasingly seen to be responsible for many social ills and individual unhappiness. A more positive postfeminist reading is that, in contrast to feminism having got it wrong, it is no longer necessary because it has succeeded in its fight for equality. In a changing social, cultural, economic and political world, individuals now have the freedom and choice to construct their identities, to have "girl power", to be who they want to be at different times and in different places. Neo-liberalism, which has been in the ascendancy in the Western world over the past three decades, with its emphasis on the market, individual responsibility and self-determination, mainstreams "equality feminism" and incorporates equality, diversity and tolerance into its rhetoric (Duggan, 2003). For McRobbie (2011), modern young womanhood is being re-made in ways that suggest that feminism has now been taken into account; this is constantly reproduced in popular culture and the media. Feminism is being swallowed up by a neo-liberal discourse that hinges on the notion of personal choice. Feminism and the neo-liberal discourse are not at odds with each other, rather they are intertwined. Women, especially young women, are seen to recognize that it is now about individual choice and effort—a new meritocracy. They want equality and empowerment but accept that it is up to them to be strong, take their opportunities and they will succeed. There may still be some constraints and barriers along the way but these can be surmounted with the right attitudes and effort. Of course what this does is take the politics out of feminism and makes any feminist voice appear to be from a bygone age when feminism was strident, speaking only of oppression and 'in the "victim" camp' (Banyard, 2010; Heywood & Drake, 1997). McRobbie (2011, p. 5) argues that we are in fact not in this positive postfeminist era but in a new gender regime whereby:

> …the subjectivities of young women are defined and described in a repetitive manner in popular and political discourses along the lines of female individualisation. This permits the replacement for feminism through stressing not collectivity or the concerns of women per se, but rather the competition, ambition, meritocracy, self-help, and the rise of the Alpha Girl …. The young woman is addressed as a potential subject of great capacity … she is a 'can do girl'.

For McRobbie this spells out the need for a major challenge to this postfeminist logic arguing that the incorporation of feminism within social and political discourse does indeed dismantle it and make it unable to, or ineffective at, challenging the new inequalities that are as pernicious today as they were several decades ago (Walter, 2010). She argues that this new gender regime is eroding many of the institutional gains that feminism has made over a period of about 30 years. Whilst feminism remains relatively strong in some parts of

the academy (although this is also being eroded), it is within political and popular culture that feminism is seen to be no longer necessary; this is recreating a powerful divide between academic research and practice.

What is clear from this brief discussion of changing feminisms over the past two decades is that there have developed more complex understandings of gender and a growing divide between academic feminism and political and cultural postfeminism. The next sections consider how our understandings of gender and PE have developed over the past two decades before arguing that this academic discourse has become increasingly divorced from the practice of PE which is entwined within the dominant neo-liberal discourse of postfeminism.

Feminism and PE: Bodies, Identities and Difference

A key area at the forefront of feminist thinking is the body (Bordo, 1995; Grosz, 1994). Interest focuses on how gendered meanings of an ideal heteronormative female body are produced through the media and popular culture and are taken up by young women (Markula, 1995). Research demonstrates how the ideal feminine docile body—white, slender and non-sporting—is constructed and then worked on by women through fitness and exercise practices developed to discipline the body to the ideal (Azzarito, 2009). This takes forward the early work of Iris Young (1990), who argues that girls learn to restrict their bodily movements and physicality by literally learning to "throw like a girl". As Garrett (2004, p. 235) found in her research on young women's experiences of PE and physical activity:

> Such is the strength and power of discourses around the body that the confidence with which a young woman engages with physical activity and physical education seems to be significantly influenced by the 'appropriateness' of her body as well as her fear of public display.

Embodiment is fundamental to young people's identities and positioning in PE (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Hills, 2007; Oliver, 2010). As Flintoff, Fitzgerald, and Scraton (2008, p. 78) argue, '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" and, hence, status in the subject'. Garrett (2004), focusing on young Australian women's physical stories of their school experiences, identifies three types of bodies constructed within and through PE: the bad body, the comfortable body and the different

body. Paechter (2003) takes this further, focusing on how gender is performed in PE; how it is a crucial arena for enacting hyper-masculinities and femininities and where gendered forms of bodily usage are constructed.

