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**The digital lives of Muslim sportswomen:
Navigating the spaces of sport, culture, and social media**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2019

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the multiple and diverse ways that Muslim sportswomen navigate a range of online spaces. In exploring the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen, this research moves beyond stereotypical representations and binaries (e.g., the hijab vs non-hijabi athlete). It also considers the broader context of ongoing racial, cultural, religious, and gender inequalities to recognise the complexities of Muslim sportswomen's lived experiences and interactions with social media. Adopting an intersectional feminist approach, this thesis explores how Muslim women negotiate various dimensions of their identities (e.g., religion, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender) within and across offline and online spaces.

Adopting a digital ethnographic approach, this research is informed by observations of the social media platforms of 26 Muslim sportswomen conducted over eight months. The primary platforms studied included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Participants are from eight countries and participate in a wide range of sports (e.g., football, mountaineering, CrossFit, snowboarding). In-depth semi-structured interviews with the Muslim sportswomen provided further space for the women to share how they navigate various social media platforms to represent aspects of their sporting, social, and cultural identities. Findings are organised into three analysis chapters, each being informed by feminist theories on intersectionality. Chapter Four explores how Muslim sportswomen negotiate power and surveillance within and across the different digital platforms. Chapter Five examines the multifaceted digital practices of Muslim sportswomen, particularly their self-branding strategies, which they navigate in culturally specific ways. Chapter Six explores how Muslim sportswomen are 'invading' digital spaces and disrupting stereotypical discourses of Muslim women. These chapters expand current understandings of sportswomen's use of social media, as well as contemporary understandings of the challenges and strategies of Muslim women living within and across online and offline worlds. Adopting a feminist intersectional analysis, this research offers new ways of thinking about and doing research in the interstitial spaces of Muslim women's sporting and digital lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

الرَّحِيمِ الرَّحْمَنِ اللَّهُ بِسْمِ

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

As a visitor to Aotearoa, I am forever grateful to tangata whenua for the process of manaakitanga (hospitality), whakawhanaungatanga (connections of the mind, heart, and soul), and aroha (love) – kei te mihi, kei te mihi, kei te mihi atu (thank you). I also extend my gratitude to Tsésthó'e (Cheyenne), Núu-ágha-távǎ-pǎ (Ute), Očeti Šakówiŋ (Sioux) whose ancestral lands I am also a visitor. This acknowledgment demonstrates my commitment to the struggle against the systems of oppression which have stripped Indigenous people of their lands and aid in the process of dismantling settler colonialism.

Many individuals contributed to my doctoral research and provided me guidance, support and love throughout my turbulent journey, to whom I am forever grateful. This doctorate would not be what is without the unwavering support of my primary supervisor Professor Holly Thorpe. Words cannot express the time and effort Professor Thorpe invested in me and my education. To Professor Thorpe I am incredibly grateful for your mentorship during my doctoral journey. I am grateful for the stimulating discussions and encouraging me to explore different avenues of thinking which strengthened my intellectual knowledge to undertake this rigorous doctoral journey. I am also grateful for your friendship, for believing in me, and for your compassion during difficult times. Professor Thorpe, you have impacted my life in a way that will continue to influence me in the years to come. I also wanted to express my gratitude to Associate Professor Belinda Wheaton and Professor Robyn Longhurst. Thank you for your enthusiasm, support, kindness, and feedback which were all instrumental in the development of my thesis, my growth as a scholar and for making me realise my potential. To all three, I express my utmost respect and most profound appreciation for guiding me through my doctoral journey.

I would not have been able to complete this thesis without my remarkable family and friends who are my emotional foundation of all I do, without them I would not

have made it through this extremely challenging chapter of my life. My wonderful parents Mumtaz and Afsar for their unconditional love, support, duas, and words of encouragement which comforted my worries. My siblings Sana and Maaz for their love and keeping me sane with spontaneous video chats. Ahmad siblings know how to keep it real. My love to my Nani Uma and Dadhi (grandmothers) for their duas which guided and protected me throughout this journey. My aunt, Ghina, grateful for her words of encouragements. To Sashi, I am extremely grateful for your guidance, support, and reassuring my doubts as a woman of colour in academia. Sashi, I thank you for being my family in Aotearoa. Thank you to Associate Professor Katy Pearce who planted the seed of pursuing a PhD during my master's program. My amazing friends Halimah, Hayam, Jane, Jeannie, Katrina, Kristy, Mohammed, Monica, Rana, Renee, Shane, and Tisha, I thank you, for your emotional support especially during the difficult times and for being my cheerleaders. I gratefully appreciated messages like 'I am thinking of you' or 'you got this' from my friends and family which ignited my flame to push forward. To my dear friend Janine, thank you for everything, for being a wonderful friend for so many years and letting me lean on you throughout this process, being my soundboard of crazy ideas and being such an inspiration with your research. I am forever grateful for our friendship and I will see you on the other side of our doctorate! I also wanted to thank the baristas at Demi Urgos, my go-to coffee shop, a safe place I spent countless hours consuming coffee, reading, writing, crying, laughing, and discussing comics, movies, Star Wars, Stranger Things, and unpacking Game of Throne theories. Thank you for letting me nerd out. I express my gratitude to the Te Mata Kairangi School of Graduate Research at the University of Waikato for providing me with the University of Waikato Doctoral Scholarship to conduct my research. Also, thank you Tanya Mete for your support and compassion towards postgraduate students, such as myself.

Last but not least, I am forever grateful to the 26 women in this research for sharing their experiences, stories, and voices which brought this dissertation to life, without them this document would be merely words on paper. The voices of the extraordinary women from around the world were essential to this thesis. Without their willingness to share their experiences, this thesis would not be possible, nor would it be so prolific.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Muslim female ummah

our presence is a form of resistance

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

pick a word like you
pick a melon. examine
its skin. its weight. its
viscosity. its sound. its
texture. its ability to be
juice and meat. –
nayyirah waheed

As a Muslim woman whose PhD gathers together the voices and lived experiences of Muslim women, I often sat and pulled apart the layers of the words ‘Muslim women’ — examining the “viscosity”, “texture”, and “meat” of these words, as poet waheed¹ (2013) suggests. Muslim women cannot be easily defined, nor should they be. However, they/we are often placed into a homogeneous category, erasing the complexities of their/our lived experiences. My own experiences are often contested according to the space I occupy; school, work, sports, and public spaces. A question I frequently encounter is, “why do you not wear the hijab²?” or “are you one of those *bad* Muslim women that do not cover?” In sporting spaces, there is often a disbelief that I play sports, “really, you do that?” is a typical response from both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals. A recent encounter upon moving to New Zealand is telling of many people’s misconceptions of what it means to be a Muslim woman, and what we can and cannot do within our faith. I was explaining to a fellow student, “I can’t wait to learn how to surf; it is something I have wanted to do for a long time”. Her response was, “I can teach you how to swim,” and when I corrected her “do you mean surf? Because I know how to swim. Why would you assume I can’t swim?” there was silence on her end. The silence was followed by a rather sheepish, “I mean, I can teach you how to surf.” Muslims are often

¹ Some poets, writers, and scholars use lower case letters in their names, and I respect their decision. The following individuals cited in this research use lower case: boyd (2013), de Jong (2015), hooks (1981), van Dijck (2008), waheed (2013), and van Sterkenburg et al. (2010).

² Muslim women’s head or body covering which symbolises honour, modesty, and religious beliefs.

categorised into a single category, and assumptions that Muslim women do not swim, play sports, or do not do certain sports, are all too common and if they do, it is often a surprise.

Even within spaces of various Muslim communities, I occasionally struggled with my own belonging and identity because I often felt out of place—my language, skin, and religion had its own history. I was born in the United States but spent my early childhood and teenage years in Saudi Arabia, and my parents are from the Sub-Continent (Pakistan and India). My experience could be classified as that of a Third Culture Kid (TCK), an individual “who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 19). The “third” culture for TCK is neither the “home” (United States) culture nor the “host” (Saudi Arabia) culture, but elements pulled from different cultures (Eastern and Western cultures). Importantly, TCKs do not fully identify with a specific culture but often find themselves in between cultures. As a TCK, I created unique life patterns, moving between cultures, adapting as I moved across spaces and places, and always learning from the different perspectives I encountered along the way. In a similar way, my journey through a range of different sports, meant that I was learning from the various sporting cultures, taking parts of them with me, shaping my character, as well as my future hopes and dreams.

Similar to my life as a TCK navigating between social and sporting cultures, this dissertation also sits in between in the grey space, between the black and white, the borderlands of sports, social media, and the offline and online lives of Muslim sportswomen. My research occupies the interstitial space, the “grey space” that “‘belongs’ to neither of the poles but ‘in-between’ the borders” (Moosavinia & Hosseini, 2018, p. 336). Such grey or ‘in-between’ spaces are often viewed as empty sites that are ignored or underestimated. However, within these spaces “new forms of creativity, new ways of thinking and new transformations” can arise (Steele & Keys, 2015, p. 113). The interstitial space of my PhD is an essential site for exploring the intersections of sport, culture, and social media to expand

understandings of Muslim women, and reframe meanings of Muslim women in sport.

Importance of the topic

The depiction of how individuals and groups of people are represented in the media can have both negative and positive repercussions depending on how such images and narratives are read and interpreted within particular socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts. In recent years there has been heightened interest in the lives of Muslims by the media, politics, policies, and research. Muslim women are often characterised as being oppressed individuals who are slaves to highly oppressive cultural and religious norms (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010; Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Imtoul, 2005; Said, 1979). The Orientalist perspective views individuals from the East (The Middle East and North Africa and Asia) as opposite of the West and implies non-Western cultures as the backwards Other (Said, 1979). The deeply entrenched problematic discourse surrounding Muslim women was further complicated post-September 11³ where they were viewed as an object of fear, scrutiny, and fascination (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Such representations have not been accidental but exaggerated at a time when the United States was justifying their involvement in wars, and attacks on, various Muslim countries (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Sharify-Funk, 2008).

Additionally, portrayals of Muslim women have focused mostly on the hijab (Al-Hejin, 2015), or in some areas of the world (The Middle East and North Africa), forgetting, overlooking, making invisible, the diversity of the global Muslim community, and the many different ways of being a Muslim woman within and across social, cultural, and political geographies. However, in contrast to such one-dimensional portrayals, Muslim women's lives are vastly different across countries, communities, families, classes, and in different political contexts. Furthermore, Muslim women do not necessarily view themselves as oppressed.

³ On September 11, 2001 four commercial airlines were hijacked by Al-Qaeda (a terrorist group) who carried out destructive attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. which resulted in thousands of casualties.

A particularly contentious topic among scholars, activists, media representatives, and politicians is the hijab. In Arabic, hijab translates to “cover,” and those who practice it cover their hair and body and only expose their faces and hands. There are also different ways that Muslim women cover, such as the niqab, which hides the face, but the eyes are uncovered and the burqa which covers the entire body and the face but has a mesh area for the eyes. The illustration (Figure 1.1) shows the different ways Muslim women veil which varies across regions.



Figure 1.1: Screenshot from Vyver’s article (taken July 2019)

Some women wear the hijab/niqab/burqa, while others do not, and against common perception, not wearing them does not take away from a woman’s Muslim beliefs or commitment. In certain countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, the hijab/niqab/burqa is lawfully enforced. In many other countries, however, the hijab is a personal choice, a strong belief and their piety (Fekete, 2008; Mahmood, 2011) and can be seen as deliberate and political (Hargreaves, 2013; Zahedi, 2007). Furthermore, wearing the hijab in a specific style portrays a social distinction such as class (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2009) or ethnicity/race (Dwyer, 1999). Some Muslim strongly oppose the hijab and fault it for obstructing women’s everyday lives (Eltahawy, 2015). Not all Muslim women wear the veil; it does not define us and is merely one portrayal of a woman’s identity. However, the hijab tends to be a significant theme for activists, scholars, and media representatives when they speak

of Muslim women. One reason for this is that the focus on the hijab is an easy target because of the visible difference between Western and Islamic cultures. But, as I argue in this research, this focus works as a distraction from more extensive and complex matters involving individuals, religious groups, and societies, and inter-societal/cross-cultural understandings.

For each and every human, their lives are influenced by socioeconomic background, educational opportunities, cultural, religious traditions and beliefs, and ethnicity, as well as geopolitical context, and this is undoubtedly the case for Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2011; Testa & Amara, 2016). Unsurprisingly, the popular Western based narratives around Muslim women have limited them to stereotypes. The complexity of being a Muslim and being female can contribute to various other aspects of an individual's life, such as being engaged in sports. Muslim women should not be considered a homogenous group, and this research speaks to the diversity of Muslim women and explores how they are using social media to share aspects of their diverse identities.

Muslim women engaging in sport is not a new phenomenon. The origins of their participation date back to 570 – 632 CE the time of the Prophet Mohammad (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam - peace be upon him [PBUH]), where his first wife Khadija bint Khuwaylid often competed in horseraces (Walseth & Fasting, 2003). Furthermore, Khadija was also a prominent entrepreneur. Khadija successfully managed her business and provided financial and spiritual support to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The rigid interpretations of Islam today, along with familiar narratives written about Muslim women, clash with Khadija's story. This story provides an insight into how historical, social, and global events such as colonialism, civil wars, and technology advancements have changed the discourse of how Muslim women participate, or do not participate, in sports.

Over the past two decades, sport participation of Muslim women within Muslim and Western societies has received growing attention from sport sociologists. Scholarship surrounding Muslim women and sports has primarily focused on issues

of gender equality, sports participation, and representation, and documenting a range of barriers Muslim women encounter in the context of sports and physical activity (Benn, Dagkas, & Jawad, 2011; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010; Farooq, 2010; Kay, 2006; Ratna, 2011; Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015; Stride, 2016; Toffoletti & Palmer, 2015; Walseth, 2006; 2015). In Benn, Pfister, and Jawad's (2010) edited book on *Muslim Women and Sport*, the authors provide space for the voices of Muslim scholars and practitioners in order to produce knowledge addressing Muslim sporting communities. The book includes case studies and narratives on the lives of Muslim sportswomen across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East to enrich the dialogue surrounding Muslim women's participation in sports.

Hargreaves' (2013) states that "the issue of female participation in sport is tied to strongly held beliefs about the female body embraced by culture, tradition, religion, and politics" (p. 47). According to an array of authors, barriers which exclude Muslim women from participating in sports include family influence, sociocultural expectations of Muslim women, patriarchy, ethnic identity, and religion (Benn, Dagkas, & Jawad, 2011; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010; Hargreaves, 2006; 2013; Hoodfar, 2015; Sofian, Omar-Fauzee, & Abd-Latif, 2010; Testa & Amara, 2016; Walseth & Fasting, 2003). Research has also examined the representation of Muslim sportswomen in the media which has been restricted to Olympic accomplishments (Amara, 2012; Benn & Dagkas, 2015; Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015) and not on everyday sporting practices. Various articles document how these complex issues influence Muslim women's and girl's participation in different sports in an array of national contexts, but particularly in Europe. Relevant research by Farooq (2010) and Ratna (2011) focuses on the sporting lives of young South Asian Muslim immigrants in the United Kingdom and delves into complex issues of identity in the British context. According to these researchers, the British South Asian Muslims involved in their studies were able to negotiate cultures and reconstruct their (hybrid) identities through sports.

While discussions of Muslim women's participation in physical activity and the focus of mainstream representations of Muslim sportswomen at the

Olympic/international sporting level, are both important, such cases seldom discuss other ways Muslim women participate in sports. For example, Saudi Arabia, a country that is often under scrutiny for prohibiting women and girls from participating in the Olympics, has made some positive changes (Khalife, 2019). There has been a rise of physical activity and sporting gyms in the region which includes: cycling, CrossFit⁴, boxing, and mountaineering which have all been initiated by local Muslim sportswomen. Another example is Iran, a country known for discriminatory laws that have long excluded women from stadiums and participating in sports (Ahmed, 2018). Despite the obstacles, Iranian women are excelling and participating in a growing array of sports, such as snowboarding, skateboarding, and sport climbing (Ahmad, 2018).

Additionally, some Muslim women are taking part in sporting activities that are not prominent in their region. For example, Fatima Al Ali, a professional ice hockey player from the United Arab Emirates (Day, 2017), Khadija Sambe, a Senegalese professional surfer (Wernikoff, 2019), and Fatin Syahirah Roszizi, an Indonesian professional skateboarder, are all challenging what it means to be a sportswoman in their respective countries and communities. There are also a handful of female surfers from Palestine, Lebanon, and Iran participating in surf competitions. In May 2017, two Moroccan women competed at the International Surfing Association (ISA) World Surfing Championships (Fuchs & Mathis, 2017).

These examples suggest the expansion and diversification of how Muslim women are participating in sports that are not reflected in the literature to date. This doctoral research aims to expand the existing literature on Muslim women and sport by considering the increasingly diverse ways Muslim women are participating in sport. Moreover, it focuses particularly on how Muslim sportswomen across an array of sports, and from different countries, are using social media to self-represent aspects of their sporting and social lives. There is value in furthering the discussion of Muslim sportswomen by incorporating a range of voices and by expanding outside

⁴ CrossFit incorporates a range of strength and conditioning movements to test the mental and physical capabilities of individuals.

of Olympic participation into other sporting areas. Olympic accomplishment is important, however, some Muslim women have achieved other sporting successes outside of the Olympic Games, and many more are participating in a wide array of informal sports and fitness cultures. The literature on Muslim women in sport has focused predominantly on the barriers facing Muslim women's participation in Western countries, and participation and representation at the Olympic Games. Much more research is needed on Muslim sportswomen's everyday lived experiences in Muslim countries and other parts of the world, and a more comprehensive array of competitive and informal sports. How Muslim sportswomen use social media is another area deserving of scholarly investigation.

Social media is 'trending' as an area of academic enquiry across mass popular culture and disciplines (e.g., education, sociology, sports). Social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter are making communication more ubiquitous and supposedly 'effortless' allowing millions of active users to share information and images with their audience. As Lupton (2015) states, our "life is digital" (p. 1), a routine, in which technology is shaping and influencing individuals' everyday life experience and goes beyond just accessing and sharing information (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). It influences corporate and organisational strategies, even sports media production and consumption, and importantly, an individual's sense of identity and belonging.

There has been growing interest in the topic of social media, especially in how social media is used (and abused) and its impact on individuals and societies (e.g., the role of digital technologies in the Arab Springs uprisings). When it comes to research surrounding social media use among Muslim populations, the focus is mostly on civic, political, and religious aspirations (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003), and less on the everyday uses of such technologies (Vieweg & Hodges, 2016). For many individuals, everyday reality is filtered through the use of devices such as phones, laptops, and/or tablets. Some state the Internet is becoming a place where people live out large parts of their lives (Lupton, 2015). This statement is supported by scholarship that shows how vital social media is as an outlet for marginalised

populations to create a space to represent their identities (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013; Mann, 2014; Piela, 2010b; 2016).

Some Muslim women have embraced social media with eagerness since the digital space offers anonymity, self-expression, civic engagement, and potential liberation (Nourai-Simone, 2014). The literature around Muslim women's use of social media tends to examine political activism (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Nourai-Simone, 2014), marketing, fashion, and business uses and how they are deliberating on gender relations according to their faith (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Beta, 2014; Piela, 2010a; 2016). However, there is very little discussion of how Muslim women are negotiating social media for everyday purposes or concerning their participation in sport.

The topic has contemporary relevance, as seen with the Rio 2016 Olympic Games (Figure 1.2):



Figure 1.2: Screenshot from BBC article (taken June 2017)

The image of the two beach volleyball players—one Australian athlete in a bikini, the other, an Egyptian wearing the hijab contesting the ball at the net was circulated by the broader social network sites and was deemed ‘clash of civilisations’ (BBC, 2016). A range of issues were discussed from religion, clothing, and race, however, the conversation and imagery focused on the hijabi athlete with hardly any mention of, Nada Meawad, the non-hijabi Egyptian teammate making her the unmarked norm. This representation reinforces the stereotypical images of Muslim women and ignores structural inequalities in politics and society hindering the development of gender equality (Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015; Toffoletti & Palmer, 2015).

Social media platforms are worthy of serious sociological, and cultural attention (boyd & Ellison, 2010; Couldry, 2012; Hine, 2015; Kietzman, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). As Parry, Cousineau, Johnson, and Fullagar (2019) state, “scholars, policymakers, and activists *have only begun* to understand how everyday life is being transformed by technology in ways that inform and challenge social dynamics and norms, which govern ourselves, our communities, and the spaces we inhabit” (p. 2, emphasis added). Therefore, exploring how Muslim women use social media in their sporting and everyday lives will offer insights into how they are navigating (often conflicting) social, cultural, religious, and community beliefs and value systems for purposes of self-representation, expression, community building, and politics. To date, no research has examined the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen. Additionally, of the scholars who have examined social media accounts of sportswomen (Chawansky, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b) very few have interviewed the women. Therefore, this project is framed around the following primary research question:

- **How are Muslim sportswomen using social media to represent aspects of their sporting lives?**

To understand the nuances of Muslim sportswomen’s digital lives, the primary question is supported by two additional sub-questions:

- How do various aspects of Muslim sportswomen's identities (e.g., family, religion, culture) influence how they are engaging with social media?
- How are Muslim sportswomen negotiating different sporting, social, and cultural value systems within and across social media spaces?

Key concepts

This research project uses a range of concepts, some of them with a variety of contested understandings. Thus, below I clarify my use of the concepts throughout this thesis, including Islam, community, digital space, ethnicity/race, agency, and self-representation.

Islam

Islam is one of the three monotheistic religions, with Judaism and Christianity being the other two. It is also one of the fastest-growing faiths globally, with an estimated growth of three billion Muslims by the year 2060 (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). As the Muslim population grows, so too does Islamophobic and Oriental rhetoric often fuelled by media in the West which further polarises Islam and the West (Meer, 2014; Poole, 2002; Poole & Richardson, 2006).

The word Islam translates to submission to Allah (God) and “obedience to His commands and recommendations” (Yaran, 2007, p. 1). Allah revealed the Quran, the religious text, to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last messenger of God, and Muslims adhere by the teachings of the Quran. There are multiple interpretations of the Quran but the overall guidelines encourage Muslims to: give zakat (obligatory charity), perform hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), fast during the month of Ramadan, namaz/salah/salat (regular prayers five times a day), and the most important is the shahada (testimony of faith) (Al-Qaradawy, 1992; Yaran, 2007). Other qualities are also linked to core values of Islam such as dressing modestly, taking care of one's body, practising peace, humility, compassion, and respect towards others (Al-Qaradawy, 1992; Farooq & Parker, 2009). These Islamic code aid Muslims in

interpreting everyday aspects of their lives (Mawdudi, 1989), including sports (Benn, 1996; Farooq & Parker, 2009; Kay, 2006).

The complexity in Islam is “bound up with family, history and community” (Mukherjee & Zulfiqar, 2015, p.1). As Mawdudi (1989) states:

Islam is not a religion in the Western understanding of the word. It is at once a faith and a way of life, a religion and a social order, a doctrine and a code of conduct, a set of values and principles and a social movement to realize them in history (p. 12).

Muslims are globally dispersed. Even though many individuals associate Islam with countries in the Middle East and North Africa, in fact two-thirds of Muslims live in the Asia and Pacific region (Desliver & Masci, 2017). Another vital point to consider is the different branches of Islam, as within Islam there are two main branches—Sunni and Shia (Shi’a or Shi’ite)—along with several sub-denominations (e.g., Ismailis, Ibadi, Sufis, Ahmadiyya) (Khalili, 2016). Sunnis’ are the largest denomination, followed by Shia’s who are predominantly in Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Khalili, 2016). There are a range of differences and similarities among the sects of Islam, but such considerations are rarely considered in research focused on Muslim sporting practices (Jiwani & Rail, 2010). In this thesis, I do not focus on different sects of Islam, but rather welcomed all sportswomen who regularly use social media and self-identify as Muslim.

Community

The notion of community “has a very long and complex history within the social sciences, being defined, researched, and theorised in very diverse and contradictory ways at different times and by different academics” (Valentine, 2001, p. 105). According to Silk (1999), community can be understood as shared needs, goals, culture, and collective views of the world. But as Mandaville (2003) notes, communities are fluid social formations that are continuously being “constructed, debated and reimagined” (p. 135).

With the rise of the internet, communities can also be place-free and stretched out, with new technologies facilitating communities without borders (Silk, 1999). Rheingold (1993) coined the term ‘virtual community’ which he defines as groups of individuals who have never met face to face but communicate through digital technology (e.g., email or social media platforms). Using different terminology to explain a similar phenomenon, Castells (2008) identifies the online community as a global network society that is “built around the media communication system and Internet networks, particularly in the social spaces of the Web 2.0, as exemplified by YouTube, Myspace, Facebook, and the growing blogosphere” (p. 90). While some have questioned whether it can really be considered a community if individuals can easily log on/log off (Hine, 2000), others have explained online networks as creating a sense of belonging and important support systems (Hine, 2000; Rheingold, 1993).

In my research, the notion of community has multiple meanings. The first is the concept of the ummah, which is the global Muslim community (Akram, 2007; Lessy, 2009; Mandaville, 2003). According to Mandaville (2003):

Muslims living in the diaspora – particularly in the West – are of varied and diverse ethnic origins. What links them together, however, is a shared sense of identity within their religion, an idea most clearly located within the concept of the ummah (p. 135).

It is important not to homogenise Muslims because there are various levels of differences among individuals. Indeed, while shared beliefs are formed by region, ethnicity, sect, and class, “local and transnational cultural and economic processes”, also have “diverse effects on the lives of Muslims around the world” (Mukherjee & Zulfiqar, 2015, p. 1). Despite the differences, the ummah demonstrates, “Muslims feel connected through their religious beliefs and therefore their collective Muslim identity globally keeps them connected” (Awan & Zempi, 2016, p. 20).

Community for the Muslim sportswomen is understood as their global Muslim community, but they are also involved in various other offline and online groups

relating to the family (e.g., WhatsApp family groups), the local communities that they live in, and gender and sport specific (e.g., Muslim Female Fighters)⁵ groupings. The participants in this research are part of the larger ummah and also belong to local and sporting communities (offline and online). In this research, I use the term Muslim ummah when speaking about the wider Muslim community and will specify the other groups (e.g., local, offline and/or online sport groups) the participants belong to throughout chapters. The Muslim sportswomen are not only navigating multiple social media platforms but are also engaging with different individuals across numerous communities.

Digital space

In this thesis I draw upon geographical understandings in my use of the term digital space (Ash, Kitchin, & Leszczynski, 2018; Cutter, Golledge, & Graf, 2002; Zook, Dodge, Aoyama, & Townsend, 2004). According to Sui and Morrill (2004):

No other technological innovation in human history has affected the practice of geography in such a profound way as the computer. It has drastically transformed both geography as an academic discipline and the geography of the world (p. 82).