However, girls and women do not simply take up notions of the ideal body but negotiate and resist through constantly re-presenting and redefining the images on offer to them. Azzarito (2010) identifies the construction of "new" femininities, the 'Alpha Girl' and the 'Future Girl'. These are powerful, sporty femininities that, by emphasizing fitness and health, challenge and contradict traditional notions of the feminine docile body (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). These images of femininity provide sites of resistance and empowerment for girls and young women and can be seen as a reconstruction of female physicality. Just as my research in 1992 identified PE and sport as a potential site for the reconstruction of a 'new' active physicality for girls and young women, this research two decades later suggests that this is indeed what is happening. Several researchers have explored the concept of "physicality", arguing that the potential for girls and women to gain control of their lives lies in their physicality or direct physical experience of their bodies (Gilroy, 1997; Scraton, 1992). Physical power comes from the skilled use of the body and the confidence that this produces (Hills, 2007). PE, therefore, is a crucial context for the construction of a positive physicality; some young women become empowered by the skilled and pleasurable experience of physical movement, while others embody a gendered physicality of powerlessness (McDermott, 1996). This research provides us with a more rigorous understanding of female physicality and how girls and women can embody traditional docile bodies or construct resistant, active bodies. However, importantly, the more recent work of Heywood (2007) and Azzarito (2010) takes the analysis further by arguing that these new sporting femininities, whilst reflecting individual agency to resist traditional discourses of femininity, also are informed by white Western ideals.

> Global neo-liberal trends informing new femininities herald homogenization, and without the theorizing of difference, they produce a utopian form of prepackaged successful Western girlhood. (Azzarito, 2010, p. 269)

This resonates with McRobbie (2011); not all girls have access to these new femininities and a neo-liberal discourse of opportunity and progress provides an illusion of gender equality that fails to account for persistent social inequalities and creates a new gender regime of successful and unsuccessful femininities. This illusion becomes part of a globalized consumer image of postfeminism that renders feminism and "old" inequalities redundant. Research on female bodies and physicality in PE makes an important contribution to our understanding

of the complexities of femininities and how girls and young women perform active, physical bodies that construct new femininities. However, researchers such as Azzarito and Heywood argue coherently for the need for social and political analysis that places this research within a neo-liberal postfeminist discourse of equality that continues to marginalize all those whose identities and bodies become "other" to the "can do" girls.

Masculinities have also come under critical scrutiny as researchers over the past 20 years have explored gender *relations* in more detail (Connell, 2005). Boys who do not fit the ideal of athletic, sporting masculinity also face negotiations and resistances in their experiences of PE. Tischler and McCaughtry (2011) use hegemonic masculinity to examine the intersection of masculinities and school PE from the perspective of boys who embody marginalized masculinities and conclude that competitive sport-based PE functions to oppress boys who are seen to be outside the norms of masculinity but that they can also be active agents in resisting these processes. Bramham (2003, p. 68) similarly argues that we need to be cautious about a simple view of 'effortless hegemonic masculinity'. Hickey (2008, p. 156), using narratives, explores how some young males navigate their identities within and against dominant sporting discourse. He concludes:

> While many boys choose not to participate, or take an interest, in the hypermasculine male sports, they are very likely to have their identities calibrated against the sorts of masculinity such games project. Given the powerful role that sport plays in wider social definitions of gender, the merits of one's performance in sport and PE become powerful sites for distributing the sort of gender capital that will determine who's a real man and who's not!

While there may be some spaces for alternative masculinities, PE continues to be an important site in the making and re-making of hegemonic masculinity. This would suggest that we need to continue to research hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities as well as exploring new alternative gendered identities.