In responding to such trends, scholars have been encouraged to ‘re-think’ geography’s relationship with the digital space (Ash et al., 2018; Zook et al., 2004). Feminist digital geographers are concerned with the lack of intersectional approaches in digital spaces (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018; Mahtani, 2014). They extend the notion of digital geography to examine “how digitality (re)produces power and extant socio-spatial inequalities along lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, ability and more” (Elwood & Leszczynski, 2018, p. 630). According to Leurs (2012) digital spaces “have their own techno-social dynamics that leave their imprint on identity construction such as medium-specific affordances and restrictions, multimedia configurations, user norms and digital cultures.” (p. 5). The

⁵ A closed Facebook community which aims to globally connect Muslim women within the field of mixed martial arts (MMA), boxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) and other combat sports.

conception of digital space by feminist digital geographers inspires me to take an intersectional approach to Leurs' definition of digital space to understand the complexity and significance of social media in the lives of Muslim sportswomen.

Ethnicity/race

The concepts of ethnicity and race have been deliberated across disciplines (Eriksen, 2002; van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, & De Leeuw, 2010; 2012). Some scholars differentiate between race and ethnicity by connecting race with biological differences and ethnicity with cultural differences (Hylton, 2009; Jackson & Garner, 1998). However, van Sterkenburg et al. (2010) take a cultural studies perspective and argue "both race and ethnicity are social phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed in and through discourses" (p. 821). Additionally, the "biological referent is never wholly absent from discourses of ethnicity" (Hall, 2000, p. 223). Recognising such complexities, van Sterkenburg et al. (2012) encourage scholars to "locate the search for racial/ethnic meanings and categorisations in the larger framework of power relations and in the social and historical context under study from which the representations emerged" (p. 425). Taking into account Hall's (2000) and van Sterkenburg et al.'s (2012) perspectives about ethnicity and race in media, I utilise the concept of ethnicity for this research. However, the term race or racial categorisation (e.g., Black or White) is at times used, when this is the language used by the scholars whose work I am citing.

Agency

Agency has been conceptualized in many different ways, however, for this research I draw upon a feminist understanding of agency. According to Kabeer (1999), agency "encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or 'the power within'" (p. 438, emphasis in original). Mahmood's (2011) revolutionary work introduced the connection between Muslim women's agency and piety. She interviewed Muslim women from the mosque movement in Cairo and found them to be active agents (Mahmood, 2011). Additionally, Mahmood (2011) problematised Western feminisms assumption of agency and the need to save Muslim women. Building upon this

critical work, Sehlikoglu (2018) addresses agency across the four waves of feminism (first, second, third, and fourth) and in relation to Muslim women's lives. According to Sehlikoglu (2018), agency is shaped through multiple complex interactions of an individual's everyday life. Furthermore, "agency is no longer seen as a human quality embedded into subjects, rather, is formed through a process of interaction between the individuals and the larger social mechanisms operating on them" (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p. 87). She shifts the "scholarly gaze" from religion (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p. 82) and explores the possibilities of Muslim women's agency within a range of social spaces, including fashion, youth culture, and sport, and considers the pleasures in these spaces and everyday life. Sehlikoglu (2018) encourages those researching the lives of Muslim women to extend outside of piety and not to over-emphasise "religion in the lives of Muslim women [because it tends] to minimise women's other forms of agency in navigating multiple social structures" (p. 86). My research is a response to Sehlikoglu's (2018) call to explore other aspects of Muslim women's lives, and forms of agency within and beyond religion.

Self-representation

Self-representation is often grounded in the early work of Goffman (1959). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) used the theatre setting as an example to define self-representation. According to Goffman (1959) when actors were in 'front stage' they performed a desirable image, however, 'backstage' they behaved differently. Media scholars have extended the notion of self-representation to social media due to its relationship with digital media culture (Baker, 2009a; Dobson, 2016; Thumim, 2012). Baker (2009a) introduced the concept of "blended identity", which refers to online self-presentation that "include both online and offline aspects" (p. 7). According to Harris (2008), online self-representation requires understandings of 'blended identity' because individuals can "make their private selves and 'authentic' voices highly visible in public" (p. 125).

In this thesis, I draw upon Thumim's (2012) and Dobson's (2016) understandings of self-representation. According to Thumim (2012) "when a self-representation is

produced it becomes a text that has the potential for subsequent engagement” (p. 6). Dobson (2016) extends Thumim’s concept to consider the “politics of self-representation” (p. 4) involved in social media practices. Such understandings of self-presentation are useful in comprehending the relationship between social media and Muslim sportswomen’s everyday lives.

Thesis overview

In the following chapters, I draw upon digital ethnography and interviews with 26 Muslim sportswomen from around the world, providing them with space to share their experiences of using social media and negotiating different social and cultural norms around their sporting lives. As my research is navigating the interstitial spaces of sport, media, and culture, it is crucial to explore diverse disciplines and bodies of literature to address my research questions. Drawing from critical feminist scholars within the fields of sport, media, and culture, I reveal the complexities and nuances of being a Muslim sportswoman and how they navigate power dynamics across digital media. Despite drawing from a range of disciplines, my approach for this research is a feminist one, because women’s lived experiences constitute important knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). The stories of the participants in this project are fragments of the conversations that have shaped, informed, and changed the lives of Muslim sportswomen. By placing these fragments in conversation with different theories, I provide subtly layered understandings of the complexities of Muslim sportswomen’s everyday lives.

Chapter Two is a literature review of Muslim women in sport, media, feminism, and the digital media landscape. The chapter is comprised of two sections. The first section addresses the literature on religion, sport, ethnicity, gender, and Muslim sportswomen and media to highlight how issues like sexism and/or racism emerge differently on social media. The second section focuses on key feminist theories in relation to sport and social media. Since this PhD is navigating the interstitial space comprised of sports, social media, and culture, I drew from a range of disciplines and feminist perspectives to address the lived experiences of Muslim sportswomen in digital spaces. Black feminism and postcolonial feminist research address the

importance of intersectionality, which aids in understanding the power structures Muslim sportswomen encounter offline and in the digital world. The concept of intersectionality is used to examine the power structures on social media and the complexity of Muslim sportswomen's lives. Critical media and cultural scholars (e.g., Sarah-Banet Weiser, Amy Dobson, Rosalind Gill) are engaging with postfeminism to understand how young women are using social media for self-representation, self-branding, and expressing sexuality, femininity, and political activism. This research allows me to explore the digital self-branding practices of Muslim sportswomen in culturally specific ways. By highlighting the various strands of feminism, this chapter not only addresses the importance of multiple feminisms in my project but allows me to expand, understand, and open up space for new ways of thinking, being, and doing research in the interstitial spaces of Muslim sportswomen's lives.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodological approach used to address my research questions. This chapter details the importance of digital ethnography and employing an intersectional approach to centralise the voices of Muslim sportswomen in digital spaces. I discuss my ethnographic methods that include digital observation across four different platforms over an eight-month time period along with semi-structured interviews with Muslim sportswomen from around the world. I also provide biographical information of each participant. I conclude the chapter by addressing my role as a researcher and the importance of my position as an insider (Muslim sportswoman) and outsider (researcher) and my efforts towards being ethnical and reflexive throughout the research process.

Chapter Four is based on empirical data. It is comprised of two parts; the first part discusses the digital practices of Muslim sportswomen across four platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat). In so doing it reveals the intersecting themes across each platform and how the Muslim sportswomen negotiate power within and across the different digital platforms. Taking an intersectional feminist lens to Foucault's theory of power (1998) and panopticism (1977) aids in the

understanding on how power operates across social media platforms and importantly, how Muslim sportswomen navigate online abuse and surveillance.

In Chapter Five, I adopt a critical postfeminist perspective. This chapter is divided into two parts to critically discuss the complex digital self-branding practices of Muslim sportswomen. First, I draw from Banet-Weiser's (2012; 2018) postfeminist concepts of self-branding and authenticity to address Muslim sportswomen use of self-branding practices. The participants in this research who are using social media for self-branding purposes use a range of gendered labour practices to share aspects of the sporting and everyday life. In the second part, I explore digital labour but draw upon Toffoletti and Thorpe's (2018b) concept of 'athletic labour of femininity' to aid in understanding the varied approaches Muslim sportswomen employ while keeping culture, religion, and family in mind.

Chapter Six is the final empirical chapter. I draw upon postcolonial feminist scholar Puwar's (2004) concept of space invaders to explain how Muslim sportswomen are 'invading' digital spaces to challenge dominant representations of Muslim women in need of 'saving' (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In the past decade, there has been a rise in online political and social activism and such movements have been categorised as fourth wave feminism (Cochrane, 2013; Munro; 2013; Ray, 2018). Empowered by the digital space and platforms like Twitter and Facebook, women are calling out discriminatory practices and/or deliberate issues specific to certain communities (e.g., Black Lives Matter).⁶ This chapter offers insight on the politicised identities of Muslim women and how some participants are challenging the stereotypes around being Muslim and participation in sports. Through the visual representation of their bodies in digital spaces and the use and re-appropriation of hashtags, they are challenging the dominant discourse of Muslim women.

⁶ The Black Lives Matter movement was established by African American women who began to campaign against systemic racism and violence towards Black individuals (Carney, 2016; Love, 2019).

The final concluding chapter summarises the theoretical and methodological process, as well as three main findings. It discusses the significance of contributing to the literature on digital media studies, critical research on Muslim women's lives, and the social media usage of sportswomen, along with important contributions to the field of feminist digital ethnography. Within this chapter, the limitations of the research are addressed. I conclude with discussing potential new research agendas.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW: FRAMING MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN THROUGH FEMINISM

Sport's and media's relationship are complex, in which various mediums such as television, newspapers, movies, radio, magazines, and social media impacts how sport is understood, produced, and consumed (Billings & Hardin, 2014; Hutchins & Rowe, 2013). This connection allows sports fans to easily watch, read, and follow their teams, athletes, and sporting events (e.g., Olympics or World Cup) (Billings & Hardin, 2014). As Hutchins and Rowe (2013) state, "the line between 'reality' and 'fantasy' in media sport cultures is blurring as the Internet, computer, console and handheld platforms have made possible new forms of interaction" (p. 4). Furthermore, the representation of sport in media "can illuminate central themes in the relationship between sport and society" (Kennedy & Hills, 2015, p. 2). In particular, "the context of national, transnational and global social structures and relations" (Hutchins & Rowe, 2013, p. 1) are important to digital media and sport.

Though this chapter focuses on the digital, it is essential to ground it in the early literature on sport and the media in relation to gender and ethnicity, because similar themes are emerging in social media spaces but in different ways. In this chapter, I draw upon crucial work by sport scholars to provide a roadmap on Muslim women, Islam, and sports participation followed by sports media's relation to gender and ethnicity. Secondly, I discuss key feminist theories ranging from intersectionality to fourth wave feminism and scholarship on sports and gender in a digitally mediated world. Finally, I discuss the importance of drawing from a range of feminist theories to aid in understanding the multiple and intersecting interstitial spaces that Muslim sportswomen navigate in their everyday lives.

Muslim women, sport, and Islam

Scholars have examined the relationship between religion and sport (Alpert, 2015; Eitzen & Sage, 1992; Watson & Parker, 2012), such as the relationship between Christianity and sport (Baker, 2009b; Parker, Watson, & White, 2016; Watson &

Parker, 2012), Judaism and physical activity (Greenspoon, 2012; Kahan, 2002; Kugelmass, 2007) and Islam's relationship with sports and physical activity (Benn, Dagkas & Jawad, 2011; Jawad, Al-Sinani, & Benn, 2011; Khan, 2019; Ratna, 2011; 2014; Testa & Amara, 2016). According to Bryant and McElroy (1997) "sport embodies religious values including character development, hard work, and perseverance, and, like religion, it promotes and inculcates these qualities and behaviors" (p. 55). Albert (2015) continues the discussion and states sport and religion are important aspects of life embedded with history and culture which influence an individual's sporting practices in numerous ways. For example, Farooq and Parker (2009) examined the relationship of British Islamic independent schools physical education program and found that "religion was the driving force behind their identity construction with sport" (Farooq & Parker, 2009, p. 290). Burdsey's (2010) research on British Muslim elite cricket players not only addressed the role of Islam, but also how Muslim men tried to use their position as elite athletes to "challenge dominant images of young British Muslim men as 'extremists', 'terrorists' and/or 'violent street rioters'" (p. 330) to change and contest the perceptions about Muslims and Islam in society. Despite such efforts, the voices of Muslim athletes were silenced and "forced into invisibility" (Burdsey, 2010, p. 330). Jarvie (2013) states that researched focused on Islam, sports, and/or physical activity "needs to become more mainstream to the debate about sport and religion today" (p. 332), to better understand sport, religious practices, and social identities (also see Benn et al., 2011).

The ground-breaking research by Benn (1996) and Zaman (1997) helped start conversations around the experiences of Muslim women and girls, specifically their perceptions around sports and physical activity in relationship to Islam. Their research found Muslim women viewed physical activity as something positive and in keeping with Islamic norms (Benn, 1996; Zaman, 1997). Abdelrahman (1992) translated an Islamic hadith which referenced the body and physical activity as an essential element. Additionally, Al-Qaradawy (1992) states the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged Muslims to "teach (their) children swimming, archery, and horseback riding" (p. 296) and participate in other forms of sports. Similarly, Kay's (2006) research in the United Kingdom and Walseth and Fasting's

(2003) research in Egypt also found Islam perceived physical activity for young women positively and in agreement with Islamic values.

Others also explored Muslim sportswomen's experiences but furthered the discussion by considering overlapping issues around gender, religion, family, ethnicity, school-structured physical activities, and how Muslim women navigate such matters in relation to physical activity (Amara, 2008; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010; Kay, 2006; Ratna, 2014; Walseth, 2006; 2015; Walseth & Fasting, 2003; Walseth & Strandbu, 2014). For example, Walseth's (2015) research on Norwegian Muslim young women found that they did not mind mixed-gendered physical activity in schools. The handful of young women that preferred gender-separated activities was not due to religious reasons but the physical dominance of the young men (Walseth, 2015). Similar themes also emerged in Knez, Macdonald, and Abbott's (2012) research in Australia, and Stride's (2016) research in the United Kingdom around the sporting practices of Muslim women. Furthermore, their findings contested widespread beliefs that Islam is the main reason for the lack of women's involvement in physical activity within Muslim communities. Despite growing research around Islam and sports, according to Benn et al. (2011), "religion is [still] an under-researched domain in terms of its influence on the social self and body cultures, particularly in the fields of education and sports" (p. 23).

Much of the discourse around Muslim women focuses on the hijab as a symbol of Islam, however, it is one aspect of Muslim women's identities (Benn et al., 2011; Fekete, 2008). There are other aspects to consider such as the influence of different sects within Islam. Jiwani and Rail's (2010) research is one of the few studies which explores Shia South Asian Muslim women's experience with physical activity in Canada. Their analysis revealed several themes, including finding that being physically active was important because it contributed to looking and feeling good and weight loss despite there being limited sporting spaces (Jiwani & Rail, 2010). They found these notions were imports of Western understanding of femininity which the participants used to be viewed as 'normal' subjects in Canadian society and to potentially "subvert stereotypes emphasising the passivity, docility, and

uncleanliness of women of South-Asian background” (Jiwani & Rail, 2010, p. 252). Furthermore, Jiwani and Rail (2010) found the Shia Muslim women had to navigate generational differences among families. For example, the older generation viewed physical activity as a North American concept and “something not typically associated with the culture of Shia Muslim immigrants” (Jiwani & Rail, 2010, p. 259). Despite generational differences, the participants navigated religion and culture to participate in physical activity (Jiwani & Rail, 2010). For example, their participants felt less embarrassed in wearing the hijab and taking part in physical activity as long as the designed programs respected culture and religion (Jiwani & Rail, 2010).

Research by Flintoff and Scraton (2001), Kay (2006), and Knez et al. (2012) also found that some young Muslim women created culturally specific spaces such as their homes and woman-only settings which enabled them to enjoy physical activity in accordance to their ethnic and religious identities. These spaces were due to the “lack of opportunities” (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001, p. 8) offered in school to excel in sports and physical activity. These studies provide a useful understanding of how Muslim women navigate faith and sports, however, much of the work has been conducted in North America, Europe and Australia and mainly focuses on physical activity. It is important to examine different approaches and perspectives on how Muslim sportswomen engage with sports and physical activity in a digitally connected world.

Sport, gender, ethnicity, and media

Many sport and media scholars have examined the critical role of sports media in gender portrayals. Researchers have exposed the many ways sportswomen are overwhelmingly marginalized and sexualized in the media (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Antunovic & Harden, 2012; Booth, 2008; Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014; Henderson, 2001; Knijnik, Horton, & Cruz, 2010; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003; Olive, 2016; Roy & Caudwell, 2014; Wheaton, 2017b) and are underrepresented compared to men’s sports (Antunovic & Harden, 2012; Bruce, 2015; 2016; Cooky, 2018a; Martin & McDonald, 2012; Musto, Cooky & Messner,

2017). In Antunovic and Harden's (2012) and Bruce's (2016) research of sportswomen in the media, they revealed coverage as inadequate compared to coverage of men's sports and sportswomen are often subjected to the male gaze as sexualised objects rather than as athletes. Similar findings were reflected in both Martin and McDonald's (2012) and Fink and Kensicki's (2002) research on *Sports Illustrated* magazine's coverage of sportswomen which revealed "stereotypical and traditional conceptions of femininity that supersede their athletic ability" (p. 317). The *ESPN Magazine's* yearly edition of 'The Body Issue' further reduces sportswomen's athleticism and portrays them in overtly sexual poses compared to male athletes (Cranmer, Brann, & Bowman, 2014; Martin & McDonald, 2012). In another study, Godoy-Pressland and Griggs (2014) examined the photographic representation of print media of 2012 London Olympic Games also found a stereotypical portrayal of sportswomen. Their research analysed the in-depth framing of sportswomen according to the focus of the image, the "location and position, type and colour of shot, the camera angle" (p. 809) which represented sportswomen in particular gendered and sexualised ways (see also Duncan, 1994).

Sport scholars have examined gender relations and representation in sports media for decades (Duncan, 1994; Mathesen & Flatten, 1996; Schultz, 2004). According to Cooky, Messner, and Hextrum (2013), sportswomen's increased participation in sports, along with their achievements, is not reflected in media coverage. In the twenty-five year longitudinal analysis of television networks and *ESPN SportsCenter*, Cooky, Messner, and Musto (2015) found a small percentage (3.2%) of coverage devoted to women's sports. There were occasions when visibility of sportswomen increased during mega-sporting events such as the Olympic or Commonwealth Games, though discrepancies remain (Bruce, 2015; Hardin, Chance, Dodd, & Hardin, 2002). Research examining the media coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games also found sportswomen as being depicted as girls as opposed to women (Hardin et al., 2002). Additionally, the coverage by male sports journalists over emphasised female body parts leading to the sexualisation of the sportswomen (Kian, Berstein, & McGuire, 2013).

Research by Greer, Hardin, and Homan (2009) and Musto, Cooky, and Messner (2017) found that men's sports coverage was depicted as 'visually exciting'. Camera angles, tailored shots, and other techniques were utilised to visually stimulate and augment the viewer's emotional engagement with the content on television (Greer et al., 2009). The 'exciting' coverage and "higher production value embedded within men's sports segments helped legitimise the exclusion of women from sports news coverage" (Musto et al., 2017, p. 583). Such practices continue today. In their more recent work, Musto et al. (2017) introduced the concept of "gender-bland sexism" (p. 573). Despite observing a decline in overtly sexist coverage, their research found that media and sports commenters framed sportswomen in "lackluster" and "uninspiring" ways compared to male athletes (Musto et al., 2017, p. 575). The sportswomen coverage ambivalently focused on their athletic accomplishments while addressing the sportswomen roles as wives and/or girlfriends and rendering their coverage as 'bland' which reinforced athletic hierarchy and gender segregation in sports (Bruce, 2015; Musto, Cooky, & Messner, 2017).

Media coverage on Muslim women and sports has been limited and largely "failed to provide a nuanced and contextual understanding of Islam, and Muslims" (Karim, 2002, p. 105; Poole, 2002). Furthermore, "Islam and the activities of certain Muslims are very newsworthy subjects" (Poole & Richardson, 2006; p. 1), meaning the media privileges conversations around terrorism or portraying Muslim women as oppressed and confined to their culture and religion (Al-Hejin, 2015). Early research by Poole (2002) found a small percentage (2.9%) of British newspaper coverage related to Islam and sports. Similarly, Hylton's (2009) research on two leading sports magazines, the *Observer Sports Monthly* (United Kingdom) and *Sports Illustrated* (United States), revealed that Muslim athletes were rarely featured in the magazines. The only exception is the coverage of Muhammad Ali, an African American Muslim heavyweight boxing champion (Abdel-Shehid, 2002; Johnston, 2019; Remnick, 1999; Wenn & Wenn, 1999).

Another key theme in the literature on Muslim women and media is around the representations of Muslim sportswomen. Feminist sport scholars have investigated how the media reports hijabi Olympic athletes at the 2008 Beijing Olympic games (Amara, 2012; Pfister, 2010), and the 2012 London Olympic games (Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015). Their research revealed stories about Muslim women in mainstream media focused on the hijab and/or portrayed them as the oppressed other as opposed to athletes (Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015; Toffoletti & Palmer, 2015). Additionally, when examining Muslim women at the international sporting level (e.g., Olympics, FIFA World Cup), there are many inconsistencies. The Olympic policies often contradict their mission of 'equal opportunity' through homogenising dress codes which fit the Western context and do not take into consideration Muslim women's dress code (hijab) which further reinforces negative stereotypes (Benn & Dagkas, 2013). Samie and Sehlikoglu (2015) conducted a media analysis of the representation of Muslim women athletes at the 2012 London Olympics and found that the Western coverage reinforced the portrayal of the Other and depicted Muslim women as victims of their culture and religion and individuals deprived of fundamental rights. In another example, Toffoletti (2014) explored a fictional film on Muslim sports fans attending a World Cup game. Her research problematised the common assumption around the homogenisation of Muslim women. Furthermore, Toffoletti (2014) extended the discussion on Muslim sportswomen by integrating film and exploring sports fandom.

Recent scholarship by Samie and Toffoletti (2018) examined the media coverage of African American Muslim athletes Ibtihaj Muhammad (fencer) and Dalilah Muhammad (track and field) athletes from the United States who took part in the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Their analysis revealed dominant portrayals of Ibtihaj Muhammad as the 'hijab-wearing heroine' and Dalilah Muhammad as the 'queen.' The hijab was elevated and used for a political agenda, however, such a narrative reinforced the dominance of the United States' cultural norms (Samie & Toffoletti, 2018). Despite the slight change in the coverage of Muslim sportswomen in international sporting events, Muslim women in physical activities and especially those who do not veil continue to remain invisible in mainstream media (Toffoletti

& Palmer, 2017) due to the fascination of the veiled Muslim woman (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Several feminist media sport scholars draw upon Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, in particular the notion of the 'gaze' (Duncan, 1994) to understand mainstream media's surveillance of sportswomen. The panopticon is based on Jeremy Bentham's prison reform, in which a prison cell would face a centrally located tower, allowing for a guard to easily monitor the prison (Foucault, 1977). Additionally, the prisoners would not be aware of the surveillance from the tower and in turn, control their own behaviours (Foucault, 1977). This mechanism of the panopticon is not only applicable to prisons; but illustrates common effects on individuals, such as sports. According to Duncan (1994):

The *look* or *gaze* is perhaps the best exemplar of how public and private are ideologically conflated in women's body practices...the gaze is not a only a visual act, it is an economy of surveillance that operates on many levels and via many forms of media (pp. 59-50, emphasis in original).

For example, Douglas (2012) found that Venus and Serena William, African American professional tennis players, are regularly surveilled in the media, which is an "important method of social control" (p. 128) to render them invisible or problematic. Similar notions of gendered surveillance were present in Godoy-Pressland's (2016) analysis of British print media which revealed four categories: "(1) trivialised, (2) secondary, (3) commercial and (4) feminine" (p. 755) and the misrepresentation occurs through the male gaze. As Godoy-Pressland (2016) states, "those people who are reported on in print media (sportswomen) are seen by those in power (journalists and editors) who have authority to depict others when and however they choose" (p. 745). The surveillance of women's bodies continues across media (Douglas, 2012; Gill, 2007; Godoy-Pressland, 2016). Therefore, feminist scholars encourage researchers to "challenge the Panopticon and to change power relations through a human agency in favor of gender equity" (Azzarito, 2009, p. 20).

In the last thirty years, sport sociologists have also drawn upon cultural studies perspectives to understand the complex relations between ethnicity and representation (Carrington, 1999; 2010; Carrington & McDonald, 2002, Hargreaves, 2013; Wheaton, 2013). Many researchers have drawn upon cultural studies scholar, Stuart Hall, particularly his work on identity and representation (1996a; 1996b; 1997). Hall states that “representation connects meaning and language to culture” (Hall, 1997, p. 1) and often the representation of others’ culture by the hegemonic group is misinterpreted or skewed to control narratives. For example, Carrington’s (2010) research examined issues of ethnicity and politics in sports and how the media often portrayed Black athletes as having superhuman abilities. However, when it comes to media coverage of Black female athletes, Adjepong and Carrington (2014) found Black sportswomen are “celebrated” but only according to codes which model “notions of appropriate white middle-class femininity” (p. 175). Black women also encounter racist stereotypes, for example, Don Imus, a radio host, made racially demeaning and sexual remarks about African American women basketball players, calling them “nappy-headed hoes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 87). Withycombe (2011) further stated that Black sportswomen endured stereotypes according to skin colour, body, and appearance in dissimilarity to White sportswomen. Research by Schultz (2005) which examined the coverage of Serena Williams found her to be “simultaneously considered natural, unnatural and even supernatural” (p. 348) appearing ‘mannish’ often in stark contrast to White female tennis players.

The stigmatisation of Black women has been embedded in colonial history (e.g., slavery) (Withycombe, 2011; Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000). The racialization and sexualisation of Black sportswomen in the media continues (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Dyson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Media is influential and enables the pattern of deficit thinking around ethnicity, such depictions (either through text or images) create narratives which adhere to the Orientalist view of the Other, which reinforces the dominant discourse by the West.

In examining the existing literature, it appears that despite notable achievements by sportswomen, issues around limited or no coverage about sportswomen still remain. Mainstream media's continuous effort to side-line the coverage of women's sports ignores the increasing interest in women's sports among audiences and fans (Antunovic & Linden, 2015). Additionally, athletes, sports activists, and feminist scholars (Bruce, 2016; Cooky, 2018a; Douglas, 2012; Markula, 2001; McClearen, 2018; Pfister, 2016; Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015; Samie & Toffoletti, 2018) continue to address the staggering media marginalisation of sportswomen.

Social media and sport

There are different definitions of social media such as new media, social network site (SNS), and Web 2.0, but for this research, boyd and Ellison's (2010) definition will be applied:

A networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (p. 158).

This definition encompasses both the online and offline connection, engagement, and user's ability to harness online platforms through tags, likes and comments to construct, perform and accentuate their identities (boyd & Ellison, 2010). Ever-changing and fluctuating technologies are a daily routine in the lives of so many, and the purposes of social media goes beyond sharing and consuming information.

Over the last ten years sport scholars have increasingly examined the role of the digital, specifically social media in relation to sport (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Bruce, 2016; Carnicelli, McGillivray, & McPherson, 2016; Clavio, 2013; Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; 2013; Miah, 2017; Olive, 2015; Rowe, 2003; Thorpe, 2016) along with sportswomen's use of their social media platforms

(Chawansky, 2016; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013a; 2013b; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013a; 2013b; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b).

Elite athletes are embracing social media platforms such as Twitter as it allows them to engage with their fans, family, journalists, and brands (Hutchins, 2011). Early literature addressed journalists' use of Twitter, explaining that they believed it to be reliable and allowed them to interact with other journalists or the audience quickly, and to share breaking news (McEnnis, 2013; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Sports journalists also moved towards Twitter to discuss and share sporting content (Billings, 2014; Hutchins, 2011; Pedersen, 2014; Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012; Sanderson, 2013; 2014; Sanderson, Frederick, & Stocz, 2016; Sherwood & Nicholson, 2013). Research by Pegoraro (2010) and Frederick et al. (2014) addressed athletes use of Twitter to interact with their fans and share professional and personal aspects of their lives. Some scholars have considered differences in how men and women use social media. For example, Smith and Sanderson (2015) observed the Instagram profiles of 27 professional male and female athletes to understand the use of visual platforms for self-representation. The study revealed several themes, one prominent finding was sharing personal moments and providing "glimpses into their home life" (Smith & Sanderson, 2015, p. 351) which was also found in Lebel and Danylchuk's (2012) research on professional tennis players. Smith and Sanderson (2015) also observed that sportswomen often depicted themselves in active poses which challenged mainstream images of women as passive and "buck[ed] the trend of visual representations and present[ed] themselves as athletes first, females second" (p. 354).

Some sport scholars, however, have observed similar patterns which emerged in traditional media surrounding gender, ethnicity, and sport are also prevalent in social media. For example, Clavio and Eagleman (2011) conducted a content analysis of the ten most popular sports blogs ranked by *BallHype*, a popular and frequently visited online sports news platform. Their research found that men received more coverage than sportswomen; additionally, images of the

sportswomen were sexually suggestive (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011). In Lebel and Danylchuk's (2012) analysis of professional tennis players, they found male tennis players attracted more followers as opposed to their female counterparts (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012).

Social media, sport activism, and online abuse

Some scholars have examined athletes' and fans' role in sports activism on social media (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). For example, Antunovic and Hardin (2012) found social media increased the visibility of women in sports. However, sports bloggers did not address broader social issues about women's sports in relation to ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Continuing, they explain that "blogs also carry the danger of uncritically replicating dominant ideologies and thereby leaving the marginalisation of women's sports uncontested" (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012, p. 318). However, social media has the potential to disrupt dominant relations of power and contribute to meaningful change (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; 2013). Despite ongoing online imbalances, Twitter allows users to voice their criticism about society, media, and sporting culture. For example, there was backlash on Twitter directed towards BBC journalists who called sportswomen 'girls' during Olympic broadcasts, calling them out on their sexism and discrimination (Cooky & Antunovic, 2018). Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) also observed 'a strong backlash' from fans "including a high profile response from UK author JK Rowling, who 'slam[ed] a twitter troll for body shaming Serena [Williams]'" (p. 22), an African American female tennis player. In another example, the *ESPNW*, a sports website dedicated to women's sports no longer allows for comments on its blogs due to having received racist, sexist, and homophobic comments (Grenoble, 2016). Cleland's (2013) research also found online racist comments on fan message boards on football (soccer) websites. The lack of moderation allowed the abuse to flourish and created hostility towards the Black and Muslim athletes in British football (Cleland, 2013). Recent scholarship by Litchfield, Kavanagh, Osborne, and Jones (2018) found that Serena Williams's Facebook and Twitter profiles received sexist and racist comments along with statements questioning her gender and athletic integrity, which reinforces the oppressive perceptions of Black sportswomen.

A recent example involved Tayla Harris, an Australian rules football (AFL) player. Sports fans and sportswomen were outraged at AFL, who removed her image from their Facebook page due to offensive and inappropriate comments (Symons, 2019). The removal of the image made her presence as an athlete invisible. Furthermore, the lack of moderation by AFL on Facebook (e.g., blocking, deleting comments) allows for sexist attacks directed at sportswomen. The pressure from fans and Tayla reposting the image on her Twitter account, which went viral forced the reinstatement of the image. Such actions are a form of sports activism both by fans and athletes.

Social media and branding

Digital platforms also provide opportunities to attract sponsors through self-branding practices (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Dumont, 2017; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). The term “athlete brand” was coined by Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014) which they defined as “a public persona of an individual athlete who has established their symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market” (p. 98). According to Arai et al. (2014), athletes who can successfully brand themselves are likely to experience benefits, such as endorsements and higher salaries. Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (2016) also encourage athletes “to build their brands strategically” through social media (p. 136) especially since athletes may be able to leverage sports teams and sponsors through online self-representation (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). In another study, Dumont (2017) examined the social media practices of professional climbers in the United States and Europe and found climbers to be adept at using social media to gain followers and attract sponsors. The climbers created “epic stories” and perfectly tailored images to demonstrate their value to sponsors, which required constant and consistent creation of new media content (Dumont, 2017, p. 101).

Sportswomen's use of social media platforms

According to Antunovic and Harden (2012), Mann (2014), and Vann (2014), digital media can challenge discriminatory portrayals and inequalities of sportswomen by giving the opportunity to control their visibility which may contribute to the growth of women's sports coverage where mainstream media has failed. For example, Burch, Eagleman, and Pedersen (2012) examined online websites from the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games and found "equitable amounts of coverage devoted to female athletes" (p. 3) compared to traditional sports media. Furthermore, as Bruce (2015) suggests "new media spaces such as those afforded by social networks and Web 2.0 interactivity offer new ways of thinking [about] representations of sportswomen" (p. 384). Others also found that social media platforms afforded ownership of self-presentation to challenge and push back on dominant gender stereotypes of sportswomen (Pegoraro, Comeau, & Frederick, 2018; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016). Research by Pegoraro et al. (2018) examined Instagram photos from the 2015 Women's FIFA World Cup and observed the hashtags #SheBelieves and #FIFAWWC. The authors found women in Instagram images mainly represented themselves in "athletic action" poses (Pegoraro et al., 2018; p. 1063). Furthermore, they also observed the photos on Instagram which corresponded to earlier research on social media which found sportswomen sought to be depicted as 'athletically competent' (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013; Krane et al.; 2010).

Some feminist scholars have explored how women in alternative sports are using social media. Research by MacKay and Dallaire (2013a; 2013b) examined Skirtboarders.com, a blog where women skateboarders contributed and interviewed the community. The study revealed the participants shared the achievements of their peers by distributing images and content on the website promoting women's skateboarding (MacKay & Dallaire, 2013a). Additionally, Skirtboarders.com blog offered an alternate representation of sportswomen and challenged the male dominance of skateboarding (MacKay & Dallaire, 2013b). Pavlidis and Fullagar's (2013a) examination of digital spaces of roller derby websites and Facebook group showed how the community uses these platforms in different ways. Pavlidis and Fullagar (2013a) "did not simply *complete* a discourse analysis of the way affects

are presented in online spaces. Rather [they] *explored* affects as a way of engaging with, feeling and ‘reading’ text and images” (p. 679, emphasis in original). Their findings revealed digital spaces enabled the creation and (re)invention of diverse roller derby communities through complex affects of pleasure, passion, and pain (Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013a).

Some feminist scholars have explored how ethnicity and sexuality configured into an athlete’s social media representations. Chawansky’s (2016) research examined the Instagram profile of professional African-American lesbian basketball player, Brittney Griner. Her analysis revealed that while new narratives are engendered via social media and other issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia persisted (Chawansky, 2016).

In examining the existing literature, most of the research on sportswomen’s use of social media has focused on Western sportswomen with little consideration of how women of different ethnicities and religions, are negotiating ongoing and new power relations in digital spaces. An exception is a scholarship by Thorpe, Hayhurst, and Chawansky (2018) who explored sporting organizations representations of Brown girls from low-income countries, and the power relations and ethical considerations of such portrayals. In so doing, they also considered the risks for girls and young sportswomen from Afghanistan appearing in social media. Their research is just one example, and to date, no research has considered social media usage by Muslim sportswomen. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore recent feminist theoretical conversations about the digital, focussing on gender and ethnicity to help frame this chapter.

Feminist theories: Intersectionality and the digital

Feminist scholars across a range of disciplines including education, media studies, technology studies, girlhood studies, and sport studies have examined digital technologies and social media as spaces of power, where gender politics and inequalities are created in new ways and reaffirmed in old ways. The rise and advancement of digital media is allowing individuals to mediate aspects of their

everyday lives in online spaces by sharing and consuming information via social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) through various devices (cell phones/laptops/tablets) (Leurs, 2012; Kietzman, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Lupton, 2015).

This project sits within the intersection of sports, digital media, and the lives of Muslim women, and no one theory is sufficient to recognise the complexities of Muslim women's everyday lives and sporting experiences. Therefore, in this section, I provide an overview of intersectional feminism, the digital space and sport, which aid in understanding how Muslim sportswomen women are navigating diverse and intersecting aspects of their everyday lives. In so doing, I consider how feminist scholars have explored themes of power, gender politics, and activism. I start with a discussion of intersectionality, which has made an essential contribution to feminist scholarship and is being applied across a range of disciplines such as geography, social work, law, politics, sports, and into mainstream feminist movements (e.g., Women's March). Second, I discuss postfeminism's critical contribution to women's use of social media. Following this, I advocate the need for an intersectional approach to understanding the importance of the digital experiences of the Muslim sportswomen in this project.

Black feminism and intersectionality

To fully grasp the complexity of intersectionality it is essential to discuss its roots which arose out of a critique of race and gender-based research that largely failed to account for the lived experiences of women of colour (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Crenshaw (1991) originally coined the term 'intersectionality' but it has been interpreted in multiple ways. According to Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality, accounts for the experiences of women of colour who frequently encounter intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and their experiences are excluded "within the discourse of either feminism or antiracism" and "the interests and experiences of women of colour are frequently marginalized within both" (pp. 1243-1244). In this section, I briefly consider the

roots of intersectionality in Black feminism before discussing how postcolonial feminists have applied intersectionality, including feminist sport scholars.

The roots of intersectionality have been attributed to the Black feminist movement in the United States. According to Collins and Bilge (2016), “the core of intersectionality appeared in several key texts” (p. 66). In particular, Sojourner Truth’s *Ain’t I a woman* speech in 1851 has been considered the ‘benchmark’ of intersectionality (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Another key text was Beal’s (1969) essay which argued for the need to incorporate ethnicity and gender when discussing multiple forms of oppression. In 1977, Beal’s work was further incorporated by the Combahee River Collective, a United States Black feminist lesbian group, to include sexuality along with gender, race, and class (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Intersectionality continued to appear in various writings in the 1980s such as the works of feminist activists and writers Lorde (1983) and hooks (1981). Lorde (1983) spoke to intersectionality in her work:

I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sizes and colours and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression (p. 1).

Lorde is speaking to the disadvantages towards/of people of colour and collaborating to push for change for all those who are oppressed. Similarly, hooks (1981) also incorporated intersectionality in her works. It is important to note that intersectionality is rooted in both Black feminist scholarship and Black women’s activism, which often go hand-in-hand. Although Davis (1981) and Morrison (1987) are not discussed in this chapter, their work is as revolutionary as Black feminists and activists who incorporated intersectionality in their work.

In academia, intersectionality was further developed by United States Black feminist scholars such as Deborah King. King (1988) drew upon and extended

Beal's (1969) concept of double jeopardy which addressed race and gender, towards multiple jeopardy. According to King (1988), Black women endured numerous and simultaneous oppressions along with multiplicative relationships within race, gender, and class. Similarly, Collins (1990) spoke to the "matrix of domination", where "African American women find themselves in a web of cross-cutting relationships, each presenting varying combination of controlling images and women's self-definitions" (p. 96). For Collins (1990), intersectionality is necessary to understand the ways race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and realities produce and change power relations (also see Yuval-Davis, 2011a; 2011b).

There has been confusion as to whether intersectionality is a theory, concept, methodology, and/or paradigm (Collins, 2015; Davis, 2008). An aspect of intersectionality acknowledges the differences among women and their multiple shifting identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006), and that one category should not supersede another (e.g., gender over religion or ethnicity over gender). The misuse of intersectionality has prompted some to work carefully towards (re)defining it. For example, Collins (1990; 2015) states that categories—such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, religion, sexuality, age, and nation—should be viewed in relational terms as opposed to separating them into single categories. These categories intersect, interrelate, and shape the power relations in racism and sexism (Collins, 2015). In her own words, these "social inequalities are historically contingent" (p. 14) and vary across cultures where "material realities and social experiences vary across time and space" (Collins, 2015, p. 14). Continuing, she reflects upon the different ways researchers have utilised the concept of intersectionality in their work by placing their own experiences and others through their viewpoint which locates their position within power relations/society. This can either "uphold or contest the status quo" (Collins, 2015, p. 14) of social inequalities and the systems of power.

Collins (2015) is aware of the dilemma surrounding intersectionality and focuses her definition on power relations and social inequalities. When considering how intersectionality works in practice, McCall (2005) extends the concept

methodologically by breaking it down to *anticategorical*, *intercategorical*, and *intracategorical*. According to McCall (2005), the anticategorical approach deconstructs categories due to the complexities and multi-layering of both subjects and structures and should not be simplified to speak of differences and social inequalities. The intercategorical approach calls on scholars to temporarily adopt the existing categories so changing relationships of disparities among social groups across multiple and conflicting dimensions can be documented (McCall, 2005). Lastly, intracategorical calls for scholars to examine groups which are often neglected through numerous points of intersection where oppression operates. While some feminist scholars continue in their efforts towards defining intersectionality, Davis (2008) suggests that “the vagueness and open-endedness of ‘intersectionality’ may be the very secret to its success” (p. 69) as a theory worthy of addressing the complicated lives of women of colour.

Postcolonial feminism

In the previous section, I highlighted that intersectionality emerged from United States history and the important work of Black feminist scholars and activists. It is also essential to explore how intersectionality emerged in relation to the works of postcolonial feminists who are attentive to the diverse experiences/realities and multiple voices of women of colour (Mirza, 2009; 2013a; 2013b; Mohanty, 1988; 2003; Rajan & Park, 2000). According to Mack-Canty (2004), postcolonial feminists focus on breaking down “dualistic thinking” by distinguishing the “contradictory identities hybridity creates” (p. 168). Importantly, intersectionality helps in distinguishing different viewpoints of women from around the world and theorising their positioned lives (Mack-Canty, 2004).

Mohanty (1988) is a postcolonial feminist scholar whose revolutionary essay offered an important critique of Western feminism. Her work called out Western feminism for homogenising and ignoring the diverse experiences of women of

colour (particularly women from the ‘Global South’⁷). In 2003, Mohanty revisited her essay and addressed the need for scholars to be more attentive to the interwoven histories and the intersections of race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality of women of colour where different experiences of oppression are exploited and resisted (Mohanty, 2003). Building upon Mohanty’s work, Mirza (2013a) defined intersectionality as:

The converging and conterminous ways in which the differentiated and variable organizing logics of race, class and gender and other social divisions such as sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion and belief structure the material conditions which produce economic, social and political inequality in women’s real lived lives (p. 6).

Mirza (2013a) further stated that intersectionality helps reveal the “everyday lives of Black and post-colonial ethnicised women who are simultaneously positioned in multiple structures of dominance and power as gendered, raced, classed, colonized, and sexualized others” (p. 6). In other words, intersectionality is an “exploration” of the “intersection of colonialism and neocolonialism” in which “women’s lives and their subjectivities” (Rajan & Park, 2000, p. 53) can be addressed. Moreover, it is an approach that helps build an understanding of the influence of different contexts in which the “Black/othered woman” continues to be “constructed as a passive object” and is engraved “with meaning and named by those who gaze upon her and ‘name’ her” (Mirza, 2009, p. 8). What Mirza is speaking to here are the stereotypes that are often associated with Black/Brown women, including, the all-too-common assumption that Muslim women need saving from their oppressive cultures or societies (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mirza, 2013b; Spivak, 1988). This perception is something that women of colour, especially those from the Global South or colonised countries, encounter regularly and must negotiate in their own terms especially since the Western stereotype of the Other is further intensified through visuals and stories to invoke inferiority and/or fear.

⁷ This term broadly refers “to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania” (Dados & Connell, 2012, p. 1).

Intersectionality has not only appeared in United States Black feminism and postcolonial feminism, but also in anti-racist research where people of colour are at the centre of analysis while simultaneously “critically engag[ing] his or her own experience[s] as part of the knowledge search” (Dei & Johal, 2005, p. 2). Other important contributions to such approaches include the works of Chicana/Latina feminists such as Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015), as well as Native/Indigenous studies such the work of Smith (1999) and other mana wāhine feminists (Jenkins & Pihama, 2001; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011) who provide counter stories of Māori women in New Zealand to challenge Western knowledge associated on this community.

Islamic feminism

Islamic feminism, first conceptualised by Abou-Bakr (2001), situated its work within a ‘faith-based’ perspective. The work draws upon excerpts from the Quran and hadiths which are reinterpreted to challenge oppressive systems (Abou-Bakr, 2001; Al-Sharmani, 2014; Badran, 2002; 2005; Barlas, 2019; Cooke, 2004; Wadud, 2006). Mir-Hosseini (2006) defines it as “a new consciousness, new way of thinking, a gender discourse that was feminist in its aspiration and demands, yet Islamic in its language and source of legitimacy” (p. 640). According to Barlas (2019), a “women’s status and roles in Muslim societies, as well as patriarchal structures and gender relationships, are a function of multiple factors, most of which have nothing to do with religion” (p. 2). However, the use of Quranic texts remains crucial. Using passages from the Quran, Islamic feminists expose how some male Islamic scholars corrupt, manipulate, and misinterpret Islamic texts to oppress women (Badran, 2002; 2005; Barlas, 2019). For example, in the following verse: “according to usage, women too have rights over men similar to the rights of men over women” (Quran 2:228). This verse suggests equality between genders, however, misinterpretations have created patriarchal structures. By exposing such inconsistencies, Islamic feminists challenge patriarchal norms within their communities. Additionally, Islamic feminists believe in gender equality and that

Islam, and not men, should define women's role in society (Abou-Bakr, 2001; Abu-Lugod, 2002; Badra, 2002; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Wadud, 2006).

A difference between Islamic feminists and some strands of Western feminism is they are looking to Islam and religious texts to address arguments and answer questions pertaining to Muslim women (Cooke, 2004; Wadud, 2006). However, some scholars view this approach as being politically insignificant (Moghadam, 2002) and as a weak framework drawing only from religious doctrines (Moghissi 1999, Tohidi 2003). Islamic feminism stresses the importance of relating text and context (Al-Sharmani, 2014), but Zayd (2004) encourages Islamic feminist scholars to view the Quran as a discourse with multiple meanings as opposed to text.

Within the Islamic feminist movement, there is an understanding of the intersection between religion and gender. However, such an approach does not account for intersecting axes of identities of class, ethnicity, culture, age, sexuality, and disability. Intersectionality can help “capture the dynamic power relations and oppression in a way that is sensitive to differences and oppression both within and among groups” (Mattsson, 2014, p. 15).

As the above discussion reveals, the complexities of intersectionality cannot be reduced to a single definition since it varies as “multiple axes of differentiation” always “intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). Power operates in complex ways to keep oppressive structures in place. Although, I cannot address all the feminist scholars who have spoken to, and currently speak to, intersectionality in their work, it is essential to acknowledge briefly some of the critical ways intersectionality has been developed and defined in a range of literature, including feminist sport studies.

Sport, feminism, and intersectionality

Early sport scholarship viewed gender as “a variable or distributive category rather than a set of relations sustained through human agency and cultural

practice” which was later re-conceptualised to address larger structures of exclusion around sport and gender (Birrell, 2000, p. 64). Scraton and Flintoff (2013) show that earlier literature on ‘women and sport’ was concerned with conversations around “inequalities seen to be founded on male dominance and male power” (p. 96). Hargreaves’ (1986; 1994) research was critical to sport sociology since it shifted the conversation around the notion of women and sport by using gender as an essential category for analysis. Through a feminist approach she re-examined the “lived experiences of women in sports and the structural forces influencing participation” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 2). Hargreaves’ (1994) also generated new ways of investigating the relationship of gender and power to understand the “conflicts over gender divisions...and the significance and shifting nature of gender relations” (p. 3).

Critical sport feminists have worked with different strands of poststructural feminism (Aitchison, 2000; Birrell, 2000; Scraton & Flintoff, 2013). In so doing, they are concerned with deconstructing power-knowledge relations, gender, identity, discourse, meaning, and language (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1991; Wright, 2003). For example, Cole (1993), Hargreaves (2006), Markula and Pringle (2006), and Scraton and Flintoff (2013) draw on poststructural feminism to understand how power operates on and through women’s bodies in sporting and exercise contexts. According to Weedon (1991), individuals can also use their positions within a range of discourses to challenge and exercise power. For example, some sportswomen are using sport in creative ways to challenge gender discourses (Markula & Pringle, 2006; Thorpe, 2006), and some Muslim sportswomen are constructing different forms of identities through sports (Farooq, 2010; Ratna, 2011).

Some sport scholars have applied works from Black and postcolonial feminists (e.g., Collins, 1990; Mirza, 2009; Mohanty, 2003; Rajan & Park, 2000) to explore and increase awareness around the sporting experiences of women of colour. As Scraton and Flintoff (2013) note, “we still know very little about black and ethnic minority women’s experiences of sport” (p. 106). To address this gap in scholarship, Benn (1996), Benn et al. (2010), Farooq (2010), and Ratna (2010;

2011) have all explored the experiences of Muslim sportswomen as discussed earlier in the chapter. Additionally, research by Jamieson (1998; 2003a; 2003b) has also addressed this gap, by drawing upon Chicana feminists to illuminate the sporting experiences of Latina women. For example, Jamieson's (1998) textual analysis of American golfer Nancy Lopez found her golf skills, race/ethnicity, class, and heterosexuality were represented within the dominant cultural ideology of Whiteness. Additionally, Douglas and Jamieson (2006) argue the "construction of whiteness relied upon discourses of sexuality and gender by maintaining cultural norms and values that were constitutive of dominant discourses of social power" (p. 128). Ratna (2010; 2011) has also focused on the intersections of race, gender, religion, and class and in particular explored South Asian' sporting experiences in the United Kingdom. Ratna (2011) found that some of the British Asian female football players referenced the Quran to rationalise their participation in football, while others focused on becoming skilled athletes to challenge sexism and racism. Furthermore, Ratna (2013; 2014) has argued that intersectionality is crucial in discussions around identity, gender, ethnicity, and power.

Important research has deconstructed Black womanhood and explored representations of Black sporting bodies (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Dyson, 2007; Ifekwunigwe, 2009; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013; Schultz, 2005; Withycombe, 2011). Brown's (2015) research on Caster Semenya, a South African middle-distance runner, draws on both Black and postcolonial feminism to articulate how Black women are framed in sporting spaces. She advances the discussion by drawing upon Puwar's (2004) concept of 'space invaders' to challenge dominant sporting ideologies in relation to race and sexuality. Brown (2015) encourages researchers to re-conceptualise sporting spaces which can aid in disrupting "old barriers and boundaries, thereby making space for change" (p. 21). Such examples address the ongoing conversations surrounding the sporting experiences of women of colour and utilise the concept of intersectionality.

In recent work, Ratna (2018) presents findings of an earlier systematic literature review focused on international scholarship relating to women of colour in sport.

She issues an urgent call for sport scholars “to produce *critical* scholarship about women of colour and their complex, multifarious, and changing relationships to sport and physical activity” (Ratna, 2018, p. 197, emphasis in original). She also encourages researchers to move beyond women/men of colour being merely different and adopt feminist decolonial and transnational approaches to privilege marginalised voices and address complex forms of oppressive systems. Her analysis reveals a range of “persistent problems” (Ratna, 2018, p. 197) in the field, including the ongoing dominance of understandings which are situated within “colonial and imperial (re)productions of difference”, meaning Western society versus the Global South (p. 200). Additionally, Ratna (2018) states that some struggles may unify women from different backgrounds, however, it is important not to ignore and erase differences around other social, economic, and political issues which continue to disadvantage and exclude marginalised groups. She noted that literature on Black women’s sporting experiences were mainly situated within the United States and research on Muslim women tended to be homogenised despite different ethnicities (e.g., South Asian, Arab) (Ratna, 2018). Ratna (2018) acknowledges research which has explored women’s sporting experiences from other countries, nevertheless, the sporting experiences of the Global South and Indigenous voices remains limited. However, Molnar, Amin, and Kanemasu’s, (2018) recent edited book on *Women, Sport and Exercise in the Asia-Pacific Region: Domination, Resistance, Accommodation* presents important insights from the Asia-Pacific region and utilises the voices of non-Western and postcolonial communities. The book raises awareness on the complex ways historical, social, cultural, and political conditions accommodate or prohibit sports participation within the Asia-Pacific region.

Another noteworthy example is Ratna and Samie’s (2017) scholarship which draws upon feminist postcolonial approaches to intersectionality. Through a series of cases studies, their edited book titled *Race, Gender and Sport: The Politics of Ethnic ‘Other’ Girls and Women* considers the multiple voices of women of colour who participate in sport and addresses challenges which underpin dominant narratives. Furthermore, the research critically analyses and unpacks the experiences of ethnically othered sportswomen in which issues of ethnicity and

gender have “traditionally been documented (by White, Western researchers, in and through selected epistemological, ontological and methodological traditions) written in and predominantly produced for English speaking countries (or ‘the West’)” (Ratna & Samie, 2017, p. 11). In one of the chapters, Samie (2017) outlines decolonisation practices in epistemology and ontology to aid in examining Muslim women in sports. According to Samie (2017), the term ‘decolonisation’ has not been utilised when discussing Muslim sportswomen and adopting a decolonial feminist approach may provide alternative knowledge accounting for different viewpoints on Muslim women’s sporting practices. As Fullagar, Rich, Pavlidis, and Van Ingen (2019) state, “feminist decolonial theories importantly pose questions about the diversity of women’s bodies by pursuing accounts of how gendered power is enacted through colonized histories and capitalist imaginaries in the present (Brown, 2018; Ratna, 2018, cited in Fullagar et al.)” (p. 5). I am inspired by Fullagar et al.’s (2019) work, and Samie’s (2017) approach to “unhinging dominant assumptions about sporting Muslim women” (p. 36), therefore, this project seeks to critically engage and weave in contextual understandings of Muslim women and their lived experiences.