In addition to research on gendered identities, there have been a number of studies that explore the relationships between gender and sexuality, centralizing heterosexism and homophobia in PE (Clarke, 1998; Sparkes, 1994; Squires & Sparkes, 1996). This work focuses on individual experiences, often through the use of narratives, as opposed to the institutional and structural research carried out in the 1980s. This is an important development telling us far more about the complex and fluid nature of gendered and sexualized identities. Research on teachers identifies heterosexual gender regimes and the

discrimination that many gay and lesbian PE teachers face as well as their active resistances (Clarke, 2002). It is unsurprising that researchers have not explored fully the experiences of gay and lesbian young people in school PE. Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 in the UK prohibited the promotion of homosexuality in schools, thus making access to research virtually impossible (Clarke, 2002). Although this act was repealed in 2003, the sensitive nature of talking about sexuality with young people has meant that we have little empirical research in the area. Sykes (2010) is an exception in that her research, drawing on poststructuralist and queer theory, explores how the taken-for-granted ideas of the "athletic" body rely on the 'marginalisation of multiple forms of queerness'. Working in Canada, she interviewed adults who self-identify as a sexual minority or gender minority, have a physical disability and/or have a body shape or size that is socially undervalued. She gathered retrospective data, a technique that avoids direct research on students, by getting the adults to look back at their school PE experiences. This research is an example of exploring difference, not only in relation to a single issue such as gender, but across identities between and within individuals. Her data provides rich and emotive examples of how bodily discourses articulate with each other to produce "queer bodies" in PE and how individuals who embody some form of queerness often have to engage in difficult and embodied coping strategies.

Wright and MacDonald's (2010) Life Activity Project also engages with multiple identities and their intersections, adopting a longitudinal approach to studying the place and meaning of physical activity in the lives of young people in Australia. Although not focusing specifically on school PE, it provides a wealth of information on choices, self-perceptions and embodiments of young people in relation to physical activity. Their analysis points to the dangers of homogenizing or universalizing young people's experiences and the sole use of either structural explanations or individual biographies devoid of cultural, social and geographic location. Their work begins to engage with the theoretical ground between structural accounts and individual explanations and assumes 'biographies to be produced in relation to changing material and discursive circumstances and that attention to the complex and dynamic nature of lives is necessary to fully understand how identities are constituted' (Wright & MacDonald, 2010, p. 3). This chimes with the work of Benn (1996) and Dagkas and Benn (2006) who focus on the complex intersections of PE and Islamic practices and beliefs; Farooq and Parker (2009), who explore sport, PE and Islam, particularly in relation to the construction of masculinities; and Azzarito (2009) who explores young people's construction of the body in and through PE at the intersections of race and gender. Knez (2010)

as part of the Life Activity Project looks at young Muslim women living in Australia and explores the complex ways in which these women constitute themselves as female. The data provide nuanced understandings of how young women negotiate their own meanings of Islam and shape their own subjectivities whilst also recognizing the impact of powerful discourses of gender and fundamentalism.

Although just a snapshot of the types of feminist PE research over the past two decades, the studies discussed demonstrate how our understandings of gender and PE have moved on since the 1980s. Rich accounts of individual experiences, with an emphasis on diversity and deconstruction, challenge any universalistic notions of femininity and masculinity and allow for far more complex understanding of diverse and fluid gendered identities and their intersections with other social categories.

Feminist Praxis

A fundamental tenet of feminism has always been the relationship between theory and practice. Stanley (1990, p. 15), writing at a similar time to my early work on gender and PE, defined feminist praxis as

> …an indication of a shared feminist commitment to a political position in which 'knowledge' is not simply defined as 'knowledge what' but also 'knowledge for'. Succinctly the point is to change the world not study it.

Hall (1996, p. 78) takes this approach and in applying it to the world of sport feminism argues that there needs to be far more unification between 'theory and practice, the personal and the political: in sum what I have defined here as praxis'. Although gender research, drawing on feminist postructuralist theories, is now far more sophisticated, asks complex questions and provides more nuanced understandings, I would argue that there remains a significant gap between research and PE practice (Macdonald, 2002). The latest report from the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2012) in England makes for depressing reading for all those concerned with gender and PE. Through a survey of 1500 school students they show that over half the girls are put off physical activity by their experiences of PE; over half of all the girls and boys think that there are more opportunities for boys to succeed in sport; nearly a third of all boys think that girls who are sporty are not feminine. Their summary suggests that rather than diverse femininities being constructed and enacted by individuals:

> …social norms around being female and feminine are still affecting girls' attitudes and behaviour. Notably, being 'sporty' is still widely seen as a masculine trait. While 'sporty' boys are valued and admired by peers, 'sporty girls' are not, and can be viewed negatively. Meanwhile, being feminine largely equates to looking attractive. (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2012, p. 4)