Other critical feminist sport scholars have also applied intersectionality to their work. For example, Watson (2018) engaged with Black feminism in her work to illustrate the importance of intersectionality within sport and leisure studies. McDonald and Shelby (2018) also used the concept to help “tease out complex social relations” (p. 500) by addressing ethnicity alongside gender, where power relations significantly differ. McDonald and Shelby’s (2018) intersectional approach allowed them to see how White and Black bodies were racialised and sexualized in the United States along with the problem of Whiteness, which remained the norm and free from explicit criticism. Palmer and Masters (2010) also employed an intersectional perspective while focusing on Māori feminism (mana wāhine) in sports management providing opportunities for Māori women “to voice their identities and experiences without being subject to essentialism or subjugation” (p. 333). Their work was informed by the aim to educate sport practitioners to be inclusive and informed of Indigenous and women’s rights in sport leadership roles. Furthermore, intersectionality has been embraced by feminist

sport scholars because it helps acknowledge “that racism and sexism are not independent systems of domination, but are instead powerful, interacting forces both within and outside of sport” (McDonald & Thomas, 2010 p. 81).

The on-going practices of excluding people of colour in sports continue to position them in the margins of society, which either silences or makes them invisible (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Watson & Scraton, 2013). According to Carter-Francique and Flowers (2013):

Intersectionality, examines marginalized people and groups’ identity intersections simultaneously within various institutions, or systems of domination, that promote oppression, discrimination, and social inequities. (p. 76).

This allowed Carter-Francique and Flowers (2013) to define and clarify “the role of sport within racial and ethnic cultures that have been marginalized” (p. 89) in the United States context. An intersectional approach brings the relationship between ethnicity, gender, religion, age, body weight, and shape in the context of sport to the fore. Intersectionality is valuable for this project as it facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the multiple and diverse experiences and aspects of the participants identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, nationality, and religion) which can help create a deeper understanding of Muslim women within the context of sport and social media.

Postfeminism and the digital world

Over the past decade, feminist media and cultural studies scholars have drawn upon postfeminism in their critical analyses of women’s use of social media (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2016; Gill, 2007; 2008; 2012; 2017, McRobbie, 2004; 2009; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013), and thus it is important to provide an overview of this key literature. Postfeminism emerged during the 1990s, but various definitions and interpretations have led to some confusion in both the literature and broader society. A range of scholars from feminist media studies and cultural studies have offered nuanced and complex critiques of the gender politics and

power relations in the context of postfeminism (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004; 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007), and it is this literature that I draw upon here. Some scholars define postfeminism as an ‘epistemological disruption’ from second-wave feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007; Thorpe, Toffoletti & Bruce, 2017). Others see it as a historical move from third wave feminism (the ‘post’ movements of postcolonialism and poststructuralism), and still, others see it as a backlash against feminism (Gill, 2007; 2017). The core concepts often associated with postfeminist sentiments among contemporary women are notions of individualism, choice, agency, and empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007). While many women in neoliberal Western societies enthusiastically adopt these discourses, critical analysts of postfeminism take care to remind us that we are far from an equitable society, and such ideals do not account for ongoing structural issues and the complexities of women’s identities (Gill, 2017). Despite conflicting definitions of postfeminism, Gill (2007) suggests it is essential to understand postfeminism as ‘a sensibility.’ By this she means, recognising it as an ‘object of study’ by observing the trends and beliefs about gender, the sense of empowerment, choice, and individualism where it is less related to feminism and more towards global consumerism (Gill, 2010; 2017). Continuing, Gill (2007) poses some questions for feminist media scholars to ask, including; “what makes a text postfeminist? What features need to be present in order for any media scholar to label something as postfeminist?” (p.148). To understand the status of women in sport, Toffoletti (2016) encourages researchers to examine:

The complexities of a postfeminist cultural landscape that casts women as empowered agents, yet fails to dislodge the persistent devaluing and marginalization of female athletes and women’s sporting pursuits more generally (i.e., as fans, coaches, administrators and in fitness and leisure contexts) (p. 200).

Arguably, a postfeminist sensibility encourages feminist scholars who are examining gender representations to move beyond interpretations as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Toffoletti, 2016), and account for the structural inequalities and exclusions based on race, class, age, and gender.

A growing body of feminist media and cultural studies scholars are critically engaging with postfeminism to understand young women's engagement with digital media, and the commodification of sexuality and femininity in online spaces (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Dobson, 2016; Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004; 2007; Ringrose, 2010). Dobson's (2016) recently examined the social media practices of young women around sexual self-representation in which heteronormative performances of gender and sexuality are reinforced. The feminist media scholar's engagement with postfeminism is helpful to explain the ways some women are using social media for self-branding, self-representation, self-expression, and entrepreneurialism. There are also debates around issues of 'sexy selfies,' which are contributing to the explicit sexualisation of young women (Ringrose, 2010). However, some suggest that the use of sexy selfies provides a sense of freedom and empowerment to (some) young women (Tiidenberg, 2014). Sexual empowerment in online spaces is an important issue, however, as Gill (2012) asserts, scholars need to consider "sexualization in relation to class, 'race', sexuality, and other axes of oppression" (p. 11). Similar approaches need to be applied in sports, where sportswomen are often presenting their feminine aspect first and their athletic demeanour second, as opposed to male athletes who are portraying themselves as athletes on social media (Coche, 2014). In the field of sport, Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) critically engage with postfeminism to understand the ways global sportswomen are using social media for self-branding and entrepreneurialism.

A few feminist scholars have drawn upon postfeminism to consider how women are using social media for gender politics. According to Baer (2016), "digital platforms offer great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas" (p. 18). The digital space allows for feminists to shape "new modes of discourse about gender and sexism" and create innovative methods of protest (Baer, 2016, p. 18). Similarly, Keller (2015) states the online world provides alternative platforms such as blogs which enable women to 'talk back' against a mainstream culture where their voices are silenced or ignored and create a sense of community. Both Baer (2016) and Keller (2015) are speaking to how women are harnessing social media platforms to distribute feminist agendas, connect with a more extensive and diverse audience, and create new forms of activism to shape new discourses.

According to Scharff (2011), White women develop their postfeminist ideas of empowerment in stark contrast to Muslim women. This comparison reinforces the stereotypical narrative of Muslim women's cultures and societies, implying they are backwards and lack empowerment aspirations as opposed to a Western (civilised) society. Here, Scharff (2011) is suggesting that Western women embrace postfeminist ideals (mainly that they are beyond needing feminism) based on the assumption and stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and marginalised, thus creating a problematic (and false) binary in which 'they' still need feminism, but 'we' do not. Interestingly, however, Scharff does not account for how postfeminism influences Muslim women's lives.

To date, postfeminism has largely ignored the voices and experiences of racialised minorities (Ratna, 2018). Critical scholarship on postfeminism is primarily focused on how such discourses are impacting the lives of young, White, middle-class, and heterosexual Western women (Gill, 2017; Tasker & Negra, 2007). There are a few notable exceptions. For example, in her research on Nigerian women living in Lagos, Dosekun (2015) suggests the postfeminist sensibility was strong among her participants where they did not experience Western feminist politics. Dosekun (2015) also criticised the overwhelming scholarship on postfeminism focusing on the European/North America world and argues for more research that considers how such discourses press upon the lives of women in other parts of the world. Another exception is Butler's (2013) research, which applies an intersectional approach to postfeminism by examining ethnicity and sexuality in American music culture. She discusses Beyoncé (African American singer), Rihanna (Barbadian singer and fashion designer), and Jennifer Lopez (Puerto Rican American singer, actress, and fashion designer), who are prominent Black/Latina figures, explaining their approach to sexuality through a postfeminist lens. Ratna (2018) addresses the importance of postfeminism neglecting the voices of women of colour in the contemporary context, suggesting that scholars "become epistemologically uncertain, querying slippages in conceptual meaning and application, and that new lessons may be gleaned from past, present, and different uses of Black feminist thinking (Carter-Francique, 2017, cited in Ratna)" (p. 198). In the sporting context, Samie and Toffoletti (2018) provide a different narrative of Muslim athletes by

examining media representation of Muslim sportswomen at the Olympic games in the context of postfeminist discourses of success and achievement.

Media, sport, and cultural studies scholars have all drawn upon postfeminism to explore the digital lives of women and practices of self-presentation on social media. Arguably, an intersectional understanding is needed for this research to help further connect discussions of postfeminism to race, ethnicity, religion, class, and nationality and how oppressive power structures overlap and operate.

As various social media and sport scholars have revealed, digital technologies allow users to potentially (re)imagine, (re)create, and challenge narratives. This is especially the case for marginalised populations (e.g., women of colour, people of colour) seeking to challenge dominant discourses and create space to represent their identities in ways of their choosing (Leurs, 2012; Mann, 2014). With this project focusing on Muslim sportswomen's use of social media for personal, social, sporting, and political purposes, I am interested in the importance of various strands of feminist scholarship to facilitate new understandings of Muslim women's engagement in digital spaces, including postfeminism and fourth wave feminism.

Intersectional fourth wave feminism

With this project focusing on Muslim sportswomen's use of social media for personal, social, sporting, and political purposes, intersectional fourth wave feminism is needed for facilitating new understandings of Muslim women's engagement in digital spaces. According to Parry, Johnson, and Wagler (2018), "the fourth wave feminist action has largely been facilitated by technological mobilization" (p. 6). As Zimmerman (2017) states, Twitter is an important tool for fourth wave feminists because the platform allows for content to be shared quickly and easily at the same time; it is a tool for utilising online/offline activism. For example, the use of #hashtags can quickly circulate content to a large number of individuals, and this has great social, cultural and political potential (Morrison, 2019; Soucie, Parry, & Cousineau, 2018; Zimmerman, 2017). Therefore, "intersectionality is now the overriding principle among today's [fourth wave]

feminists” (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 54; Barry, 2013; Parry et al., 2018) enabling them to theorise tweets and hashtags to identify and challenge power dynamics and inequalities that occur online and offline.

As previously discussed, intersectionality is more than a theoretical framework, and the “intersectional identities of women of colour” who do not neatly fit into rigid, predesignated categories of identity within oppressive systems get further marginalised (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243). A key issue for intersectionality is that of difference, for instance, race over gender gets prioritised over other categories (e.g., religion, class, sexuality). The same occurs on social media; such as the case with the #Bringbackourgirls (the emphasis on the ‘our’) movements which call for social change, however, marginalised voices get silenced or ignored (Loken, 2014; Loza, 2014). Loken (2014) speaks to activism that privileges certain ideals (Western) and “demonstrates the colonial gaze, enabling the claiming of unidentified African women as indispensably ours while also constituting them as interchangeable others” (p. 1101). For example, the #Bringbackourgirls hashtag started in the West, which exoticised and homogenised the Nigerian girls into the “liberal feminist salvation” (Khoja-Moolji, 2015, p. 347) narrative of ‘saving the Other’.

Online space has provided opportunities for women of colour to express viewpoints, especially at times when mainstream media has ignored the voices of women of colour (Dreher, McCallumb, & Wallerc, 2016; Jackson 2016; Morrison, 2019). However, some individuals claim differences are ‘toxic’ effect in online feminist spaces (Goldberg, 2014; Greenfield, 2014; Murphy, 2013). For example, women of colour who call out patriarchy, misogyny, sexism or other forms of oppression such as White privilege and/or White feminism are blamed for disrupting and even transgressing the feminism in the digital world (Milstein, 2013; Thelandersson, 2014). The attacks toward differences mean that the voices of women of colour “pose a considerable threat to mainstream feminism (emphasising the former’s influence and power)” (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 62) and are labelled ‘toxic’ for addressing discrimination. These actions silence marginalised voices and stabilise “a hegemonic version of online feminism” (Risam, 2015, p. 6).

Kaba and Smith (2014) state that “the only way we can avoid toxicity is to actually end White supremacy, settler colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy” (p. 1). Women of colour not only encounter inequalities offline but also online (Kaba & Smith, 2014; Lawson, 2018). For example, Leslie Jones, an American Comedian temporarily was forced off Twitter due to an onslaught of racist and sexist attacks by alt-right individuals (White supremacists) (Lawson, 2018). Despite the growth and proliferation of online activism, power imbalances in offline spaces are reproduced online and where privileged voices narrate or speak for/over marginalised voices (Lawson, 2018; Thelandersson, 2014; Zimmerman, 2017). It is an important and necessary requirement for fourth wave feminists to “identify privilege, difference, representation, and racism from an intersectional approach” (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 64; Barry, 2013) to address online inequalities.

Social media allows for people to connect, and brings visibility and raises awareness of topics or issues that may get ignored or overlooked, and women of colour are radically disrupting and changing feminist politics on social media (Love, 2019; Morrison, 2019; Okolosie, 2014). For fourth wave feminism to move forward, various scholars agree that commitment and solidarity needs to occur (Barry, 2013; Kendall, 2013; Milstein, 2013; Zimmerman, 2017). Kendall (2013) and Milstein (2013) provide a list that ensures solidarity and movement towards an intersectional approach to digital practices. They state that White feminists need to: (1) listen as opposed to become defensive or speak for women of colour, who are more than capable of speaking for themselves, (2) learn about different viewpoints, (3) check own actions and call out derogatory actions, and (4) understand that goals with the feminist community will differ. In this process, it is crucial to remain self-reflexive and vigilant to differences, and being open to adopting new practices of intersectionality is vital, especially in digital spaces (Barry; 2013; Zimmerman, 2017). However, the issue of ‘solidarity’ as mentioned by Zimmerman (2017) as a central aspect of fourth wave feminism may be challenging given the diversity of women’s experiences based on issues that are important to them, such as political and cultural struggles.

Zimmerman (2017) focuses on an intersectional fourth wave feminist approach to Twitter. However, the same can be applied to other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. While the scholarship surrounding fourth wave feminist intersectionality is limited, the approach offers much promise. As Parry et al. (2018) state, “noticeably absent from the discussion of existing literature on fourth wave feminism thus far are the voices and research contributions of leisure scholars” (p. 9). Therefore, an intersectional approach to analysing different social media platforms could be an important contribution to sport and media literature.

Into the borderlands: Navigating interstitial spaces of culture, sport, and social media

The previous section drew upon key literature around sport, culture, gender, and media along with various strands of feminism to aid in understanding the intricate lives of Muslim sportswomen. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the importance of the concept of interstitial spaces. Safi (2018) shared an excerpt from a Muslim mystic: “all your life you’ve been reading scripture as black ink written on a white page. I read the blank spaces in between.” These blank spaces are just as important as the written word. Importantly, these spaces are not only physical spaces but also conceptual social-cultural spaces which need to go beyond categories, acknowledging different ways of being and interacting with the digital world. This thesis explores the ways Muslim sportswomen navigate between religious, culture, sporting, and digital spaces.

The interstitial spaces are moments of transit where space, time, and identity, create a complex sense of being and interacting with the world (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994). Many scholars have theorised the concept of in-between, liminality and being, between spaces. However, for this research, I draw upon Bhabha (1994), Anzaldúa (1987), and Puwar (2004) to explore the notion of ‘in betweenness’. According to Bhabha (1994), “the realm of the beyond” (p. 1) or Third Space, is a political and cultural site of resistance. Bhabha (1994) further states that the Third Space could be an amalgam where opposing cultural identities join and intermingle and an area for “elaborating strategies of selfhood—that initiate new signs of

identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (pp. 1–2). At the same time, it “carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37).

Anzaldúa (1987) in *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* also speaks to the notion of the ‘in-betweenness’ or what she refers to as ‘the borderlands’, discussing her life growing up on the border of Mexico and Texas. The borderlands explores how one navigates both a real space (Mexico-Texas border) and conceptual identities; “hay veces que no soy nada ni nadie, pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy” (sometimes I am no one and nothing, but even when I am not, I am) (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 1029). Anzaldúa (1987) challenges the binary notion of identity by speaking to the Mestiza consciousness, where the multiple identities remain but are enhanced into a new entity. Recently, Chicana feminist scholars have started to incorporate “cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities - that is, living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers” into the Mestiza/Chicana consciousness (Bernal, 2001, p. 626). Similar to Bhabha (1994), Anzaldúa (1987) also speaks to “juggling cultures” (p. 87) and her work also draws on intersectionality where the Mestiza/Chicana identity intersects at multiple forms of oppression around race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Bhabha (1994) primarily envisioned the concept of Third Space for political resistance. However, it is important to extend and explore other spaces, such as feelings, emotions and affect. The concept of borderlands is inclusive not only of geographical spaces but emotional, and/or psychological spaces occupied by Mestizas (Elenes, 1997). The interstitial spaces are moments of transit where space, time, and identity create a complex sense of being and interacting with the world (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994). Puwar (2004) explores the concept of ‘space invaders’ to reveal how women and people of colour navigate institutional spaces of Parliament, the art world, and academic institutions which privilege White male bodies. The Third Space (Bhabha, 1994), Mestiza/Chicana consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987), and space invaders (Puwar, 2004) will allow me to better

understand the lives of Muslim sportswomen and pay close attention to how they navigate the between-spaces of sport, culture, and religion on social media.

Chapter summary

Intersectionality is rooted in Black feminism, postcolonial feminism, Chicana/Latin feminism, and Native/Indigenous feminism. Each of these approaches seeks to address the multiple forms of power and oppression which may be invisible if only considering a single axis identity (Collins 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; McCall 2005; Mohanty, 2003; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; Smith, 1999). Intersectionality has been utilised by a number of feminist sport scholars (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; McDonald & Shelby, 2018; Ratna, 2013; 2014; Watson, 2018) and is vital in my analysis of Muslim sportswomen's social media usage because it encourages an investigation focused on the intersections of gender, religion, ethnicity, and explores how old and new forms of power structures impact the experiences of marginalised communities.

Bhabha (1994) developed the concept of the Third Space, an in-between space, an ambivalent site for designating identity, where experiences, social interactions and shared discourses are negotiated, merged and reconstructed. Chicana studies, especially the work of Anzaldúa (1987) can also be helpful to this research which sits at the intersection of sport, media, and Muslim sportswomen. The in-between/the borderlands are not bare; these interstitial spaces hold meaning which this thesis will explore through the voices of the participants.

Hall (1996b) encourages one to think “at or beyond the limit” (p. 259) which is what I undertook in this thesis drawing from a range of feminist theories and literature and not limiting myself to one concept. In the following chapters, I draw upon key feminist and cultural studies literature around sport, gender, and media in dialogue with the concepts of surveillance, identity, self-promotion/branding, and digital space invaders to explore the various forms of power operating within social media and Muslim sportswomen's agency and politics. In so doing, I take up a feminist approach to develop intersectional digital and feminist knowledge by

ensuring Muslim women's voices and experiences are centralised rather than alienated or silenced. In the following chapter, I detail the methods employed to understand Muslim sportswomen's complex and nuanced experiences of using social media.

CHAPTER 3:

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY: EXAMINING THE ONLINE LIVES OF MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN

In my efforts to understand the complexities of how Muslim sportswomen are using social media to share aspects of their lives with their national and international followers, I took inspiration from a growing body of research on digital methods. Digital methods have evolved rapidly over the past decade, with researchers across an array of disciplines discussing, debating, and developing a variety of qualitative methods to understand human interactions in online spaces. Social media are socio-technical systems that are an amalgam of both social interactions—creating new environments for social engagements and exchanges—as well as technological platforms that create new forms of identity expression, connection, and change (Benjamin, 2019a; boyd & Ellison, 2010; Cottom, 2016; Langlois & Elmer, 2013; Leurs, 2012; Trussell, Apgar, & Kovac, 2019).

With this thesis sitting at the intersections of sport, media, and culture, a feminist digital ethnographic approach offers multiple layers of insights into how Muslim sportswomen interact in both offline and online spaces. According to Hine (2000; 2015), Murthy (2008; 2011), Hjorth, Horst, Galloway, and Bell (2017), and Underberg and Zorn (2013), digital ethnography is a comprehensive and pragmatic method to use when examining individual's use of social media platforms. A digital ethnographic approach has the potential to give researchers access to participants and groups they might not otherwise have access, and in some cases may enable 'de-marginalization' of participant voices (Murthy, 2008; Trussell et al., 2019) thus making topics that were previously challenging to study more transparent (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Hine, 2000; 2015; Hjorth et al., 2017; Sandvig & Hargittai, 2015). de Jong (2015) encourages scholars to "reimagine the ways online spaces may be incorporated as sites for methodologies" (p. 212). Therefore, a digital ethnographic approach will allow for existing questions to be innovatively explored or shed light

on new realities (Hjorth et al., 2017; Murthy, 2011; Trussell et al., 2019) such is the case for Muslim sportswomen's online experiences.

In this chapter, I discuss my research design, outline the recruitment process of participants, data collection, and analysis. I first begin with an overview of the importance of this research methodology and justification for using digital ethnography. Second, I discuss my reasons for using semi-structured interviews and the rationale for monitoring mainstream media for events, which aided to understand the participants' background. As an individual who identifies as a Muslim sportswoman, the insider status gave me access to my participants' digital and offline lives at the same time it also presented some challenges which will be addressed in this chapter. Therefore, throughout this chapter, my role as a researcher will be discussed and how my position as a Muslim sportswoman informed the project. In so doing, I explain how I negotiated my position as an 'insider' and 'outsider' for this research. Third, I discuss the ethical issues I encountered and some of the strategies developed in addressing these issues. The chapter concludes with some comments on my approaches to analysing data.

Research paradigm

As a Muslim feminist, I operate within a critical paradigm and incorporate a feminist approach that seeks to recognise the various ways Muslim sportswomen navigate online and offline power structures. Working within a critical paradigm, I wanted to understand and explain the realities of Muslim sportswomen through their experiences of using social media and how power operates in digital spaces. According to Guba and Lincoln's (1994) definition of a critical paradigm, "realities are shaped by categories of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, and then crystallized (reified) into a series of structures that are now (inappropriately) taken as 'real'" (p. 110). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), a feminist approach not only embraces various theories which critique power structures, but also challenge and/or uncover oppressive systems of powers which operate across a range of structures to eventually bring about restitution or positive changes.

The previous chapter provided an overview of key feminist literature working to address women's experiences in digital spaces and navigating interstitial spaces. A feminist approach allows me to understand how my participants are negotiating and navigating power relations and differences within culture and society. The representations of Muslim sportswomen have often been stereotypical, and this research seeks to provide space for Muslim sportswomen's voices and lived experiences of how they negotiate their cultural, social, and sporting bodies in digital areas, and ultimately offer new narratives to challenge dominant and stereotypical representations.

Digital ethnography: A feminist approach

To understand and contest the problematic discourses surrounding Muslim women, this study adopts a feminist approach to digital ethnography. A key term to consider in the use of digital ethnography is the word "ethnography". Historically, ethnography is viewed as a holistic approach since it allows researchers to immerse themselves in the field to understand the cultural context in which individuals are embedded (Gobo, 2008). Digital ethnography encompasses similar practices as traditional ethnography, but applies and modifies these for online spaces (Hine, 2000; 2015, Murthy, 2008). Therefore, methods such as observations, interviews, and media analysis are extended to the online realm (Hine, 2015; Murthy, 2008; 2011). The digital space is comprised of images, videos, texts, and provides insights into interactions of individuals, communities, across countries and geographies (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz, 2012; Hine, 2015; Murthy, 2008; 2011; Underberg & Zorn, 2013). As McGannon, McMahon, and Gonsalves (2017) state, platforms such as "blogs are advantageous to study because they offer researchers an unobtrusive method to gain access to naturalistic narratives which participants use to construct their identities in a spontaneously generated format" (p. 127). Furthermore, "old methods" are inadequate to capture the ever-changing online world (Bruce & Antunovic, 2018, p. 263).

Sport sociologists have also adopted digital methods to contextualize how sportswomen are engaging with social media (Chawansky, 2016; Hammersley &

Atkinson, 2007; MacKay & Dallaire, 2013b; Olive, 2015; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2013a; 2013b; Phoenix, 2010; Thorpe, 2016; Thorpe, Toffoletti & Bruce, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). For example, Bruce and Antunovic (2018) encourage feminist sport media scholars to consider new methods to engage with; calling for a shift:

[Away] from one-way, limited-dialogue, mainstream media-produced media texts, to fleeting, multi-vocal, dialogic and increasingly audience-produced material, on both mainstream online media and user produced sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat. We propose that we are in a new “moment” where old methods are insufficient to capture what is happening. (p. 263).

Importantly, the technological advancements have changed social life in many parts of the world, requiring digital ethnographers to adapt and continually reconceptualise digital ethnography. As Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern (2015) argue, digital spaces “present rich and complicated environments for feminist research...[and] have the potential to politicize everyday life in new ways” (p. 527). Ringrose (2018) also encourages scholars to explore “digital platforms like Twitter to investigate power, privilege and positionality” (p. 654). I take cue from Bruce and Antunovic (2018), McGannon et al. (2017), Morrow et al. (2015), Ringrose (2018) and employ digital ethnography to comprehend the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen.

Participant recruitment

To capture the diverse experiences of Muslim sportswomen, I used targeted and snowball sampling to recruit participants. In the past decade, I have worked on several sports for development and sports diplomacy projects involving Muslim and non-Muslim sportswomen, and I drew upon and utilised these connections. I first used targeted sampling and approached individuals already known to me, asking them if they were interested in being a participant in the research and if they could help identify other Muslim sportswomen who may also be interested.

Simultaneously, I searched Instagram and Twitter hashtags (#) of sports (e.g., #basketball, #soccer), countries (e.g., #Saudi Arabia, #Indonesia) and words associated with being Muslim (e.g., #muslimwomen, #hijab). I also looked at the @ symbol in photos of accounts I was following or came across in my search.⁸ On Facebook, I contacted administrators of Muslim sportswomen groups and pages, along with other groups involved in sports (e.g., women in sports network, sociology of sports networks). The initial contacts occurred through the private messaging feature asking if I could share my call for participants on their page (Appendix A). While many expressed interest by responding to my recruitment posts on social media, there was often a delay during the follow-up phase of getting the consent forms back. A specific issue I encountered was working within the privacy functions of all the social media platforms. I could easily send direct messages (DM) on Instagram, Facebook and some Twitter⁹ profiles, however, some would not receive the messages since they would get filtered into “other” (similar to a spam folder) box.

An issue I had to keep in mind with targeted sampling was that the participants came from a similar sporting background as myself, and thus to ensure a diverse group I also used snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is an approach where a participant provides the researcher with the contact of another participant who in turn offers additional names (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). According to Atkinson and Flint (2001) and Browne (2005), snowball sampling allows researchers to target hidden, dispersed, and hard to reach populations and trust is essential to initiate contact. This approach allowed me to capture a globally dispersed group of participants who are active online. Browne (2005) used snowball sampling on social media to recruit LBGTQI¹⁰ communities. This approach allowed Browne (2005) to include individuals who were often ignored or disadvantaged and not part of her friendship circle. Similar sampling allowed me to gain access to participants from

⁸ The @ symbol is often used to tag individuals, organizations, and groups to share content or to gain additional followers.

⁹ On Twitter individuals can only send direct messages (DMs) to others according to privacy settings permitting DMs.