Whilst recent feminist research in PE has engaged with important questions about the body and physicality, it would appear that little has changed since my study in the 1980s. The report finds that activities remain very gender specific; girls do not appear to have confidence in their skill levels; many girls feel self-conscious about their bodies and appearance, with compulsory PE clothes and showers after activity yet again being singled out as problematic; space continues to be dominated by boys; and teachers are seen to focus only on the "sporty" girls. Whilst our knowledge of gender has developed significantly, change in relation to everyday practice seems to be limited, with a disjuncture between research discourses and PE practice. This does not deny some important initiatives that have taken place, such as some curriculum reform (Ennis, 1999), more opportunities outside school for some girls (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001) and "girl-friendly" PE initiatives (Nike/Youth Sport Trust, 2000). The Nike/Youth Sport Trust (2000), for example, helped teachers devise a set of strategies aimed at increasing girls' participation in and enjoyment of PE. These included the introduction of new activities, changed teaching styles, improved changing-room environments and/or running promotional events (Flintoff & Scraton, 2006). The research of Dagkas, Benn and Jawad (Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011) is also a recent example of researchers focusing on individual voices whilst explicitly linking these voices to informed recommendations for educational policy. In this case the voices are those of teachers, young people, head teachers and parents and the research captures the concerns and experiences of those involved in the inclusion of Muslim girls in PE. Although not overtly feminist in approach, this research does raise consciousness of the diverse needs of Muslim girls and the barriers to participation which they continue to face. This research is a development from the liberal, equal-opportunities research of the 1980s in that it engages with access and opportunity but with a more complex understanding of identity. Macdonald (2002, pp. 209–210) makes a pertinent point when she argues that 'as modernist institutions, schools are shaped by timetables, space allocation, bounded subject communities, industrial models of teachers' work, and frequently traditional syllabuses'. Research that remains within a modernist discourse of equality, access and opportunity can still contribute to helping to reform our schools. However, this change is based on inclusion and access just as in the 1980s rather than any

radical revision of PE itself. A critical feminist praxis requires a discourse and politics of transformation (Walby, 2000) that fundamentally questions all aspects of PE. However, the radical feminist work of the 1980s has been largely supplanted by poststructuralist analyses which are increasingly divorced from the everyday lives of teachers and students who have to cope with neo-liberal politics and policies based on individualization in a consumer-driven market place.

But gender does still matter, as the recent study by the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2012) highlights. Gender still matters because both the institution of schooling and the individuals within it remain influenced by powerful gendered discourses that impact on what is taught, how it is taught, and gendered expectations about behaviour, appearance and abilities, albeit that these are complex and diverse. If our research has produced exciting new knowledge in the past 20 years but practices remain largely unchanged, how can we ensure we do not have two parallel worlds of the academy and PE practice that never meet? How do we move towards feminist praxis?

Gender Still Matters

Poststructural analyses have certainly opened up our understandings of the complexities of difference and the social construction of gender. In highlighting discourse, culture and identity, poststructuralism rebalances the determinism of many structural accounts of material inequality. However, I would argue that it is not a binary relationship between equality *or* difference, rather it is the need to understand and explain the systematic links between equality *and* difference (Scraton, 2001). Feminism is about exploring the fluid construction of diverse identities but with an acknowledgement of enduring oppression and material inequalities. This 'middle-ground' theorizing enables analysis of specific circumstances encountered by individuals, whilst maintaining an explanatory and analytical perspective focusing on systems and processes (Valentine, 2007). One approach to exploring this middle ground is through a theoretical engagement with intersectionality (Grabham, Cooper, Krishnadas, & Herman, 2009). Whilst there are many critiques and concerns about intersectionality within feminism, it can be a useful approach as it focuses upon specific *contexts* and the political, social and material *consequences* of social categories (Valentine, 2007). Theoretically, engagement with the messiness of accounts somewhere between modernist accounts and poststructuralist analyses reminds us that the focus should be on inequalities *and* identities, not one or the other. I would want to see feminist PE research exploring

more fully this 'middle-ground' theorizing; a critical PE feminism that recognizes both multiple categories and identities whilst locating these within political, social and economic power structures. It is important that feminist PE continues to forge strong links with mainstream feminism and researchers involved more broadly in critical social research.