¹⁰ The acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex.

sports that I had limited or no connections in and even gave me access to some high-profile participants such as Olympians. A limitation with snowball sampling is that recommended participants overextend their network leading to an oversampling of a specific group (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Browne, 2005; Cohen & Arieli, 2011). To avoid this, I reached out to various Facebook groups, and individuals from diverse sporting backgrounds not limiting my recruitment to a particular sport, or just Muslim women in sports but extending to academic groups (e.g., sociology of sports Facebook groups) and sports foundations, such as the “Women Sports Foundation” or “Women in Sports” Facebook groups. This approach allowed me to reach different sporting disciplines and individuals from around the world.

Approximately 80 individuals either ‘liked’ my call for participants, retweeted or tagged others on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts. However, only 35 expressed initial interest and this number later decreased to 26. The decrease occurred post-Donald Trump’s 2017 presidential inauguration in which he introduced a racist and discriminatory executive order suspending the refugee assistance program and barring individuals from entering the United States coming from Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Somalia, Venezuela, and Yemen (Roberts, 2019). The legislature is titled, ‘Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States’, however, it is often referred to as the ‘Muslim Ban’ because it targets Muslim majority countries (Roberts, 2019). This directive not only created controversy but increased Islamophobic rhetoric and accelerated fear among many, such as the participants I was recruiting. Several participants who initially expressed interest no longer wanted to participate; others ignored my follow up messages. Despite the setback, I managed to recruit a diverse range of participants in the second call. During the additional recruitment phase, participants expressed interest in the study because they felt this research was even more important to show the diversity of Muslims. In the second round, I did not accept all participant requests, for example, in one of the Facebook groups which is mainly comprised of a specific sporting discipline. From that group, I only selected a handful to avoid overpopulation of a specific sport. To ensure a diverse sample, I kept the following criteria in mind: nationality, ethnicity, sporting disciplines, age, class, different levels of social media usage (from very active daily users to less frequent/occasional

users), and types of platforms they used, especially those who allowed me to observe their Snapchat, which is an extremely private platform. Through this process, I was able to recruit a diverse group of 26 different Muslim sportswomen.

Participant profiles

Upon receiving the completed consent forms from the Muslim sportswomen, I observed a total of 50 different social media profiles, which was inclusive of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. The participants are from a wide range of countries including Australia, Canada, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, New Zealand, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and United States. The sportswomen were ethnically (Arab, Bosnian, Indian, Pakistani, Palestinian, Persian, Somali, Sudanese) and racially diverse (Caucasian, Black, Asian, bi-racial). The diverse range of sporting experiences, identities, social media practices, and lived experiences contributed to the richness of the data. The sporting disciplines included combat sports (boxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, fencing, Thai boxing), action sports (surfing, climbing, snowboarding, mountaineering), team sports (basketball, soccer, netball), and fitness-focused sports (CrossFit, running, powerlifting). Furthermore, their participation in sports varied; some were non-competitive, but sports/physical activity was part of their routine, while others trained to compete at local, national, and international levels. The participants' socio-economic background ranged from working to upper class, the religious and cultural practices varied (e.g., some wore the hijab while others did not), and shared content and/or images in relation to being Black Muslim, South Asian Muslim, British Muslim, American Muslim, or hijabi. Below I provide an Instagram-style snapshot of all the women taking part in this study and which social media profiles I observed of each participant (Figure 3.1).

Instagram



0 posts

0 followers

26 following

Edit Profile

Nida Ahmad: PhD student at the University of Waikato. Endurance Athlete | Coffee addict.



Rania is a 32-year-old hijabi competitive [#combatsports](#) woman from North America with ethnic roots from the Middle East and North Africa. She works in higher education and competes at the national level.



*Asma is a 27-year-old hijabi [#basketball](#) player from Europe who is of Sudanese ancestry and works in the arts industry.



Khadija is a 30-year-old hijabi [#footballer](#) from Oceania. She is of Middle Eastern descent and works in the sports for development sector.



Iman is a 33-year-old lawyer, a mother who occasionally plays [#netball](#). She lives in Europe but was raised in East Asia and her family is from the Middle East.



Saman is a 33-year-old mother who plays [#hockey](#) at the national and international level in South Asia. She is the CEO of a sports academy which empowers young girls to participate in sports.



Dina is a 30-year-old [#mountaineer](#) from the Middle East region who works in marketing. She is training for the Seven Summits.



Noor is a 23-year-old competitive [#combatsports](#) woman from the Middle East who competes at the national and international level. She is an active user of all social media platforms.



Widad is a 25-year-old hijabi sportswoman from Europe who plays [#football](#) recreationally. She is of African ancestry who selectively uses social media.



Lamya is a 34-year-old recreational participant in [#actionsports](#) who lives in the Middle East and runs her family business.



Dalia is a 27-year-old [#mountaineer](#) and fitness trainer who lives in the Middle East.



Maria is 34-year-old hijabi [#powerlifter](#), coach and who lives in North America.



Hiba is a 29-year-old hijabi [#Olympian](#) in the field of athletics from the Middle East. Who is expecting her first child.



<p>Reem is a 22-year-old hijabi university student who is a #skater and lives in the Middle East.</p> <p> </p>	<p>*Mona^m is a 36-year-old #mountaineer from the Middle East currently studying abroad in Europe.</p> <p>  </p>	<p>*Haya is a 30-year-old hijabi #CrossFit competitor, mom, coach, and owns her gym and lives in the Middle East.</p> <p></p>	<p>Batul is 27-year-old a #cyclist from South Asia.</p> <p>  </p>
<p>Rana is a 22-year-old hijabi, student and is an active #combatsports woman living in North America. Her family migrated from Eastern Europe when she was young.</p> <p>   </p>	<p>Manaar is 38-years-old, a mother who plays #football recreationally. She wears the hijab and works in the sports media industry in North America & is of South Asian descent.</p> <p>   </p>	<p>*Mona^s is a 33-year-old a competitive snowboarder, living in the Middle East. She is a marketing specialist for an outdoors company. #actionsports</p> <p> </p>	<p>Sarah is a 33 year-old #CrossFit athlete, trainer and business owner living in the Middle East.</p> <p> </p>
<p>*Yara is a 24-year-old competitive athlete in #combatsports who trains and competes at the national level. She was born in the Middle East and immigrated to North America when she was very young.</p> <p> </p>	<p>*Zenith is a 22-year-old #motocross sportswoman from South Asia. She recently graduated from university with a business and marketing background.</p> <p>  </p>	<p>Nadia is a 28-year-old who lives in South Asia. She recreationally plays #badminton and #basketball. She works in the tech industry.</p> <p> </p>	<p>Melek is a 35-year-old retired #basketball player from North Africa. She is the founder of a sports organisation for girls. Melek lived and studied aboard in Oceania.</p> <p> </p>
<p>Nayla is a 26-year-old competitive #combatsports woman from North America, who completes at the national level. She works in the tech industry.  </p>		<p>*Yasmin is a 38-year-old mother, a coach and #climber. She lives in the Middle East. </p>	



* - Indicates participant provided approval to share the first name with their image

Figure 3.1: Social media profiles of participants

The Instagram style snapshot includes 16 Muslim women who recreationally participate in sports and/or physical activity, and 10 sportswomen who compete at the national and international level. Some of the participants provided approval to share their images and first name and the ethical reasoning will be discussed later in this chapter (pp. 87-88). Those who permitted me to use their first name have the asterisk symbol (*) by their name. Additionally, two of the participants have the same first name (Mona), similar last names, are in similar sporting fields and from the same region. When discussing these two participants in this research, Mona, the mountaineer will be referred to as Mona^m and Mona the snowboarder will be referred to as Mona^s.

The participants' audience numbers also varied across each platform. On Instagram the audience numbers ranged between 343 to 23.4K Instagram, 160 to 4K on Facebook, and Twitter the range was 118 to 16K. Only two participants had the blue checkmark on their Twitter profile. The checkmark informs users on Twitter that the "account of public interest is authentic" (Twitter, 2019, n/p) and signal's 'elite' status. Lastly, Snapchat does not allow me to view the participants' audience numbers, however, the interviews revealed the platform was reserved for close family members and friends ranging from 10 to 50 followers. The specificities of each platform will be discussed in detail in the 'Digital observation' section of this chapter. The literature which has examined sportswomen's use of social media often looks at elite/celebrity athletes who have a large number of followers (Chawanksy, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). This research extends to incorporate the voices and experience of Muslim sportswomen who are elite athletes but do not necessarily have millions of followers, along with other more recreational sportswomen who use social media to share aspects of their sporting and cultural identities.

It is also important to speak about the sexuality of the participants. I did not specifically ask for a participant's sexuality to be revealed nor did any participant disclose it to me during interviews, or on their social media platforms. I tried to create a space for participants to express themselves, however, there is sensitivity

on enquiring about one's sexuality in certain cultures and religions; this is certainly the case in Islam. There is often a stigma around sexuality not just at the global level but among different societies, cultures and religions. For example, Queer Muslims who disclose their sexuality to family and/or local or national community encounter great risks of physical violence and isolation (El-Khatib, 2011; Yip, 2004). Moreover, Queer Muslims are also largely invisible due to public debates around Islam and homosexuality which often creates aggression towards them (El-Khatib, 2011). The fear of isolation, violence and aggression may limit Queer Muslims from coming forward to take part in studies or to make themselves even more visible and at risk on social media.

In my observation of the participant's social media accounts, heterosexuality seemed apparent. According to Zafeeruddin (1996), heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of relationship within Islamic cultures which is often associated with marriage and family. Furthermore, some scholars such as Bouhdiba (1998) endorses a view in which Islam is exclusively heterosexual. However, not all Muslims agree with such interpretations, though, it is important to recognize that such views exist. Nine of the participants are married which was revealed either in the interviews and or online where a handful shared images of their husbands. One participant spoke about her engagement to a male individual she met at university. Additionally, only one stated she was not married or in any form of a relationship in our discussion, and the other 15 did not disclose their relationship status during their interviews or online. Images with husbands and children that some of the participants shared, reflects the heterosexual norm of Islamic cultures, but could also relate to concept of the 'apologetic behaviour' of female athletes who stress the "desire for heterosexual relationships by talking about and interacting with boyfriends, husbands, and children" (Malcom, 2003, p. 1388; Davis-Delano, Pollock, & Ellsworth Vose, 2009; Hardy, 2015). The participants in this research emphasised their sporting identities, however, 'female apologetic behaviour' (e.g., emphasising motherhood, wife) were apparent in some of the images.

Digital observation

I conducted an eight-month-long digital ethnography of 50 different social media profiles across four different platforms (Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). To date, the use of Twitter by sportswomen (or athletes in general) has dominated sports literature (Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio & Walsh, 2014; Cooky & Antunovic, 2018; Hutchins, 2011). However, the scholarship is increasingly addressing how sportswomen are using Instagram (Chawansky, 2016; Geurin, 2017; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Pegoraro, Comeau, & Frederick, 2018; Smith & Sanderson, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). As Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) note, engaging with other visual platforms such as Instagram may provide a better understanding of how athletes use different visual strategies for self-presentation. To expand on the sport and social media literature, this project extended to include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Below I offer insight into the functionality of each platform to fully comprehend the different uses of social media by Muslim sportswomen.

“Connect with people from around the world”: Facebook

When Facebook launched in 2004, it quickly became one of the most popular social media platforms (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). It currently has over a billion daily active users who access the platform either on a mobile device or computer (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Earlier literature on Facebook found the primary motive for individuals to use the platform was to stay connected with friends, family, and acquaintances, and to maintain social ties (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) which corresponds with Facebook’s login page, “connect with people from around the world” (Facebook, 2019). These online connections enhanced their sense of closeness and relationship quality (Lin & Utz, 2015; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Some researchers found Facebook contributed to narcissism and self-esteem issues (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Fox & Moreland, 2015; Mehdizadeh, 2010), with others exploring how individuals use Facebook as a tool for self-representation (Yang & Brown, 2016).

In 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram for \$1 billion (US), which allowed users to share their Instagram posts on multiple platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Luckerson, 2016). Facebook's acquisition of Instagram was a business decision aimed to eliminate competitors and gain access to more data on users. Big data is a topic that is trending among scholars who are examining how corporations are using 'data' to capture, store and analyse behaviours of users which can be used for various reasons (e.g., marketing, surveillance) (Lupton, 2015; Slaker, 2017; Tufekci, 2014). Facebook continues to acquire other platforms such as WhatsApp and Oculus (technology focusing on virtual reality) (Wagner, 2017). These movements by Facebook are a form of digital imperialism, to expand into digital territories through economic gains and control over user's data. For example, according to *Business Insider* (2018), Instagram is now worth more than \$100 billion (US). When users abandon Facebook for other platforms like Instagram, which some of the participants in my research did, however, they had not entirely left Facebook. Everyday users may not be concerned around the mergers of social media platforms, however, its effect may impact users in the future. Additionally, recent security breach where 50 million Facebook users' personal information was compromised (Matsakis & Lapowsky, 2018) is a concern that users should be wary of along with privacy, surveillance, and online abuse which will be discussed in the following chapter.

“See photos and videos of your friends”: Instagram

Instagram is a mobile-based photo-sharing platform that allows users to capture 'their life moments' through images or 30-second videos, sharing this content instantaneously with their audience, while also linking it to other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). On Instagram's (2019) home page it states "see photos and videos of your friends" allowing users to view, comment or like content, and with recent updates, users can bookmark a post. Individuals have the choice to make their account public or private and send direct messages to other users even if their account is private. Users can also share their Instagram posts across multiple platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. With over 500 million users, Instagram is among the most popular social media platforms (Instagram, 2019). It is particularly popular among young adults (Duggan, 2015)

and has been identified as the fastest growing social media platform (Lunden, 2014) which is also widely used by females (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Like Facebook, Instagram also maintains a form of social connection (Tobin & Chulpaiboon, 2016). Additionally, for athletes who use Instagram, they do so to share life stories through photos and interact with their online audience (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a).

“See what’s happening in the world right now!”: Twitter

Twitter is considered a microblogging platform (Hutchins, 2011; Java, Song, Finin, & Tseng, 2007), where users can immediately “see what is happening in the world” (Twitter, 2019) and interact with their audience using 280-character tweets (originally it was a 140-character limit). Microblogging is a smaller version of blogging with short bursts of content that is shared quickly through tweets. Tweets are made up of texts, emojis, images, GIFs, and hashtags. Through hashtags (#) and retweets (RT), tweets can quickly reach a broad audience (Gilkerson & Berg, 2017). In regards to relationships, unlike Facebook, a user (tweeps) can follow others on Twitter but being followed does not necessitate reciprocation, which is also true for Instagram. If you are following someone on Twitter, you will see their tweets on your timeline. Another common practice with Twitter is threading. If a user wants to share more than 280 characters tweet they will thread (or link) their tweets together and usually start the content with ‘thread’ followed by ‘1’ (sometimes seen as 1/2 or 1/3 for a two or three part thread) so the readers can read the thread chronologically, if desired.

“Sharing spontaneous moments”: Snapchat

Snapchat is a mobile-based social media app typically viewed as a “lightweight channel for sharing spontaneous experiences with trusted ties” (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2016, p. 956). Users can send specified length (one to ten seconds) ‘snaps’ in the form of text, image, and video which they can add filters to before sharing with other Snapchat users (Colao, 2014). A unique aspect of Snapchat is that the content disappears after it has been viewed and is no longer accessible to the receiver (Waddell, 2016). Snaps can also be sent privately to other

users (similar to direct messaging on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). However, despite a promise of instantaneous and fleeting messages, information can still be retrieved and stored. Recipients can take screenshots of the snap, but the sender will be notified when a snap is saved (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). Snapchat recently teamed up with Amazon allowing users to purchase items they “see in the real world” by simply snapping an image of the item they see in public through their Snapchat app (Frier & Soper, 2018, p. 1).

The reason I incorporated a range of social media platforms was to capture the breadth of the participant’s experiences. Instagram and Snapchat are mainly visual platforms and by including them in this research, these platforms may be “critical to story-telling and meaning-making” for the participants in this research (Highfield & Leaver, 2016, p. 53). The visual and everyday images are important, which also helps contextualise and comprehend cultures and individuals (DeLuca, 2006; Stafford, 1998). Additionally, digital technologies such as cameras, phones, and photo blogs are preferred idiom for the new generation (van Dijck, 2008). The “pixelated images, like spoken words, circulate between individuals, and groups to establish and reconfirm bonds” (van Dijck, 2008, p. 62). The role of images is not merely a part of everyday life, “it is everyday life” (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 1). The exchange of text, images, and videos are essential social online currencies for individuals (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012). As Phoenix (2010) states, images “also act as powerful indicators regarding the multiple meanings embedded within our culture” (p. 93). To capture the diversity and richness of the multiple ways Muslim sportswomen are using social media, I extended it to include not only text but visual representations to address my research question on how are Muslim sportswomen using social media to self-represent aspects of their sporting, social, and cultural identities. This allowed me to understand how they were sharing and re-appropriating content, especially with visual features like Instagram stories and Snaps, even GIFs, memes, and emojis. Furthermore, during the digital observation period, I also examined comments and likes from followers to capture emerging themes to aid in the understanding of social media engagement from various levels.

Lurking in the digital spaces

There are some critiques pertinent to digital ethnography, such as the relationship between researcher and participants, the power of the researcher to represent their participants in particular ways, and issues of overt/covert researcher positioning. In the case of digital ethnography, ‘lurking’, which occurs in digital spaces and typically means that an individual who observes online content for research purpose, but does not participate or engage (e.g., does not post in online message groups or chats) in online spaces is a debated topic. Especially since some online information is accessible to the public and the information can be accessed by anyone without consent. Denzin (1999) ‘lurked’ in online spaces without permission because of its “uniquely unobtrusive nature” (Kozinets, 2002, p. 65). However, more recently, ethical concerns have been raised about ‘lurking’ and the rights of those being observed for research purposes (Ma). In acknowledgement of such ethical considerations, I was overt about my researcher role in any interactions on social media spaces, and before any online observation, I gained consent from all the participants with the sportswomen choosing which platforms I could follow for this research.

Additionally, I created new social media accounts specifically for this research, and while I was observing the participants’ platforms, I refrained from ‘liking’ and ‘commenting’ on images and tweets for the safety of all the participants, and to ensure clarity of my role as a researcher. There was a worry that if I ‘liked’ or ‘commented’ on images, both the individual posting the comments/images and other followers may not know if I am doing so as a fellow ‘follower’ or as a researcher. Often in social media platforms, followers can see ‘likes’, ‘comments’, ‘shares’, and/or friends list. Therefore, I avoided being active on my researcher account to be more mindful of ethical issues and critical of the process of examining the digital lives of the sportswomen.

Social media platforms are dynamic spaces, and I needed to be flexible in relation to how I collected the data. As Markham and Buchanan (2012) state, “rather than one size-fits-all pronouncement, ethical decision-making is best approached

through the application of practical judgment attentive to the specific context” (p. 4). Keeping these ethical issues at the forefront and safeguarding participants’ privacy was of the utmost importance which I adopted according to the ever-changing environment of social media. An issue I encountered was some participants discovered my personal (not research) social media accounts which are open to the public (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) and started following me. Keeping my researcher role in mind, I changed privacy settings by altering the security settings on my social media accounts to private and limited posting and sharing content during this research.

During my digital observation period between January and August 2017, I spent between two and four hours a day immersed in the online environment and observing the participants content and activity. Initially, the observations took place in the mornings (New Zealand time starting around seven in the morning, which would be an early afternoon in the United States, evening in Europe and late evening in the Middle East and North Africa). Due to various locations of my participants, I also made efforts to observe their online activity during their day time zones, which were my evenings. The reasoning was some participants were posting on Snapchat and/or Instagram stories, which have a time limit for the content to be viewed. Similarly, with Twitter, content is moving fast and can get lost in the stream of tweets and retweets. There were some occasions where social media activity declined, which was due to the fact some of the sportswomen were travelling, school (exams), sports competition, even one stated in her post that she was taking a break from social media for a week, and lastly, Ramadan (a religious Holy month for Muslims). During the month of Ramadan, Muslims are required to abstain from eating and drinking along with other activities from dawn until dusk and focus on increased worship and spiritual reflection. Also, a time where the Muslim ummah is strengthened due to the solidarity of Ramadan. Additionally, some Muslims also limit their social media activity and focus on religious obligations. The Holy month of Ramadan allowed me to limit my daily observations of the various social media accounts to every other day. Such intensive observations of over 50 different social media accounts caused social media fatigue, and Ramadan was convenient to help

address this exhaustion, which I started to encounter in the later stages of the digital observation phase.

Social media is inundated with information which is shared continuously (despite some content being 'fake') across a range of platforms and often similar content is being circulated. Since this project was observing Muslim sportswomen, the political climate was increasingly changing. There was a rise of hate crimes, Islamophobia, and world events where minorities (e.g., Muslims) were targeted (sometimes violently) offline and online. I found myself experiencing exhaustion from the constant stream of negative news being shared not only by the sportswomen but on my personal social media accounts. As someone who is an activist living in New Zealand, at times, I felt geographically distanced from my home country and the social and political issues which are important to me. As a result, I experienced some tensions on how to balance my personal and professional life online. Often, I choose not to go on my personal social media to avoid seeing similar content and limit overexposing myself to news/content which could impact my emotional well-being.

During the digital observations phase, I also switched between digital devices, primarily laptop and cell phone. The laptop allowed me to examine and capture most of the content on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. However, to capture Snaps and Insta stories, my phone was required. A dilemma I encountered was regarding how to capture content on Snapchat, as when a screenshot is captured, the poster is immediately notified. I had prior approval, but most of the content the participants were sharing were videos, and I initially had no way of capturing their stories. A few months into my digital observations phase, I discovered the app Mobzien, which is a free app that allows one to record the phone screen. I used Mobzien to record Snaps and Instagram stories, so I could examine them during data analysis, especially when I wanted to review videos again.

During my digital observations phase, I recorded and analysed over 1500 images and videos along with texts, and thus, it was essential to develop a systematic

approach for collating and archiving these materials. In so doing, I adapted Anderson's (2016) method for collecting Instagram images in which she examined the organisational ethics behind representing girls on social media (Anderson, 2016). To systematically collate and analyse her materials, Anderson created a table consisting of the following categories: caption of the photo, subject (who was in the picture and what they were doing), position (was it a candid or action shot), and settings (home or school) (Anderson, 2016).

Building upon Anderson's (2016) table, I created an excel and word document for field notes not only including types of photos (candid/action shots), the topic of the picture (e.g., workout routine), but also hashtags and key themes in the comments by followers. Initially, in the beginning stages of my digital observation, I populated the excel document with notes, however, with a large amount of incoming data, it started to get overwhelming. Therefore, I chose to focus on writing digital notes on Word or Google Docs, along with taking notes by hand and using the recorder on my phone to speak to what I was observing.

I also screengrabbed images and/or content, which helped inform the interviews, with some images used as prompts to explore why they posted it (e.g., political, cultural motive). The use of digital field notes, tagging, and online observations are important since they are inclusive of both online and offline groups (Hine, 2015). Additionally, I created folders for each month, and within that folder, each participant had a subfolder. These subfolders were comprised of images and videos from the participant's social media accounts and any notes describing the image and/or video. Upon completion of my data collection and during the writing phase of the thesis, I still had access to the participant's social media accounts.

In two instances, I wanted to review additional images and posts and learned that two of my participants were no longer active on specific platforms. Maria had deactivated/deleted her Facebook and Instagram accounts and Nayla only her Facebook, but her Snapchat remained active. I reached out to both of the participants to inquire the reasoning, however, I did not hear back from either. In

my interview with Maria, she spoke about temporarily deactivating her social media profiles in the past to take a break from the online world. As for Nayla, the discussion had revealed she rarely uses Facebook. Therefore, I speculate that since our conversation, Nayla ended up deactivating her account.

Semi-structured interviews

An issue often discussed with digital ethnography is that it may work to eliminate face-to-face interviews and observations (Hesse-Biber, 2011). However, Murthy (2013) and Chapman and Lahav (2008) each incorporated online interviews through Skype or Google Hangouts along with digital observations. Murthy (2013) combined digital and traditional ethnography to traverse geographically dispersed and diverse groups of participants to understand the transnational Muslim music subculture. Furthermore, Chapman and Lahav (2008) conducted research on social media platforms across three different countries (France, United States, and Korea) and combined it with traditional face-to-face semi-structured interviews and found the shared practices on social media appeared to be different across platforms and countries which were made apparent with their interviews.

According to DeVault and Gross (2007), feminist approaches to interviewing “have brought forward a wealth of previously told stories—those of marginalised peoples” (p. 173). A feminist approach to interviews provides a space for women’s voices to be heard and (re)define the meaning of social media practices in their own words. Feminist geographer Longhurst (2016) explores how Skype and other technologies are being used for interviews. In her book *Skype: Bodies, Screens, Space*, Longhurst (2016) speaks to the notion of in-betweenness of space where “people are reasonably familiar with technology but not overly so” (p. 117). Importantly, she addresses the significance of the visual aspect of digital technology which reorients individuals towards different ways of being in a space (Longhurst, 2016). This is particularly important to this research since among the feminist sport scholars who have conducted digital methods very few have interviewed the sportswomen alongside their media analysis.

The diverse body of literature around digital technology aided in the interview approach. Following digital observations of 26 Muslim sportswomen's social media profiles (across an array of platforms), I conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 of the original 26 (Appendix B). While all 26 were invited, six of the women failed to respond to my requests for an interview. This drop-out rate was expected and did not compromise the project. The digital observations of the six women who were unavailable (or unwilling) to be interviewed, were used in developing the key themes which were explored in more depth in the interviews.

The interviews were treated more as a conversation rather than a question and answer exchange (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Trussell et al., 2019). I also incorporated follow-up questions and probes around the same topic informed by Rubin and Rubin's (2011) interview guidelines. The participants were able to elaborate on questions asked during the interview and about their social media contents. DeVault and Gross (2007) provide strategic methods to achieve a collaborative relationship with a participant, such as maintaining contact with participants and strategically disclosing personal information. For example, I shared my motivations about my research project, and that the participants' contribution was valued as a collective part of seeking meaning and creating knowledge (Reinharz, 1992). According to Seidman (2006), researchers can potentially contaminate the data or distort the "interview and distract participants from their own experience to the interviewer's" (p. 95). However, I argue that sharing personal anecdotes about being a Muslim sportswoman, as well as practising reflexivity throughout the research process, served as important purpose, especially since Muslim women are often marginalised. This dynamic created rapport and space to share experiences as genuinely as possible. However, I was careful not to overshare my experiences.