However, while this can help develop useful knowledge there clearly remains a significant gap between the production of this knowledge and its implementation in our schools. This should not deter those researchers interested in exploring ideas and developing theory. Academics apply their theory through their teaching and the education of the next generation of practitioners as well as seeking to inform national and local policy. It is crucial that research and critical ideas are fed into teacher education to ensure informed teacher educators in the future. This is a major challenge. Dowling (2011, p. 201) exploring the concept of the 'professional teacher' in Norway argues that student PE teachers 'seem to be locked into "modernist" or "classical" ideas about good PE practice'. Her research into PE teacher education suggests that theory is seldom linked to practice and that being a 'good' PE teacher centres on being a competent performer. Dowling considers that 'the PE teacher is still cast as someone whose work is confined to the gymnasium, rather than an educator who nurtures society's citizens of tomorrow' (p. 218). Similarly, Brown and Rich (2002, p. 96), researching PE student-teacher identities, suggest:

> …a vision for gender inclusive futures in physical education strongly implicates physical education teachers' gendered identities. While the quality and commitment of our participants' approach to their profession is not in doubt, the dimensions of their gendered identities which they drew upon during the difficult circumstances of teaching are implicitly strategic enactments that tend to fit into, rather than challenge the Gender Order in society, sport and physical education.

Teachers play an important role in reinforcing or challenging gender in PE. Despite the detailed knowledge that has been developed over the past few decades, very little appears to have found its way into the teacher education curriculum (Wright, 2002a). Students continue to receive limited critical work relating to gender in their teacher education programmes. Writing in relation to teacher education in Australia, Wright (2002b, p. 204) argues powerfully that constraints on gender reform do not come from the lack of appropriate national policies but rather 'through the discursive construction of IPETE programmes and the investments of those who teach and study in

them'. In the UK, as the routes into teaching become increasingly diverse, it is difficult to see how this situation will improve in the future but it is crucial that it does if critical ideas are to be fed into practice.

The way we "do" gender research is also important in linking researchers to practitioners. We need to try to incorporate teachers and young people into our research methods rather than including them simply as respondents. Participatory methods including photography, mapping exercises, storytelling, role play, drama, journal writing and poster design have all been used recently to gain more detailed and relevant data in sport and PE research (Fitzgerald & Jobling, 2004; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004). Enright and O'Sullivan (2012) argue that educators and researchers need to ask questions that produce different knowledge through different means, thus producing different ways of thinking and being in the world. This would seem to replicate the intention of feminist praxis. If teachers, students and researchers can come together to produce knowledge, then the rich multi-layered data generated could help bring theory and PE practice closer together.

Conclusion

Since the 1980s when I conducted my research into gender and PE, feminist theory has developed to produce new and exciting knowledge. A focus on difference and identity has meant that girls and women are no longer seen as an homogeneous group and the binaries of femininity/masculinity, individual/society, structure/agency have been transgressed, with new questions and new understandings developed. Yet the relationship between feminist PE theory and practice remains problematic. I have argued that we need to continue to develop feminism through a focus on the middle ground between structural and post-structural understandings. This approach does not view gender as an identity separate from other social identities such as class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability or sexuality. We need more rigorous theorizing that can explore the intersections of identity and provide layers of understanding mapping individual biographies onto broader social, political and economic structures. Applying such theory to ensure feminist praxis is in no way straightforward as neo-liberal discourse sets up a "new" binary between postfeminism and feminism. Although not easy, the relationship between feminism and PE must be retained so that there is a critical engagement with both equality and difference. If knowledge from the academy is to influence practice then we require critical, reflective practitioners who understand and query the complexity of difference within a moral agenda of social justice. Ideally these practitioners are central to research as partners in

innovative projects. PE should be a continuing focus for feminist research not only because there remain significant issues in relation to equality, difference and PE but also because PE, with its primary concern for the body, physicality and movement, offers a crucial site for the exploration of feminist theoretical understandings.

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Sheila Scraton is Emeritus Professor at Leeds Beckett University, UK, where she has developed and led research in Leisure and Feminist Studies for over 20 years. Her major research interests include leisure and feminist theory, gender and physical education, cross-national qualitative work on women and football, older women and leisure, and intersectionality in leisure and sport scholarship.