The 20 interviewees were aged between 22-38 years and were dispersed globally, across a range of sports and social media use. The interviews ranged from one to three hours, with most conducted via digital platforms (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts). My skills in developing a strong rapport with the participants, active listening, along with emotional sensitivity (Reinharz, 1992), cultural understanding,

and netiquette¹¹, were valuable throughout the interview process. During the interview phase of the research, I encountered some challenges including working with interview times zones and work schedules which often meant I was conducting the interviews early in the morning or late in the evening. Issues surrounding technology, such as connectivity and unreliability of platforms also emerged during this phase. For example, Skype is not reliable in some countries due to firewalls, low connectivity (bandwidth), and even security (some participants did not find it secure). If, during the interview process, a connection was lost, or the audio connection was not clear, I would advise the participants to turn off the video to regain a clear connection and limit further technological distractions during the interview (e.g., re-establishing connections). Earlier in my interviews when I encountered issues with Skype, a participant recommended Zoom, which I later utilised in other interviews when Skype failed. The different interview platforms Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout, Facebook, and WhatsApp also allowed me to conduct interviews. I typically used the platform preferred by the participant.

All the interviews were conducted online, however, some preferred audio only (no video). Of the 20 interviews, 14 were video and six were audio. For example, Rana preferred Skype instead of in-person interview (me physically being there) because “in-person interviews” make her uncomfortable. Therefore, Rana preferred and even enjoyed the online interview because she was able to “relax” and answer questions from “the heart instead of thinking of other things.” Similarly, Longhurst (2016) also found some of her participants favouring Skype because the platform gave a “little bit of, not anonymity but ... distance” (p. 38). The semi-structured interviews were a valuable contribution to the project after prolonged digital observation to aid in understanding how Muslim sportswomen engage with social media.

¹¹ Netiquette means the researcher is “familiar with common language including jargon, abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and common grammatical rules” (Madge, 2007, p. 663).

Contextual analysis

To help contextualise the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of the participants' and inform my interviews, I also monitored national and international events online. For example, I created Google alerts about 'Muslim sportswomen' and 'Muslim women and social media' where daily links to news articles were sent to my email. Additionally, I also monitored Twitter's 'trending' section, which allowed me to stay informed on developing situations and events. During this phase, I captured key events which impacted, or were directly related to, this project (Figure 3.2):



Figure 3.2: Timeline of events

These events impacted the project in multiple ways. The first event occurred at the end of 2016 and resurfaced in mid-June of 2017. The United States government was requiring foreign visitors to reveal their social media accounts upon entering the country (BBC, 2019; Romm, 2016). The introduction to this controversial policy enraged technology companies, activists, and individuals. The policy was directed towards foreigners, but several American citizens were also impacted based on their religion (e.g., Muslims), race and/or cultural and ethnic background. This policy impacted me as well since my research is examining social media. I was especially concerned during my travels back home to the United States, about how I would be received by United States immigration since I have encountered hostility in the past despite being a citizen. My main concern was that I would be asked to show all my social media profiles, including my research account. Concerned with this potential situation, I temporarily deactivated my research accounts as I entered the United States to protect my participants' identities. Fortunately, I was never asked about any of my social media accounts but was aware of other Muslim Americans who were targeted.

Two specific events impacted several of my participants. On May 5, 2017, the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) finally lifted its ban on the hijab (Ahmed, 2017). This was a key event in relation to my project since several participants either spoke about the ban in their interviews which impacted their sporting careers or advocated overturning the ban. The FIBA ban prohibited players from wearing religious headgear (e.g., hijab, kippah, turbans) which denied sporting careers/opportunities for many individuals. This particular event provided me with a contextual understanding surrounding issues of Muslim women who cover encounter in sports. Another event that was trending was the tension among the Gulf countries.¹² The crisis began with Saudi Arabia imposing a blockade against Qatar and other countries joining in against Qatar. To further add to the conflict, United Arab Emirates called to punish and blacklist individuals posting content on social media supporting Qatar (Al-Jazeera, 2017). Several of my participants are from the region, or have family living there, which allowed me to see their

¹² Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Iraq, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain.

responses and views around this event and not just what the media was saying. Throughout the data collection, other horrific events took place such as bombings and attacks in certain countries and cities where my participants were from or are currently living. There were larger scale events that also occurred, such as incidents surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis which I monitored but mainly focused on events based on the backgrounds of my participants. This not only allowed me to tailor questions for participants, but added to the richness of the data and helped me to contextualise their social media posts and our interview discussions.

Researcher reflexivity

Feminist scholars have long argued for the importance of researcher reflexivity and positioning (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Pillow, 2003). This can allow for new questions to emerge and provide a holistic process to the research (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Pillow, 2003). The reflexive process requires the researcher to be observant and understanding of the social, political, and cultural surroundings of the participants and their own location within the project (Collins, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007).

Here I want to shed light into my own historical, cultural, and social context, and how this influenced my project and relationships with the participants. I am a heterosexual South-Asian American Muslim from a middle-class family, who does not cover. During my childhood, I spent ten years in the Middle East and North Africa on an international compound, where I lived, studied, and worked. Such experiences from my past and present influence my interpretations and lived experiences along with it, this research. What positioned me as an insider (Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 2003) was my cultural, religious (Islam), historical, and linguistic literacies (Urdu and conversational Arabic). These various aspects provided me with opportunities to draw from the teachings of the Quran along with South Asian and Arab cultural traditions to understand how intermingled culture and religion are in the lives of Muslim women. As a Muslim woman, pre-existing sporting, cultural knowledge, and experiences that were comparable to some of my participants (traditional and action sports) also made me an insider (Olive & Thorpe, 2011;

Thorpe, 2006; Wheaton, 2002). However, as a Muslim woman who does not wear the hijab, combined with my academic status, positioned me as an outsider to my participants' communities (Collins, 1990).

I practised “strong reflexivity” throughout the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15) working to acknowledge my multiple positionalities. I did so by critically reflecting on “the different ways [my positionality] can serve as both a hindrance and as a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 15). When it comes to discussing marginalized groups and the complexities of political, social, and cultural of participants and the researcher, Pillow (2003) suggests that researchers are critical and aware of their “own knowledge production” (p. 178) and be explicit in ways a researcher “agenda [can] affect the research at all points in the research process” (Hesse-Biber, 2011, p. 17). Therefore, it was necessary to challenge my perspectives, experiences and assumptions through dialogue with myself, my participants, the data, and the literature.

It is through such reflexive practices that a researcher can become more aware of their contribution in providing an understanding and representations of lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Pillow, 2003). For example, I also wanted to make sure that I did not fall into the Orientalist trope of exoticising or essentializing the sportswomen in my research. Hence, I kept Abu-Lughod's (2002) views in mind in regard to ‘saving Muslim women,’ and took on more of a productive approach in considering “how might we contribute to making the world a more just place” (p. 789). Ratna (2018) also stresses the importance of recognising one's privilege and to research responsibly. Additionally, she encourages: “do not retract from the responsibility of speaking to the lives of women similar and different” (Ratna, 2018, p. 198). Like Ratna (2018), I also have concerns on the impact of my dissertation on the Muslim ummah and “how it may travel across different geo-political borders, including to the Global South, and how scholars from within those spaces will view it” (p. 198). Ratna (2018) draws upon Falcón's (2016) transnational feminist framework which encourages “political

commitment to communities over institutions” (p. 189). I take a similar approach of Abu-Lughod (2002), Ratna (2018), and Falcón (2016) to do my best to research with responsibility with critical dialogues with myself, theories, and data and my commitment to the Muslim ummah. A researcher’s positionality and experience can influence the research process, which makes both the fieldwork, as well as the final product, the dissertation, intensely personal.

As previously stated, I was both an insider and an outsider in the wider Muslim ummah. As a researcher in the community I was researching, I had to acknowledge differences such as cultural background, age, education, socio-economic, religious, ethnicity, and sporting practices. For this research, I had to balance between being an outsider and insider and keep power relations in mind. Drawing upon sport feminist scholars’ conversations on reflexivity, Olive and Thorpe (2011) explain that they were cultural insiders in their sporting disciplines. However, as feminist researchers they encountered methodological, ethical, and theoretical challenges. As Olive and Thorpe (2011) state, “researcher reflexivity, ethnographic practice, and feminist praxis cannot be separated from the relationships we develop with people in places of work and leisure” (p. 427).

As an ethnic minority woman, I have always felt accountable to the Muslim ummah, but now as a feminist researcher within my community, strong critical reflexivity was essential along with the “reflexivities of discomfort” (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). For example, a participant Sarah stated she is not “a very proper Muslim” because she does not cover. One of the issues/stereotypes surrounding Muslim women (Chapter One) has been regarding the hijab/niqab/burqa, which is often associated with being “a good Muslim.” Going back to the conversation about the diversity of being a Muslim woman, I asked her to elaborate on her statement by prompting, “I believe there is diversity when it comes to what a Muslim woman is, what would you define as a proper Muslim woman?” This enabled her to reflect and elaborate on her answer:

That is not the right word, it seems judgmental, and that is not right. At the end of the day, it is all about your

intentions, which is between you and Allah. I will say there are certain things that should be agreed upon in our religion. It is not nice for a female to attract others to look at her, and if she does, she needs to be reasonably covered.

At first, the initial response in my head was that even if you are covered head to toe women often encounter unwarranted attention. Of course, how an individual interprets the Quran varies along with one's social, cultural, and religious understandings which also influences individuals' experiences. As our conversation continued, Sarah expressed "not having the strength" to take up the hijab and one day hopes to. Sarah also spoke about how her sporting practice "contradicts" with what "our religion preaches". What she is referring to, is her open social media profile which allow users to view "[Sarah's] uncovered self, doing stuff [sports], being in action". Upon further reflection, it is essential to note that Sarah's parents come from a different Muslim majority country. Sarah's interpretation of Islam is intertwined with religion and culture which creates a "double identity" crisis when trying to share aspects of her sporting life online. For example, during the summers Sarah often travels abroad to train clients, and stated:

I wasn't sure if I wanted to post some images. I mean, I am on a beach, but I am training people because that is my job. I wanted to post stuff but I also didn't want post stuff because some of my viewers are also from [conservative country].

Sarah is referring to training or coaching her clients in shorts and tank tops and was trying to be mindful of her conservative followers. Upon further reflection, I relate to Sarah's statement around a 'double identity' crisis. I too was raised in the same country as Sarah, which also influenced how I navigate culture and religion which sometimes impacts what I share and reveal to my social media followers. The dialogue with Sarah prompted me to consider my multiple positionings in this conversation, as both a Muslim sportswoman from a similar cultural and national background, and as a researcher.

In another conversation with Melek, who wears the hijab asked, “don’t you feel invisible?” What she is referring to is how a Muslim woman, like myself who does not cover, often is rarely represented in mainstream media. Melek further added “sometimes the constant conversation and coverage [media and wider public discourse] about the hijab is too much”. We both agreed the representation of Muslim women is often focused on the hijab and render other Muslim women who do not cover invisible. We also spoke about different experiences of being a Muslim woman. For example, Melek has encountered Islamophobia while travelling abroad especially in the United States. As for myself, I often get questioned about the legitimacy of my faith by non-Muslims, ‘wait you are Muslim? Really? Why don’t you cover?’ ‘Where are you really from?’ and/or ‘Go back to your country!’ These kinds of remarks and questions at times were discomfoting, however, in this thesis, I try to take an active approach by speaking to the diversity of Muslim women’s identities. Observing and listening to the stories of the Muslim women in this research impacted me profoundly, I learned from other women with whom I shared a religion, with some a common (and different) language and cultural traditions that allowed me to reflect on my own experience as a Muslim woman. These conversations revealed how political, social, economic, racial/ethnic, and gender issues complicate the lives of Muslim women in similar and different ways.

To grasp and manage my own emotions throughout the research I would first allow myself to sit with my feelings. As poet waheed (2013) states, “if you need more time to understand how you feel about a thing. give yourself more time to understand how you feel about a thing”. I would reflect through various creative forms. One was through journaling; this would be either handwritten, online, or audio entries. I also would either draw or take photographs (I am a trained photographer), though some were mostly through Instagram. Lastly, I blogged, which was not often, and not all the posts were public, a similar approach has been conducted by others. For example, Olive (2013) discussed the use of blogging as a research method to understand and contribute to women’s surfing. Additionally, Bundon (2018) discusses the importance of blogs which contributes to the understanding of gender in sport and physical education. In particular, Bundon (2018) highlights that blogs allow “individuals who have been excluded from other

forms of political engagement may start to see themselves as political agents and cultural producers, and the role of feminist participatory research methods in supporting this process” (p. 274).

I used my blog entries to reflect issues of representation and identity surrounding Muslim sportswomen. Blogging also allowed me to reflect on my insider perspective. In my blog entries I used images and text to highlight other ways Muslim women were taking up sports to challenge some of the narratives around Muslim women. I am also an executive board member of the Muslim Women in Sport Network (MWSN) which is dedicated to amplifying the voices of Muslim sportswomen. In 2018, we facilitated the first ever virtual summit where Muslim women from various sports sectors (e.g., journalism, athletes, activists, researchers, social entrepreneurs) shared their expertise. Additionally, I sometimes share my knowledge about Muslim women in sports through radio and online interviews. I also spread awareness on social media by highlighting stories about Muslim women in sports such as using #MuslimWomensDay, a hashtag used annually on Twitter during International Women’s Day. These are some multiple ways I try to raise awareness about the lives of Muslim sportswomen.

When it came to my dissertation, I had to continuously remind myself to be critical in all aspects of my research and data collection, which at times was unnerving. Thorpe (2011) addressed how researchers doing critical work in their own sporting communities faced challenges in which the joy can be taken out of the sport (also see Marfell, 2016). Fortunately, I did not lose any of my joy of sports. In fact, following the accounts and talking with various Muslim CrossFit athletes, I was inspired to take up CrossFit. Upon further reflection, CrossFit gave me a local sports community in Hamilton, especially since I was struggling to establish a sense of belonging when I first moved to New Zealand. However, for me, the joy was taken out of using social media. I was not only managing my research social media accounts but personal ones to stay connected to friends and family and stay abreast of news, which led to digital fatigue. I was fully immersed online. Every aspect of my life was digitally connected. There were times I began to loathe going online

and had to work around this challenge. I started by deactivating my personal Facebook account. I also unfollowed individuals on Instagram and Twitter and muted words on Twitter. The mute function on Twitter allows you to mute accounts or words which will not appear on your timeline. While I was conducting my research, several political and social events were emotionally impacting me, the communities I had worked with in the past, and the communities I was researching. Therefore, the muting of words and accounts allowed me to control the information I saw on my accounts for my wellbeing. I also made efforts to ‘disconnect’ from being online, this meant not reading content on a screen but paper. I also engaged with other forms of literature, such as poetry by nayyirah waheed, Yrsa Daley-Ward, and Warsan Shire whose work was not only comforting but aiding in my reflexivity and understanding how to navigate interstitial spaces of sport, and this project with its multiple intersecting layers of religion, culture, and sport.

In my research I wanted to make sure the voices of the participants were central. I was cognizant of Anzaldúa’s (1987) remarks about language: “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language...as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (p. 1027). I wanted to address my inadequacy in not being fluent in other languages, especially my participant’s languages (e.g., Farsi, Bosnian, Arabic) and attempted to be linguistically receptive (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). The call for participants did not state English speakers only but mentioned the interview would be conducted in English with the option available for the interview to be held in another language. All the interviews were conducted in English, though there were instances where a word or two was used in the participant’s language to emphasise a point or if they forgot the English word. In situations like this, either the participant explained the meaning, or I knew the translation.

As stated previously, I safeguarded individual’s privacy while keeping the accuracy of what they shared. Of course, what people share online may not always be accurate or can be distorted. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to

understand the type of digital and emotional labour being put into the content they were sharing. This project on Muslim sportswomen's use of social media is an attempt to capture their self-representation and diversity and avoid dominant discourses prevalent in hegemonic Western media and scholarship. In the forthcoming chapters, I address the key themes of this research. Within these chapters, I share images and posts that the participants shared on their digital platforms. I initially experimented with blurring or 'erasing' the faces of the participants. This troubled me because one of the aspects of this project highlights the diverse and multiple ways Muslim sportswomen are participating in sports but also their varied approaches to social media. For some, being visible is a political act (Chapter Six). I took my cue from Aziz (2004), an Arab American writer who encourages new ways of perceiving Arab Americans and states: "write or be written" (p. xii). I extend her words to the Muslim women in this research and their self-representation, especially due to the overwhelming global misrepresentation and misconceptions about Muslims. Some of the participants gave me approval (via email or direct messaging on social media) to share their images in the chapters that follow. By incorporating their words alongside their images, the project provides the participants with a space to share their stories and their own reasons of self-representation and importantly, engage, renegotiate, and deconstruct dominant discourses of Muslim sportswomen.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the course of this research, I considered a range of ethical issues regarding the participants. The interviews were all voluntary, and participants were provided with the information sheet (Appendix C) outlining the aims of the research along with their rights. Those participating in the project were all over the age of 18 years. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form (Appendix D) before any activity taking place on my part. This also provided the opportunity for participants to ask any questions about their role in the research.

The participants were given an option to have full anonymity (pseudonym with no other information) or partial disclosure (alias with some additional information,

such as the sport or country they are from). The participants who provided me written approval to use their images were aware they may be identified from the pictures, but for all of those whose images appear in this thesis were happy to do so with some stating: “it is okay since my account is public”. Throughout this phase, I reflected on the importance of visibility of Muslim women not only in this research but broadly. Therefore, I offered them the option to use their real name (first name only) with their image, especially since some of the participants during the recruitment phase and even in their consent form expressed interest in providing their full name. Thus, I took a collaborative approach, as opposed to ‘saving’ or protecting the Other by making her invisible, through conversations with the participants on their preferences and respecting their decisions around the images being used in this thesis. Those who gave me approval to use their first name with their images have the asterisk symbol (*) by their name in the ‘Participant profiles’ section (pp. 64-66). For some of the sportswomen, social media provided visibility and exposure to self-brand or self-represent various aspects of their lives. For those who wanted to remain anonymous, I respected the participant’s request and provided them pseudonyms to safeguard their privacy. I always took care not to provide too much information that the sportswomen’s identities may be inadvertently be uncovered, especially those who wanted partial anonymity.

The interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants to amend and approve. The majority of the participants responded within the ten-day time frame with little or any amendments. It is important to note that returning a transcript was not compulsory for participation, and I was aware that some of my participants were busy and were not able or interested to read their transcripts. However, I made sure that all participants understood that if they did not return their transcript within the agreed time period, I would assume that they do not wish to make any changes. The participants had the right to withdraw at any time, and the right to retract their data until the point of approving transcripts and when data analysis commenced. No participant withdrew from the project. However, participants were informed if they decided to do so, all information pertaining to the participant would be deleted. This included materials such as all correspondences between the researcher and the

participant data scraped from their social media accounts such as posts, images, comments, and interview transcripts.

Thematic analysis

A feminist approach inspired my thematic analysis. According to Clarke and Braun (2013), a thematic analysis “is essentially a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data” (p. 120). Furthermore, a thematic analysis is “theoretically flexible,” which can be applied to an array of theoretical frameworks (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I kept Rubin and Rubin’s (2011) strategy in mind when analysing data. They state: “analysis in grounded theory does not distinguish between themes and terms that are more central and those that are more peripheral to the research topic” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 204). This was essential to my research since I drew upon a large body of literature in relation to the data because this project sits at the intersection of digital media, sociology of sports, and Muslim women.

I started a pre-analysis of my data during the observation phase. Interview and media analysis helped contextualise the meaning which was constructed through words and images by the participants and myself, the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellis & Berger, 2003). According to St. Pierre (2011), it is “impossible to disentangle *data*, *data collection* and *data analysis*” (p. 622, emphasis in original). The process was not linear, there were overlaps. It was a living breathing project with ongoing events/issues impacting the Muslim ummah. When it comes to data, there is often a necessity by new researchers to find ‘the perfect theory’ which corresponds with the data (Thorpe, 2012). I engaged with my data concerning the literature on emerging feminist theories, gender and sports, and social media. I worked hard not to force my data into a particular framework, instead searching for concepts and theoretical approaches in the borderlands and interstitial spaces.

The transcripts were read several times in conjunction with ongoing references to the literature within the intersections of my research. I first started with looking at broad themes across the interviews, observations, and media analysis in correlations

with my research questions and remained open to a range of possibilities (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). During the second round, I read each transcript carefully and developed a mind map, so I could visualise other themes and link them to my digital observations. In the final round of examining the data, I created small figures of participants' to also help me visualise and to capture different themes which were not consistent across other participants social media profiles to truly examine the intersectional aspects of these sportswomen's lives.

When examining images and text on social media platforms, I looked for consistencies and irregularities. Additionally, when reviewing the images and text across various digital platforms, the use of hashtags emerged as a key theme. The hashtags are an essential site for reorienting digital ethnography, especially regarding the importance of "network and community" in both offline and online spaces (Postill & Pink, 2012, p. 124). Keeping hashtags in mind, I drew upon existing literature around social media, and specifically Instagram and Twitter concerning hashtags to help flush out additional themes. When examining the images on Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, I looked for consistencies and contradictions of the types of images not only among the diverse group of participants but across the multiple social media platforms the Muslim sports were navigating. I also paid close attention to the posts which received the most likes and/or comments and even posts with the least amount of likes to understand the differences. When looking at images, I also kept in mind the placement of the camera/cell phone/GoPro both in the images and videos on their Instagram stories/Snaps to look for additional themes. I also drew from literature which focused on Instagram not only within sport studies but expanded it to other scholarship (e.g., education, geography) to reveal additional themes.

Throughout the analysis phase, I practised reflexivity, on what the data was revealing. DeVault and Gross (2007) encourage researchers to reflect on the power of interpretation, selection, and representation of the research process. In particular they ask that attention is paid to what content gets used over another since that is a powerful and privileged action by the researcher. In my work, I did my best to

recognise my own biases and assumptions about what was important to include, such as a select number of quotes which were relevant to my research questions and development of my thesis. I understand I may have potentially left out content which I may have failed to recognise as important. However, my interpretation is organised to reflect and breakdown the dominant meanings, and representations of Muslim sportswomen, through my theoretical lens.

In the following chapters, I adopt a feminist approach drawing on intersectionality, postfeminism, and fourth wave feminism in dialogue with the concepts of surveillance, identity, self-promotion/branding, and digital space invaders to explore the various forms of power within social media and Muslim sportswomen's agency and politics. In so doing, I take a feminist approach but with the aim to develop a postcolonial approach to digital and feminist knowledge by ensuring Muslim women's voices and experiences remain central rather than alienated, silenced, or spoken over too heavily with theory.

CHAPTER 4:

MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN'S ENCOUNTERS WITH DIGITAL SPACES

This chapter explores the diverse ways Muslim sportswomen are accessing and using various digital spaces, notably Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Sport media scholars have examined athletes' use of individual social media platforms, but in this chapter, I consider how the same group of Muslim sportswomen use and make meaning out of four different social media platforms. In so doing, I reveal how different platforms enable and constrain the possibilities of self-representation for Muslim sportswomen, as well as the multiple forms of power that impact their digital sporting bodies. This chapter also reveals how Muslim sportswomen from different countries, cultures, classes, ethnicities, religions, ages, and sports are drawn to and engage with, different forms of social media. Adopting a fourth wave feminist intersectional approach, this chapter also examines the various tensions and struggles associated with using different platforms and how these platforms overlap.

The rise of new digital technologies has transformed "social interactions" creating "new forms of visibility, communication and connection" (Segrave & Vitis, 2017, p. 14). However, offline oppressive powers such as sexism, patriarchy, Islamophobia, homophobia, and racism also pervade digital spaces in "sometimes disturbing ways" (Daniels, 2013, p. 702). As explained in Chapter Two, the literature exploring social media use by athletes has primarily explored the use of Twitter (Billings, 2014; Clavio, 2013; Coche, 2014; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pedersen, 2014; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson, 2013; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). However, recent scholarship is also addressing Instagram (Chawansky, 2016; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). In this chapter, I build upon and extend the existing literature by exploring one group of athletes' uses of a range of social media. Rarely are social media platforms used in isolation, and thus, it is essential to consider how different platforms overlap and

intersect. By observing sportswomen’s engagements with multiple social media platforms, I offer new understandings and intersectional insights into how athletes employ similar and different strategies of using social media across various platforms. I first provide an overview of the Muslim sportswomen’s engagement with each observed platforms; Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. Second, I discuss overlapping themes across each platform with a focus on how power structures in the form of surveillance and online abuse enable and constrain participants’ usage of different platforms.

Social media platforms: Type, snap, click, and share

Social media platforms are steadily increasing in popularity/usage, and individuals are adopting them into their everyday lives. The chart below highlights the global ranking of each social media platform for this study. Facebook is ranked number one, with over 2.2 billion active users, Instagram comes in sixth with 1 billion active users, Twitter is ranked eleventh with 336 million users and Snapchat at seventeenth with 255 million users (Statista, 2018).

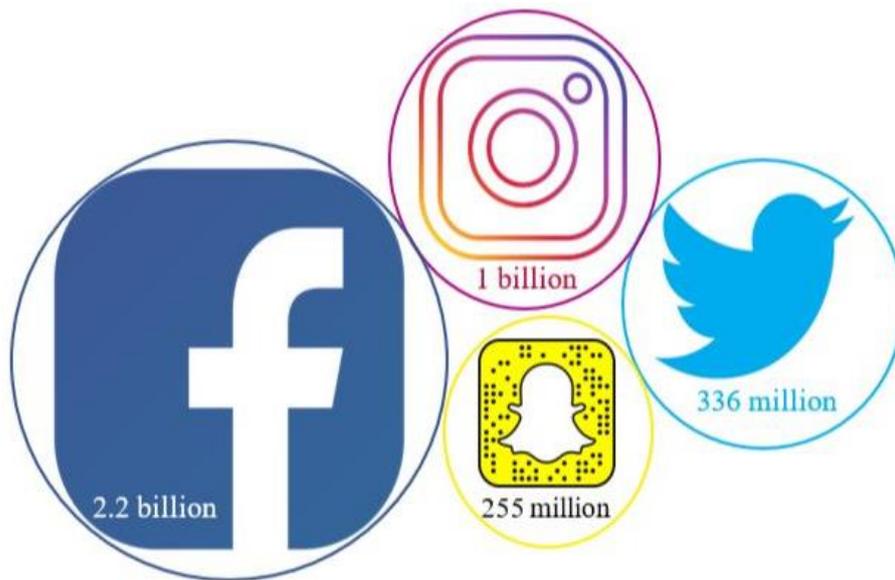


Figure 4.1: Social media accounts ranked globally

Each platform has some similarities, along with differences. When it comes to academic discussions about social media, the various platforms are too often grouped into a homogenous category of ‘social media.’ Intersectionality is applied to understand the experiences of women of colour by considering dynamic systems of oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006) and in a similar, (though also quite different) way it is important to understand how each of these platforms overlaps in complex ways. In the section below, I outline the various ways the participants use different social media platforms, also examining how Muslim sportswomen navigate multiple forms of surveillance and online abuse according to their gender, faith, and culture.

Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram

In speaking with participants, Facebook is one of the first social media platforms they used, with a select few referencing Myspace as their primary social media platform which predates Facebook. Many of the participants spoke about Facebook being an important platform which allowed them to stay connected to friends and family from around the world. This is similar to Doyle and Goldingay’s (2012) findings, where users found Facebook to be useful in staying connected with friends and family members who were geographically distant. Saman, Rania, Khadija, and Iman all stated that Facebook allowed them to stay connected with a “large network” (Rania) of friends and family who live abroad, and Facebook made it easy to “drop in” (Iman) to check in and “keep in touch” (Rania) with friends and family.

Despite Facebook being one of the initial social media platforms, and being one of the most popular platforms, there has been a decline in Facebook usage among young adults (18-29 years old) (Duggan, 2015). This is due to the recent proliferation of new platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat) and a growing distrust of Facebook (e.g., privacy concerns, fake news). There has been a continuous decline in market shares and of global users (Edwards, 2018; Spangler, 2018). Most of the sportswomen admitted to rarely using Facebook today. However, some make an effort to open the platform occasionally to check for “notifications” (Lamya), such as “birthdays or anniversaries” (Mona^m). According to the participants, Facebook

is now more for the “older generation” which many of them referenced and stated that Facebook was no longer a ‘fun’ app. Research has examined the motivations of users abandoning platforms. An earlier study by boyd (2013) noted “white flight”, where privileged White teens flocked to Facebook from Myspace to connect with users with similar demographics of class and ethnicity (also see Watkins, 2009). However, others explain the more recent exodus from Facebook by younger users (Duggan, 2015) who are moving towards Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp (Kiss, 2013). According to Miller (2013) younger users dread the day they receive friend requests from their parents. However, this is increasingly being seen on other platforms and across different ethnicities.

Twitter was the least used platform. Some used it to stay informed about sports. This speaks to earlier literature about the interactions between journalists and fans, and fans and athletes, on Twitter (Clavio, 2013; Clavio & Kian, 2010; Clavio & Walsh, 2014; Hutchins, 2011; Sherwood & Nicholson, 2013). Hiba, an Olympian from the Middle East and North Africa checks Twitter “for news, and what is happening in the world and around me and [to] understand the views of people”. Similarly, Rania uses it to “keep informed” about world events. For sporting news and events, Rania specifically searches the “hashtags”. As a competitive athlete in combat sports, she is interested in fights (e.g., boxing, mixed martial arts), and popular matches require individuals to purchase the match to view on television. Rania does not own a television and relies on the hashtag to follow sporting matches. Iman, who is ethnically Arab and grew up in East Asia and now resides in Western Europe identifying as a recreational sportswoman, states that Twitter “is more of a news outlet” because she no longer “buys newspapers,” and Twitter allows her to “connect with journalists.” Iman also likes to stay informed on topics which are important to her, such as politics and sports, specifically football (soccer). This speaks to earlier literature about Twitter being used to connect with journalists. For the most part, Hiba, Rania, and Iman each use Twitter to stay informed of current events.

A handful of the participants enjoyed Twitter and used the platform in a range of ways to express their views in a few words. Manaar, who works in sports media and lives in North America, is a heavy user of Twitter. She uses Twitter to share a range of topics, focusing on sports and female athletes, but occasionally shares personal viewpoints in relation to her identity or something she encountered in her everyday life, such as going out to dinner or a movie with her friends and family. Twitter is a space where users can discuss, debate, and question sporting cultural norms (Hull & Schmittel, 2015), including a woman's role in traditionally male-dominated sporting spaces (Antunovic, 2014). Manaar, and on occasion Asma, engage in debates or create discussions around race/ethnicity, religion, and gender in relation to sports. Both spoke to issues surrounding Muslim sportswomen and their (mis)representation or stereotypes in sports and used Twitter to reorient the sporting and cultural norms. As for Noor, Twitter allows her to “vent,” but certainly not in an echo chamber. For example, Noor expressed frustrations on Twitter that her country is more concerned with girls participating in sports as opposed to providing infrastructure and investing (e.g., coaching) in athletes. Noor is aware the pressure comes from outside organisations, including “Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the United Nations (UN) to involve girls and women in sports”. This pressure, though important, is filling the superficial initiative of ‘getting girls and women into sports’ through promoting “[country] women doing sport”, but it fails to pay attention to the ‘actual needs’ of the sportswomen and the structural issues they encounter as they try to compete for time, space, and resources. For Noor, she does not “want to be known as the first girl who does sports, but as a GOOD [emphasis in original] fighter!” Haya also uses Twitter to express her emotions. She says it is a place “to release whatever thoughts that I have in my head”, and as such “loves Twitter.” Continuing, Haya describes using Twitter to “rant about random things”. For Noor and Haya, Twitter is more carefree than their Instagram platforms where they feel they need to be “more careful” with what they are posting.

There has been a growing interest among sport scholars on the ephemeral nature of social media such as Snapchat (Bayer et al., 2016; Billings, Qia, Conlin, & Nie, 2017; Piwek & Joinson, 2016). For example, a user can post snaps to their own stories (in Instagram it is referred to as ‘my stories’) or public stories which are

viewable for 24 hours, and then they vanish. The ephemeral nature of Snapchat has led to the controversy of it being used for sensitive content such as sexting¹³ (Colao, 2014; Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015). However, Snapchat is used for a variety of reasons which are not necessarily related to sensitive-private content (Roesner, Gill, & Kohno, 2014; Utz et al., 2015). Researchers have examined Snapchat to understand the type of material being shared by users (Bayer et al., 2016; Piwek & Joinson 2015), as well as the motivation and emotional affects of using this digital platform (Utz et al., 2015). Research by Billings et al. (2017) is the first to examine the use of Snapchat concerning sports fandom. Their study found sports fans favoured ephemeral social media (e.g., Snapchat) over other media because the content disappears. Furthermore, fans “can cheer when [their] team scores without worrying about looking dumb if they end up losing” (Constine, 2014, p. 1)”, since the content has vanished, and therefore the image has no future (Jurgenson, 2013).

As previously mentioned, however, the content does not really vanish because of the screenshot function and in some instances impacts the users offline and online relationships with friends and family (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). Recent scholarship by Handyside and Ringrose (2017) examined how youth mediated intimacy on Snapchat and how “power relations shape what users/bodies can do (or not do)” (p. 7) in this ephemeral context. In their mixed gendered focus groups, they found gendered identities were reinforced within Snapchat user communities and the ‘so-called’ disappearing content which the platform is known for affected youth’s online and offline sexual relationships. However, there were instances where some girls used humour as a strategy to reclaim agency when they were judged on previous snaps which were interpreted as sexual often by male followers (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017). Other research has shown that young women used humour to counteract humiliating experiences of sexual double standards (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; Shifman & Lamish, 2010). The literature on Snapchat is in its infancy and has not yet examined how ethnic minorities or how sportswomen, use Snapchat.

¹³ Sexting is sharing sexually evocative content (images/text/videos) via text or the internet (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011).

In my observations and interviews with the sportswomen, four of them use Snapchat. However, their uses varied considerably from observing, freely expressing themselves, sharing aspects of their sporting journey, and self-branding. Mona^m and Hiba used Snapchat mainly to observe others posts and interactions; “on Snapchat, I am a stalker [laugh]” (Mona^m). The private nature of Snapchat sees the women, reserving that platform for their friends and some family members, rather than fans and followers whom they do not know. The small and close social network on Snapchat was similar to what Roesner et al. (2014) and Utz et al. (2015) found in their research. Rana stated that “Snapchat is more private, and I am very conservative on who has it and who can see me.” This was similar for Noor, who stated, “Snapchat is only for close friends and normal friends.” When prompted as to what she meant by “normal friends”, she replied, “like whoever I meet, and I think they are cool and we exchange our usernames.” Some of the Muslim sportswomen were frequent users of Snapchat, often sharing daily unfiltered or filtered accounts of their lives on Snapchat because of the private and ephemeral nature. For example, Nayla explained: “I am very personal on my Snapchat, and you will get daily updates.” She shares freely what is happening in her life: “When I am down, I will talk about how down I am, and if I am happy I will talk about how happy and so on” and does so with at least “five snaps.” For her and others, Snapchat is a space where they can be “vulnerable” and free to share everyday routines (e.g., going out for a meal with friends or family) of their life because of the temporal nature of the application. According to Bayer et al. (2016), Snapchat users did not share “big moments” nor “curate” images to be shared across other platforms. Instead, the users “spontaneously” shared snaps which were mainly fun, humorous, selfies, or everyday mundane pictures (e.g., weather or food) (Bayer et al., 2016; Roesner et al., 2014; Utz et al., 2015). In contrast to this finding, Nayla, Zenith, Noor, and Rana were sharing more than ‘fun’ ‘selfies.’ They were documenting their sporting journey for their audience. Nayla saves her snaps on her phone; “I save a lot, I save my memories, I save a bunch of my training videos because I want to remember the path” to sporting successes, including training to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Also, Nayla, Noor, and Zenith did not shy away from posting their “big moments” of winning competitions or other successes (e.g., college graduations). The fleeting nature of Snapchat seems partially important for the Muslim sportswomen, giving them a sense of confidence,

knowing that content will be deleted and limiting possibilities of surveillance (discussed later in this chapter).

The power of imagery

Instagram was one of the most heavily used and favourite social media platforms by Muslim sportswomen in my research. According to Mona^s, a competitive snowboarder, who lives in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), “Instagram is my favourite social media account at the moment. I have had it for more than six years, and I [am] pretty much using it every single day, I don’t know, 100 times, every single day [laugh].” Similarly, Mona^m, a mountaineer from the MENA region who is currently living in Western Europe where she is working on her PhD, admits to checking her Instagram daily; “nonstop, in the train, walking, when I take a break, when I don’t take a break, it is like all the time.” Some of the participants also suggest it is a very user-friendly platform. For Haya, the “interface is easy to use”, and Asma appreciates it “being so instant and connecting so quickly”. For Noor, a competitive athlete in combat sports who lives in the MENA region, Instagram has “always [been] the coolest app,” and is a daily user and prefers it over other platforms because Facebook is “overwhelming...since there is so much going on”. Similarly, Dina, a mountaineer from the MENA region, also prefers Instagram because it is “easy to use”, “quick”, and “straight to the point” where she can easily “scroll or swipe” through content.

Additionally, the aesthetic possibilities and ease of the platform made Instagram very popular among many of the participants across different sports and geographic areas: “Instagram I just love it! It’s just pictures which says a lot without using any words” (Mona^m). Some referred to Instagram as being like an “album” of their sporting and social lives. According to Reem, she likes that she can “[re-] watch” her “album anywhere and anytime”. As for Khadija, she uses it as a ‘memory’ album and space for reflection. She “shares highlights and milestones,” with one such example a discussion in which she “track[s] her rehabilitation journey” following a knee injury. By sharing her rehab journey, she wanted to “inspire others in similar situations”. She also added that, on a personal note, she wants to be able

to look back “in a year or two” and see her achievement of overcoming an injury. Enabling users to post a series of personal images, Instagram has become a digital ‘album’ for participants like Khadija to ‘track’ and ‘reflect’ on specific aspects of their sporting and personal lives.

The power of the imagery and creativity are important to the participants. As Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) have explained, there is considerable power in the imagery of the female sporting body, and many sportswomen are embracing the opportunities to represent their bodies and lifestyles in highly creative ways using the Instagram digital offerings (e.g., filters). Similarly, many of the sportswomen in my research are strategic in how they use Instagram; some use it for self-promotion and branding purposes (Chapter Five), some push back on narratives about Muslim women in sports through explicit and implicit posts (Chapter Six) and others use Instagram to inspire their audience. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) found that creativity (text and filters) was one of the motives for users of Instagram. For Haya, a CrossFit athlete, a coach and owner of her CrossFit facility, her creativity on Instagram works in multiple ways. She uses her Instagram page to inspire others, uses it for self-inspiration and through her posts she brings in a different narrative about Muslim women in sports, especially those who participate in CrossFit. Below is a screengrab of Haya’s Instagram profile (Figure 4.2):

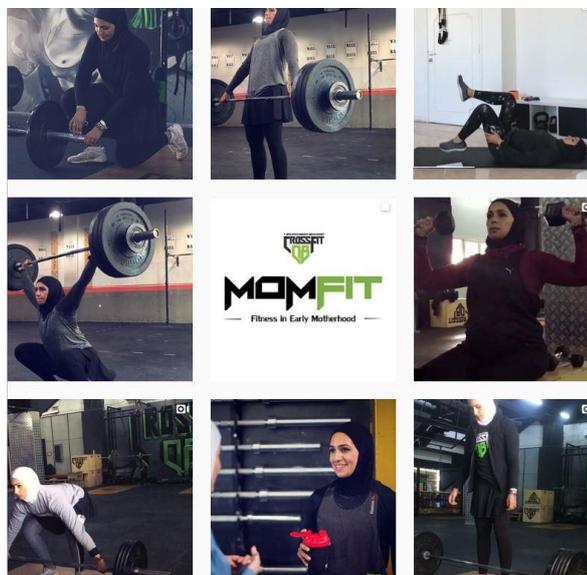


Figure 4.2: Haya’s Instagram profile

When observing Haya's Instagram page, the majority of images position her as a CrossFit athlete, a coach, and training through her pregnancies and postpartum. Conversations surrounding sportswomen and pregnancy are gaining traction in mainstream media such as American elite tennis player Serena Williams (Cooky, 2018b) and New Zealand Olympic shot-putter Valerie Adams, which "suggests that pregnancy, motherhood and sport are not mutually exclusive" (McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012).

Research by McGannon et al. (2012) examined two issues of *Runner's World* (RW) magazines of elite British marathon runner Paula Radcliffe. The textual analysis revealed "*pregnancy and motherhood as redemption narrative*" (McGannon et al., 2012, p. 824, emphasis in original) meaning Radcliffe's representation in RW had fluid and nuanced meanings. She was either "1. athlete and mother as one and 2. primarily a mother; athlete as secondary" (McGannon et al., 2012, p. 824). Furthermore, such narratives may have been presented in a particular way to sell products and/or motivate women to get active after pregnancy. McGannon et al., (2012) statement of athlete and mother as one resonates with how Haya's represents herself online as a 'CrossFit Mom athlete'. The majority of Haya's images are about CrossFit and weaves in motherhood through the images of her training with her child at home or at her training facility. Furthermore, Haya also spoke about inspiring other women who reached out to her on social media, "I helped her [one of her followers] see that she doesn't have to, you know, lose herself after pregnancy, that you can still take care of your body and still work out." When asked if it was a fellow Muslim woman, Haya stated: "she was not Muslim, American, blonde uhm, lives in a small town in the US". Haya's experience adds to the call by McGannon et al. (2012) and Spowart, Burrows, and Shaw (2010) who encourage researchers to examine 'new mothering athletes' from different social and cultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, religion).

The 'fit' body on Instagram is an area of discussion by media and sport scholars. Reade (2016), Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016), and Robinson et al. (2017) research on Instagram revealed that the images of women that promoted fitness (e.g., #fit)

were primarily of thin and toned female bodies. Furthermore, “strength was subverted by sexualised body poses, framing and clothing” (Reade, 2016, p. 6) and within the CrossFit community, attractiveness and a sexual appeal were emphasised over strength and fitness through images of a sports bra and ‘booty shorts’ (Washington & Economides, 2016). CrossFit reinforces women’s bodies as sexual objects for the heterosexual male gaze, especially on social media (Washington & Economides, 2016). Haya, along with Sarah, both identity as CrossFit athletes. Haya rarely used hashtags that fell into universal themes of #fit #fitspiration or #strongisthenewskinny. Dominant #fitspiration images are “cropped image of a woman’s body focusing on her thin, toned, White, hairless, six-packed torso” (Lucas & Holder, 2018, p. 232). Haya’s hashtags were more driven towards her sport, such as #CrossFit, country, promotional purposes #reebok or #reebokmena (‘MENA’ references Reebok’s regional office in the Middle East and North Africa), and particularly highlighted aspects of her identity #modestfitness (she used occasionally) and #CrossFitMom (used often). Sarah also uses her Instagram to inspire other women (Muslim or non-Muslim) but uses it specifically to promote a healthy holistic lifestyle by being active and sometimes uses hashtags which are associated with the specific movements of the day, such as #deadlifts #curlsthatcurl (referencing her curly hair) and her own business. Additionally, both Haya and Sarah avoided sexualised poses in their images. Sarah understands how social media works, and consciously chooses how to self-represent:

If someone wants to show their ass, or show their whatever, just for more likes, then okay, but you can’t fool your true followers for long. If you really want to inspire people, they will not get inspired by your bum in the camera (edited for clarity).

When I started following Sarah in February 2017, she had over 4000 followers, and at the time of writing (September 2018) she had over 17,800. Her images receive about 20 to 100 comments per posts and an average of 100 to over 2000 likes. Sarah does not focus on the numbers of followers or “likes” on her pictures and avoids sharing her “bum in the camera” or posting a “sexy selfie.” Her images consist of her working out, training her clients, spending time with family and friends as seen in her Instagram posts below (Figure 4.3):



Figure 4.3: Sarah's Instagram posts

Haya's and Sarah's social media accounts are public, and they both live in the MENA region but are from different countries. Additionally, Haya wears the hijab, and Sarah does not cover. However, aspects of their religiosity feature, either through posts about fasting and training during Ramadan, and in Sarah's case images of her post are of pre-namaz/salah/salat (obligatory prayers for Muslims). These images show the diversity of Muslim sportswomen and their social media content based on the same sport and region. Their Instagram use may differ, however, both Sarah and Haya are negotiating the cultural, social, and religious aspects of their lives to subtly and explicitly provide an alternative narrative of women from different ethnicities and religion in sports.

The functionality of each platform is continually evolving, therefore, it is essential to understand the power structures of these powerful platforms. Facebook was created in a dorm room of an elite university (Harvard) and was only available to a limited group (Ivy league schools) before the public gained access in 2006. Facebook's original structure was built on privilege and exclusion. As for Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, they were available to the public upon their creation. Some users are able to navigate these structures while others encounter online abuse, racism, and sexism. The second part of this chapter will discuss how the participants in this research used these four platforms in various ways, strategically navigating issues of accessibility and surveillance, and drawing upon online and offline experiences to forge their digital sporting journeys.

Negotiating power within/across digital spaces

In this section, I explore how power relations operate across social media platforms and how Muslim sportswomen navigate social, cultural, and national norms in regard to surveillance, online abuse, and accessibility. Foucault's theory of power (1998) and panopticism (1977) has been used across a range of disciplines related to the power of the media (Douglas, 2012; Duncan, 1994; Godoy-Pressland, 2016). Additionally, feminist scholars have engaged with Foucault to "explore how power is produced in society and functions to regulate individual bodies through dominant discourses" (Azzarito, 2009, p. 20). According to Foucault (1998) "power is everywhere" and people encounter it every day in multiple ways, intertwined in every aspect of life, in particular power is established through accepted forms of knowledge (p. 63). The rise of new digital technologies adds to the complexity of such power relations. Surveillance scholars often reference Foucault's (1977) concept of panopticism, which allows institutions (e.g., governments, schools) to resourcefully exercise power through subtle forces (Lindgren, 2013; Rose, 1999). However, in online spaces multiple gazes can be occurring simultaneously, this impacts on how digital surveillance operates in different ways to the panopticism model which focuses on the power of the observer over the observed (Robins & Webster, 1999).

Media scholars have also drawn upon Foucault's panopticism (1977) to explore how power relations operate online (Benjamin, 2019a; 2019b; Boellstorff, 2013; Bucher, 2012; Magnet & Gates, 2013; Nafus & Sherman, 2014; Rettberg, 2014; Whitson, 2014). For example, Boellstorff's (2013) research addressed how the United States' National Security Agency (NSA) developed a surveillance program called 'prism'. According to Boellstorff (2013), NSA's program corresponds to Foucault's (1977) concept of surveillance in which a tool (prism) was created to exert power allowing for "exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance—thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attention ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network" (p. 214). Bucher's (2012) research on Facebook also found that social activities such as 'friending' and 'liking' and 'trending' are manipulated by technological infrastructures which are designed to encourage certain norms and behaviours while implicitly discouraging and devaluing others.

Some feminist media scholars are also exploring the concept of technological racial surveillance (Benjamin, 2019a; 2019b; Nakamura, 2008). According to Benjamin (2019a), power imbalances and issues of surveillance remain intact in digital environments. Benjamin (2019a) states:

Users are not only watching from their positions but in ways that support existing power structures of race. This means that watching from below can reinforce dominant hierarchies as much as watching from above (p. 135).

Nakamura's (2008) research examines online popular culture (e.g., gaming, instant messaging) and found users utilised visual images to mediate racial identities. However, she also found that race and racism permeated in new ways online through surveillance, which closely mirrored offline racial stereotyping (Nakamura, 2008). Other forms of online surveillance programs are being developed to track, monitor, influence behaviours, and keep power structures intact (Benjamin, 2019a; 2019b; Boellstorff, 2013, Nakamura, 2008).

The concept of surveillance has also been used in sport and media studies (Azzarito, 2009; Dawson, 2017; Douglas, 2012; Duncan, 1994; Godoy-Pressland, 2016; Jette, 2006; Markula, 2014; Markula & Pringle, 2006). Markula (2014) adapts Foucault's work to understand surveillance practise in sports media. Specially, she uses Clarke's (1988) term 'data surveillance' and offers insight on how sports websites access user's personal information to control and use it to spread news without their knowledge (e.g., market-consumer research). Douglas (2012) extends the notion of surveillance in regard to media representation of Black sportswomen. According to Douglas (2012) "surveillance refers not only to the practice of observing people in public spaces; it is also linked to the rapid and seemingly endless display of media representations that influence public discourse" (p. 128). Furthermore, the Williams sisters 'on and off-court' activities were observed and functioned "as a form of racialized gender marking" (Douglas, 2012, p. 130). According to Douglas (2012), these actions "constitutes a form of surveillance that is used by Whites to observe, identify, and ultimately, control the range of available representations of the sisters" (p. 130).

I argue that some social media users are aware of online and offline surveillance practices and apply this knowledge to gain agency. For example, some users either abandon platforms or use privacy settings features on their social media accounts to (re)gain autonomy. In the following section, I begin with a discussion of issues of accessibility by overarching institutions (e.g., governments) and how they exercise power over their citizens through internet censorship policies. These are issues some of the participants have encountered, and according to their experiences, the participants navigate the digital space in complex ways. The overall intention of this second part of the chapter is to adopt a feminist intersectional approach—of both identities and platforms—to understand multiple ways power works on and across the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen from different social, cultural, and national backgrounds.

Power, governments, and accessibility

The growth of new technologies has benefited governments who employ cyber warfare, either by blocking/banning or surveilling social media to retain power (Morozov, 2009). The ease of connectivity and accessibility is hindered for everyday users like some of the participants in my research because of government censorship policies. Mona^s (the Middle East and North Africa), Nadia (South Asia) and Asma (Western Europe) each encountered access issues due to bans by their respective governments. For example, for Mona^s, Facebook and Twitter were both blocked, and this ban was implemented during the 2009 election season in her country (Howard, 2010; Howard, Agarwal, & Hussain, 2011; Kirkland, 2014). The MENA region has a history of media censorship and using violence (torture of citizens) to gather information to stay in power (Morozov, 2009). During the 2009 election, governments have harnessed the power of social media by surveilling anti-government social media accounts and applied pre-emptive actions through offline violent crackdowns and by banning social media (Morozov, 2009). From Western Europe, Asma is a “big Snapchatter! Like really big” but while travelling abroad, she could not use the app because of the sanctions in place by the country she was visiting. The government sanctions were also in response to anti-government protests and Asma “lost interest” in Snapchat because she was not able to access her account. For everyday users, this impacts accessibility. However, some users

are able to manipulate censorship; which is something Mona^s did, “I needed a VPN or proxy to access” Snapchat and Facebook. VPN is a service which encrypts and reroutes the internet connection, so the user can privately and safely surf the web (Ferguson & Huston, 1998). However, not all VPN’s can guarantee anonymity and VPN detections in place by some websites can lead to limited accessibility (Ferguson & Huston, 1998). The difficulty of accessing Facebook and Snapchat drew Mona^s towards Instagram, which is now her central social media platform. Mona^s also uses WhatsApp (a free private messaging platform mainly used to keep in contact with close friends and family) to stay connected.

One of the participants spoke of a temporary ban on Facebook in her country. According to Nadia, “in the early days when it came out, Facebook was blocked for some reason”, and people started using other social media platforms “such as Twitter,” but once the ban was lifted people started using Facebook again. The platform in her region was temporarily blocked in response to a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, publishing offensive cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) which incited global riots and violence (Uddin, 2011). The ban in Nadia’s country was to stop images spreading on social media, because “blasphemy” related content gets people “killed” (Nadia). In this example, the government’s rhetoric was to stop violence in communities; the power to control content was under the guise of ‘protection’.

Platforms such as Twitter allow users to share short bursts of content quickly. This is beneficial to individuals and activists who can harness social media platforms to protest, engage, and shed light on issues. However, in some instances, offline power structures (e.g., government, communication policies) limit accessibility to control the content and users. The participants encountered issues of censorship which limited their ability to adapt specific platforms (e.g., Twitter). Despite accessibility issues, some participants learned to navigate the platform while others adopted platforms which suited their lifestyle and needs.

Surveillance is everywhere

According to Lyon (2001), surveillance is covert where information is collected about specific individual or groups, such as Muslims, and/or racial, and ethnic groups. The traditional surveillance practices are often conducted by government (Trottier, 2012), which is something Mona^s and Nadia encountered with their government. However, there are other forms of surveillance where specific communities and individuals are ‘watched’ because some cultures or identities are considered a threat. For example, surveillance on Muslim communities has increased over the last decade (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013; Jamil & Rousseau, 2012) where they are perceived as potential threats by border agents, neighbours, and/or the broader public. The increased profiling of religious communities is further perpetuated by media content, which creates stereotypes of Muslims being a ‘threat’ to society (Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009).

To aid in surveillance practices of Muslim communities, subtle messaging is used for ‘security’ purposes. Take, for instance, posters around transportation areas (e.g., airports, train stations, buses); “if you see something, say something”. This phrase was developed by the United States Department of Homeland Security after the September 11, 2001 event, to prevent another ‘terrorist’ attack (Duboff, 2001). Hall (1973) states that the production of certain content, a message is received to the audience/individuals, which is often linked to a context. Applying, Hall’s (1973) encoding/decoding concept to this example reveals this particular phrase is often associated with Muslims, especially since the attacks were made by terrorist organisations based in the Middle East and North Africa and Asia. Therefore, the receiver (those reading the posters) often perceives Muslims as a ‘threat’ and ‘reports’ them to the police or other authorities. These kinds of messaging practices provides certain groups with the power to enforce racial and religious profiling (Alsultany, 2012; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2000; Mythen et al., 2009).

As for Muslim women, their identities are aggressively questioned by dominant discourses in the media, institutions (schools, sports, and government), and social relationships (friends, family, and community). Vieweg and Hodges (2016)

highlight the role of culture and religion in the surveillance practices of Muslim women in Gulf countries. For example, women in Saudi Arabia and Qatar either omitted their gender when creating social media profiles or avoided using real images due to the concern someone may see them online and report them to their families (Abokhodair, Abbar, Vieweg, & Mejova, 2016; Vieweg & Hodges, 2016). Surveillance of Muslim women occurs because “some bodies are marked out as trespassers” (Puwar, 2004, p. 8), and by entering specific spaces in which they do not meet “normative ways of being” (Puwar, 2004, p. 116), they are inscribed as being out of place (Puwar, 2004; Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015). In the context of Muslim women, their bodies are read, interpreted, and treated differently to Caucasian men and women when entering an array of social spaces, including online spaces.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are not neutral spaces; they play a role in shaping and impacting social relationships (Langlois & Elmer, 2013) by allowing users to search, observe, and interact with other user’s digital profiles. Surveillance on social media is a synthesis of government and social media users/followers/friends who watch over others where the relationship becomes more surveillant (Trottier, 2011). Also, surveillance appears ‘less sinister’ in the digital world (Lyon, 2018), where users are afforded the ability to ‘keep tabs’, ‘stalk’, ‘eavesdrop’, ‘gossip’, and gather information on friends, family, and strangers as a form of ‘robust surveillance’ (Marwick, 2012).

According to Marwick (2012), ‘social surveillance’ exists on specific social media platforms (e.g., Twitter) or across multiple platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube). Furthermore, social surveillance differs from other forms of surveillance through three characteristics; power, hierarchy, and reciprocity. Power flows in multiple ways (e.g., between users and across platforms) along hierarchies that “incorporate very real power differentials” which go “beyond state/subject or corporation/consumer” and account for “social status, race, class, gender, and social roles” (Marwick, 2012, p. 384). Research on Facebook has explored privacy concerns and surveillance (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Young & Quan-Haase,

2009). For example, social media users who engage in social monitoring reciprocate by also producing online content, which is surveilled by others (Marwick, 2012). In sum, social media is designed for users to “continually investigate digital traces left by the people they are connected to” (Marwick, 2012, p. 1).

These are very real problems for Muslim women. Muslim women encounter multiple forms of surveillance not only by Western society (e.g., vetting of veiled Muslim women in airports) (Blackwood et al., 2013; Jamil & Rousseau, 2012), but also friends and family and the greater Muslim community (Rodriguez Mosquera, Tan & Saleem, 2014). In some societies, Muslim women are required to be modest, restrained, and obedient, ideals based on cultural or societal rules of their communities (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In some societies, community members observe and regulate behaviours “to prevent individuals from disrespecting or bringing dishonour, to the group” (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2014, p. 401). This can be applied to Muslim women, who are required to uphold the family honour. Family honour is preserving the reputation of the family through a set of religious and cultural values and norms (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ayyub, 2000; Dodd, 1973). Muslim women bear the burden of being the keepers of the family honour, which is often around ‘sexual purity’ (Chakraborty, 2010). To avoid bringing shame or being labelled a ‘bad girl’, Muslim women are discouraged from socialising with men or engaging in activities deemed inappropriate such as dating and social gatherings.

In the digital age, a Muslim woman is accountable for the type of pictures and content she posts, which can lead to individuals ‘gossiping’ and ‘reporting’ her to family and friends. For example, Lamya, a recreational athlete living in the MENA region, who runs her family business and is a digital media influencer, is aware of the offline surveillance, which also occurs in online spaces. Lamya is careful on how she engages on her public social media account as she is aware of the “negative” consequences. An incident Lamya referred to was when she went on an overnight “hiking trip” consisting of mixed genders, where “people saw pictures on Instagram” and suddenly the “word gets out” and the “conservative people” start “spreading” rumours. The rumours Lamya is referencing here refer to her ‘hanging

out with boys' which some family and community members fear will lead to sexual activity (Chakraborty, 2010; Dasgupta, 1998) thus bringing dishonour to the family and the local community. This incident created problems for Lamya, with her father cancelling future sporting and personal trips. According to Lamya, her father would not give a reason but "I believe someone told him something". While Lamya believes that her parents "trust her", they "don't want to hear shit from others". This 'shit' Lamya was referring to is the local community gossiping about her being in the company of men she is not related to because 'mixed sex interactions are forbidden' in some cultures (Chakraborty, 2009). Furthermore, these interactions suggest young women can get "pregnant out of wedlock" (Chakraborty, 2009, p. 426). The surveilling practices by the local community of her social media account impacted Lamya's sporting mobilities. Research by Thorpe, Hayhurst, and Chawansky (2018) reveals similar risks for Muslim girls in Afghanistan and how they fear images of their participation in sport would lead to family dishonour and risk among their community and potential attack from the Taliban.

Keeping in mind Lamya's experiences of being watched over by her local community and the impacts on her father, Lamya is careful in what she shares or reveals on her Facebook account. Lamya's experiences of being surveilled also happened on Snapchat (private and available to a select few), thus highlighting the ways social surveillance intersects across multiple platforms (Marwick, 2012). A key element of Snapchat is their privacy aspect; compared to other platforms, users only share their account names or content with those they have a closer relationship with (Duggan, 2015). Snapchat users can select who views their content, a feature that Instagram and Facebook have now also adopted. On Snapchat, Lamya spoke about "ridiculous theories" on "topics that were somewhat controversial for our terms", meaning Arab women, women from her society/country talking about things like dating. Her best friend, who like Lamya is not conservative, "rarely stopped her from posting content," but was concerned that "you are projecting the wrong image of who you are because you are so open about these topics" and "in reality you are sitting at home with your grandmother." According to her concerned friend, this "misrepresentation" is "not good". Continuing, Lamya describes her close friends getting together in an "intervention" to persuade her to reconsider the

ways she was using this platform, such that Lamya has stopped contributing to Snapchat, and mainly now uses it to observe. Lamya's friends were concerned that the content she is posting could comprise her standing within the local Muslim community.

For some sportswomen in this research, family members encouraged their participation in sports, but it was other aspects of their lives they shared on social media that came under close 'parental' surveillance. Sarah, Noor, Rana, and Nayla all encountered online surveillance by their family and friends. During the interviews, several Muslim sportswomen identified concerns with their family members regarding their social media platforms. For some, this raised issues of parental 'lurking'. Nayla, a competitive athlete in combat sports from North America hoping to qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, refuses to accept her mother's Facebook request: "I am like 'mom I am not going to accept it, I love you, but it is not going to happen.'" Nayla further stated she wants to include her parents on Facebook "because I do show a part of my personality I feel they don't get access to, but on the flip side there is a lot of stuff that I don't feel comfortable sharing." Her family is supportive of her sporting life, however, she is aware that differing beliefs on her religious practices (she no longer veils) may impact her relationship with her family. Nayla is carefully negotiating and selectively sharing her intersecting identities of sport, religion, and social relationships with her family on social media.

Another participant, Sarah, a personal trainer from the MENA region, has gone back and forth between blocking and unblocking her father: "My dad uses it to creep up on you [laugh]" and "I literally had to block him for a while." She felt guilty for doing this, however, she was encountering disapproving "looks" and her dad being "upset" with her because she was "lifting" and she stated: "NOTE made, delete, block." The issue was regarding the sport, CrossFit and Olympic lifting, and her parents were afraid she would become 'masculine' looking making her undesirable for marriage. However, after having a "big conversation" with her parents saying, "this is who I am, and you just have to accept it," they were finally

becoming more understanding of her sport and accepting of her participation in it, therefore, Sarah unblocked her father on Instagram. The issue of digital ‘surveillance’ by parents, family members, and members of the religious community was an ongoing issue the women had to navigate.

According to Crawford (2009), Twitter aids in reinforcing connections and maintaining social bonds. In contrast, Noor does not use Twitter to connect with others, but rather as space to “express myself, like when I am frustrated, happy or sad, or whatever. I just use it as an outlet to say the stuff I can’t say in real life, but like out loud.” Her account is public, but she rarely gets responses, so when she posts a Tweet, she does so “not expecting” a response. Noor explains that Twitter is a place where she can “just write whatever is on my mind,” but this sometimes gets her into “trouble” because her “dad follows” her. While she doesn’t receive many responses on Twitter, her father will let her know when he thinks she is out of line, telling her “you shouldn’t write these things”. The type of content Noor was tweeting about was mainly venting about life struggles, cursing, and occasionally retweeting political content. Noor’s father encourages her to use Twitter to “spread awareness” about her sport and try to “promote it” and avoid cursing and being negative online. Both Noor and her father recognise that “society is a bit judgmental when it comes to girls playing sports, especially martial arts,” so he encourages her to use the platform to say only positive things and promote her sport. However, he also warns her to “never show any picture of you on the internet because people will take it and use it.” With her father continually surveilling her Twitter account, he often “calls her”, advising Noor to “remove this” or asking, “why do you have this picture?” She later added that she feels relieved that he does not know about her Instagram account.

Other researchers have shown that parents feel the need to protect their children from harm, especially from online predators, therefore, under the guise of protection, some parents feel they have a right to surveil their children’s social media accounts (Ruck, Harris, Fine, & Freudenberg, 2008). This could be another reason why Noor’s father is monitoring her Twitter account. From a cultural

perspective, Noor's images may elicit the 'evil eye', where people's envy unintentionally brings misfortune to another, hence the concern by her father. Culturally this superstition of the 'evil eye' is common among Muslim communities. Another reason could be safety concerns, the government in Noor's country has campaigns to silence dissent through surveillance and torture. Though, she rarely posts content challenging her government, it would be a potential concern of Noor's father. Her mother also follows her on Twitter, but her reaction is different: "she is not like my dad, she will be like 'if you need anything, come talk to me'." As for Rana, a combat athlete from North America, her mother's surveillance practice differed from Noor's, and this was made evident in our discussion of her use of Snapchat:

I post very freely. Sometimes I am out of dinner, she will text me privately and say 'why are you going out when you should be sleeping, don't you have work tomorrow? Or 'why are you hanging out with this person I thought you were doing your laundry,' and I am like 'wow mama leave it alone.'

After some time, Rana "deleted her (mother) off Snapchat [laughed]". When asked if Rana's mother ever asked 'why', Rana stated, "she let it go and never commented about it". By blocking her mother, Rana avoided the constant surveillance of both her on- and off-line activities. Others spoke about their family members "liking" every image and/or "commenting" on every posts with statements like "mashallah¹⁴" (Nadia) and/or "there is my baby!" (Yara). For the Muslim sportswomen in this research, family members encouraged sports but the 'parental' online surveillance occurred in other aspects of their lives, as seen with Noor and Rana.

Mutual surveillance is everywhere; people are watching others, and others are watching over them (Trottier, 2011). This was something some of the participants in this research experienced by their families and communities. However, there are

¹⁴ A phrase used to express praise and protection from the evil eye.

also more serious consequences and/or risks of online and offline harassment, racism, sexism, and even threats of rape/death for Muslim women. For example, Pakistani social media model Qandeel Baloch was murdered by her brother because she was bringing dishonour to the family by posting provocative images on her social media accounts (Mohsin, 2016). In some societies, to cleanse the family honour and uphold cultural values, the woman and/or girl is killed (Kogacioglu, 2004). Kogacioglu (2004) further stated that it is important to acknowledge power and inequality when examining honour killings and not to simply write off murder as ‘traditional.’ Another recent example involved a Saudi woman who posted on Snapchat of her walking around uncovered wearing a mini-skirt (not wearing the abaya)¹⁵ in an old historic city in Saudi Arabia. Her snap was widely circulated, with online users calling for punishment, and the woman was arrested by mutawas¹⁶ (Batrawy, 2017).

Some of the participants in this research come from countries and societies where dishonouring your family or local community can have serious implications. These risks are very real, and how they navigate them, in their unique ways differed according to their lived experiences. Family is an integral part of most Muslim women’s lives who were supportive of their sporting careers (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010) providing financial and emotional support, which many of the participants spoke of in their interviews. Family honour is something the participants are aware of and know society members who, unsolicited, act as guardians of ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslim’ communities and report behaviours which they interpret as not coinciding with Islamic norms. Keeping all of this in mind, the participants apply caution and awareness of the type of posts associated with their sporting identities.

¹⁵ A black robe worn over clothes and scarf to cover the head which is worn by some Muslim women (see illustration on p. 4).

¹⁶ In Saudi Arabia there are mutawas who are religious police. They intervene when Muslims are not acting in accordance to Islamic norms.

“Social media brings out the dark side”: Online abuse

Trolling is a unique form of digital surveillance because social media allows for many people to watch the many (Jurgenson, 2011). Trolls are some of the many, who are followers with no personal connection but threaten and harass users by posting unkind comments. There is often a perception that those who are trolling others are miserable (Binns, 2012). According to Özsoy (2015), trolls “generally prefer a provocative, abusive, sexist, racist, inflammatory and disruptive writing style” (p. 537). Additionally, when involving social, cultural, and political issues, the public discourse is polluted with “emotionally charged Twitter messages [which] tend to be retweeted more often and more quickly compared to neutral ones” (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013, p. 217). Furthermore, anonymity on social media provides an infrastructure for trolling, such as on Facebook and Instagram pages or Twitter accounts (Farkas, Schou, & Neumayer, 2018).

Women frequently encounter online abuse and harassment compared to men (Wotanis & McMillan, 2014), and some of it is through trolling on social media accounts. Edström (2016) found that women journalists in Sweden received more threats than their male counterparts, additionally the women were faced with a “special kind of sexualised and misogynist hate speech” (p. 98) in online spaces which were multi-fold. According to Edström (2016) the “sexualised hate speech can be seen as an expression of power or lack of power” (p. 102) where online gendered harassment was used to silence and scare women from entering journalism along with perpetuating fear and not knowing “when words will turn into actions” (p. 102). Recent scholarship by Antunovic (2019) examined 29 different online news articles (e.g., ESPN videos, news articles, news clips, online radio program) surrounding #MoreThanMean, a social media campaign to raise awareness about online harassment that women in sports journalism encounter. Her analysis revealed three themes “centralizing men and their emotions; establishing online trolling as harassment; and bringing visibility to women’s experiences to construct a collective” (Antunovic, 2019, p. 434). According to Antunovic (2019) the hashtag went viral because it was not “linked to feminism” (p. 438) which can be problematic since it privileged the voices of men. However, #MoreThanMean

prompted critical conversations around harassment and “gender discrimination in sport” (Antunovic, 2019, p. 438).

Some of the participants in my research are aware of trolls but have not encountered them in extreme ways. Iman did not encounter trolls on her personal Twitter account, but she has undoubtedly observed the issue; “trolling is mainly on Twitter, and someone may have written a great article and, instead of thanking them, people say nasty things.” Despite Twitter’s attempt to close down accounts of extremist groups (Roettgers, 2018), the platform has not made significant efforts to deter online abuse (Lawson, 2018; Olivarez-Giles, 2016). Hate speech increased drastically on Twitter during the United States presidential election (Guynn, 2016). There was an increase of online racism (Daniels, 2017) and online Islamophobia which instigated offline anti-Muslim hate crimes (Awan, 2014). Additionally, there are violent threats towards women (e.g., rape, death) (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016). According to Jane (2016), Digital Rights Foundation (2017), and Duggan (2017), online harassment of women is a huge issue and has increased globally. As noted by Lamya: “Twitter people are just nasty! It annoys me when people start attacking other people.” She considers people who attack others online as “bitter” and does not understand why they do this on a public platform. She feels like “everyone on there [Twitter] is angry”, and people are waiting for others to make “a little mistake” so the trolls can “blow it out of proportion” and “make that person’s life miserable.” She expresses concern that people make cruel comments and then move on and do not think about the “damage they have caused to that one person.” In contrast, she feels that Instagram users are “happy people” but has witnessed trolling of “social influencers” who encounter the brunt of the harassment, where they are called “ugly”, told they are “whores”, or threatened as in “you are going to go to hell”. Lamya further stated that social media “brings out the dark side” of people and humanity, continuing she offers a humorous interpretation of the “dark force” where “Darth Vader is their godfather” and these trolls “are making him [Darth Vader] proud”. Similar to Iman, Lamya did not personally encounter trolls on Twitter or her personal Instagram but she was always aware of the possibility of online abuse.

The participants in this research also encountered or witnessed trolling of others across their multiple accounts, which is not uncommon for sportswomen. Studies by Bruce and Hardin (2014) and Chawansky (2016) highlight the harassment sportswomen can receive on their public Facebook pages. A select few of my participants rarely encountered negative comments, such is the case with Dina who feels “lucky” that “until now I haven’t experienced anything” on her platforms and especially Instagram which is her primary platform. Trolling and online abuse occur across other platforms such as Instagram. For example, Serena Williams was ‘body shamed’ by trolls on her social media pages in which fans would leave sexually explicit comments (Litchfield et al., 2018; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b). In my research, some of the participants spoke about their frustrations with trolls. Khadija used to argue with trolls but realised it is “soul destroying”, and thus no longer engages. Continuing, she explained that if she sees “a negative comment about me or a topic I am passionate about”, she responds by either deleting or ignoring the comment. Zenith expressed similar frustrations when she sees articles written about her, and there are cruel or inappropriate comments on the dialogue sections of the article:

People make up stories out of nowhere, ‘She is a disgrace to Muslim women’, I remember this comment. ‘She is a disgrace to our community’, and ‘what is she doing?’ and ... ‘she is a tomboy’, and ‘what kind of parents allow [her] to do this?’

Zenith is now learning to emotionally “handle” such criticisms, and no longer “picks fights” with trolls. Through experience, she has “learned to keep quiet because at the end of the day they won’t change”, and whatever she says or does won’t change “their perspective or their mind frame.” During my digital observations, I noted that Zenith rarely received any criticism on Facebook, but during our interview, she explained that such negative comments were usually in response to articles posted on pages of news outlets (e.g., BBC) and not on her Facebook page.

The risk of experiencing online abuse is a constant consideration for many sportswomen, but for my participants, this is intensified because they may also

encounter online surveillance and restrictions from family and friends according to what is culturally and religiously appropriate to post online. If a particular post is considered culturally offensive, this could result in considerable abuse by the local community. Both Khadija and Zenith note their caution in posting; and both consider their religious and cultural norms. Khadija states: “as a Muslim woman, you think about your spirituality and your ego how much of that are you putting in public” and really considers “the intention behind it” and “why, am I sharing the content,” asking herself questions like, “is it to educate or raise awareness, or is it about me?” Continuing, she describes “every day [as] a challenge of what I am sharing and why am I sharing it” and “draws some boundaries” around what she shares. Furthermore, Khadija states that she is careful about what she posts because she does not want to “hinder” or “ruin the work I am doing in my community or with football or my professional work”. She is not afraid to share “political opinion” but makes sure “it doesn’t overtake [her] key messages”. Additionally, Khadija knows she is “accountable for [her] own actions and that is not only representing [herself], but also [her] organisation”. Zenith spoke about culture and specifically how she dresses; “I do keep in mind the type of clothes I am wearing”. Despite her family being “very liberal” and “having the freedom to wear anything” she wants, Zenith avoids showing too much skin (e.g., tank tops, short skirts) which she has been doing since “childhood”. Zenith knows her online audience and thus keeps in mind that what she wears in online posts is “acceptable for both the foreign community and [her South Asian] community”. Khadija and Zenith both post carefully to avoid potential concerns from their community.

According to Foxman and Wolf (2013), Facebook can be used as a powerful tool to distribute racist discourses. Furthermore, Matamoros-Fernández (2017) stated that harassment occurs “by hijacking social media sites’ technical infrastructure for their benefit” (p. 6). For example, a news report addressed how hate groups, in particular White supremacist groups, exploit weaknesses of social media platforms to spread hateful rhetoric through unmonitored message boards or using anonymous accounts (Daniels; 2013; 2017; Donovan, 2019) which have real consequences in the form of violence towards groups of minorities. Interestingly, participants in this study who spoke about trolling reported encountering sexism more than racism.

However, it is essential to consider how other forms of oppression being encountered by the sportswomen may not necessarily be explicitly stated. It is unknown whether a user's race, religion, socio-economic background, and/or gender elicited an initial attack.

It is also important to state that experiences of offline harassment also impact a user's visibility in online spaces. For example, if a visible Muslim woman (e.g., hijab) has encountered some form of harassment in the offline world this may transfer over to the digital space. The participants in this research are aware of online abuse, where some have either observed or encountered harassment. Some who encountered online harassment learned to ignore it, while others would report the user, and a few would screenshot the message and share it with their followers. Those who did not encounter online harassment may have experienced some form of offline harassment which may have implicitly impacted their social media usage.

Navigating culture in online spaces

Snapchat is designed for ephemeral communications (Poltash, 2013). In so doing, the platform allowed the participants in my research to navigate their culture in complex ways. The ephemeral nature of Snapchat also allowed some to speak to more controversial issues or sensitive topics which they do not feel comfortable sharing on other social media platforms. Lamya, in her previous use of Snapchat, enjoyed that it allowed her to be more open; "my sense of humour is very inappropriate, and I curse a lot, and I say a lot of inappropriate things, which I don't do on my public accounts [meaning her Facebook and Instagram accounts]." As for Rana, Snapchat allows her to be "more verbal, more vocal" because it is private, "as opposed to Facebook since I have a lot of people from my class, my old teachers, people I work with." Continuing, she notes that her father is an Islamic leader, an Imam, and "as a daughter" of someone who holds a leadership position in their community, "I can't post too much" so she limits what she posts on her other social media platforms.

For Rana, there are multiple experiences and aspects of her identities that she is managing online which intersect with cultural and religious norms. As previously mentioned, family honour is something Muslim women are tasked to uphold (Chakraborty, 2010). Rana is a Muslim woman who divorced at a young age. Divorce is stigmatised in Muslim communities, being seen as an “act of public defiance” by the woman or a form of “disobedience” (Malik & Courtney, 2011, p. 35). Additionally, society and family members will ‘reject’ and ‘socially ostracize’ a divorced woman (Haj-Yahia, 2000; Malik & Courtney, 2011). Rana referenced her local community “choosing sides” and her divorce was something “the community weighed heavily on” because “I was a daughter of the Imam”. This means Rana was ostracized by her local community and she “no longer associates” with them. Rana did not provide an explicit account of experiences of divorce, but the actions of her local community impacted how she used her social media and who had access to it. Additionally, Rana revealed that she took up combat sports after her divorce and her mom was the only one that knew about it. Rana rarely posted about her sport on social media because she did not want to deal with community responses: “look, the Imam’s daughter is out playing with the boys or something”. What Rana is referencing here is her sport setting where males are present in the gym she trains at and sometimes the gym “tags” Rana in Facebook posts. So, Rana has to monitor her Facebook platform carefully and “un-tag” herself from posts to avoid dealing with a backlash from her local community. Interestingly, Rana’s father saw her uniform and asked ““are you taking Karate?”” She replied, “no baba¹⁷ I train in Brazilian jiu-jitsu” and his response surprised Rana. He said, “No way, that is so amazing” and asked why Rana never told him. Her response was she was afraid that being an Imam’s daughter and playing sports was something he and local community members would frown upon. Having already experienced the negative consequences of divorce, Rana did not want to dishonour her father through her participation in sports, especially a very male-dominated sport. However, her father’s response was: “No, I know a lot of guys whose daughters are in karate, boxing, taekwondo and are black belt” and ended with “just go for it”.

¹⁷ Dad in Arabic.

As a young woman who is divorced and is a daughter of an Imam, Rana has to be very careful about what she does, says, and posts in public. However, some digital spaces, such as Snapchat, offer Rana a temporary space to speak and show aspects of her life as she wishes. For Rana, Snapchat was not a “lightweight” platform (Bayer et al., 2016; Utz et al., 2015), instead it provided her power to control who has access to her digital life, especially since her offline life has been ‘controlled’ through ‘surveillance’ isolating her from the local Muslim community and family abroad.

These examples illustrate that it is essential to examine social media user’s cultural practices in relation to technological infrastructures while also considering the offline surveillance practices of, and within, Muslim communities. Despite controlling who has access to their social media accounts and the disappearing content, images and posts still can be captured and shared. As previously stated, some Muslim women are surveilled in their everyday lives and this surveillance continues in the digital spaces by self, friends, family, and the community.

Chapter summary

Power relations in social life are often reproduced online. Intersectionality is essential to understand how digital technologies are used to connect, challenge, and/or disrupt social and political issues. Additionally, power structures that discriminate according to intersecting aspects of one’s identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, culture, religion) are often rendered invisible in online settings. In other instances, some Muslim women become hyper-visible because of historical, political, and social discourses and are trolled or encounter online abuse.

While many of the participants experienced online surveillance and oppression, some demonstrated subtle forms of power in their strategic decisions to ignore comments, block trolls, and delete friends/family members of their social media platforms. These actions are a form of control over who has access to their digital lives. Additionally, for the participants who do not block other users, they do so as a response to potentially change perceptions about Muslim women and/or Muslims

in general. For some of the participants, there is a form of autonomy in such acts, allowing them to curate content based on their experiences and by using the block and privacy functions to control who has access to particular aspects of their digital lives.

How platforms are used by the participants vary, with some using multiple platforms for various reasons. Participants are not bound to a single platform and may move between platforms based on issues of surveillance, privacy, harassment, and accessibility to have more control of their online lives. The participants are sharing more than spontaneous selfies with their followers. They are using social media platforms to reorient their narratives through sharing strategic images and stories and asserting themselves across different social media platforms to gain recognition, to challenge stereotypical understandings of Muslim women, and build their brand, which the next chapter will explore.

CHAPTER 5:

DIGITAL SELF-BRANDING PRACTICES OF MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN

This chapter explores the various ways the professional Muslim women athletes in my sample ($n=10$) are engaging in digital self-branding, along with the numerous labouring practices they employ to connect with their audiences. The digital world provides a range of opportunities for creative career pursuits, and one such approach is through self-branding (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017; Kanai, 2015; Pruchniewska, 2017). Social media increases visibility and exposure for those engaging in self-branding practices (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017; Marwick, 2013; 2015; Pruchniewska, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). However, individuals engaged in self-branding are constantly self-managing (Gill, 2010) and self-promoting through various forms of labour to attract clients, interact with followers, increase the number of followers, promote themselves, and build audiences in ways that feel appropriate and authentic and increase opportunities for financially profitable relationships with advertisers and/or sponsors (Dobson, 2016; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017).

Sport scholars are exploring how athletes are using social media to showcase their talent, generate revenue, advance their careers, and/or attract potential sponsors (Arcy, 2016; Dart, 2014; Dumont, 2015; 2017; Enright & Gard, 2016; Jones, 2011; Thorpe, 2016). Gilchrist and Wheaton (2013), Jones (2011), Thorpe and Ahmad (2015), and Woermann (2012), revealed how social media plays an important role in sharing and supporting sports content. For example, athletes within the field of skateboarding (Dupont, 2014; Snyder, 2011), freestyle skiing (Woermann, 2012), snowboarding (Coates, Clayton, & Humberston, 2010), climbing (Dumont, 2015, 2017), and other sporting disciplines are engaging with social media to produce content and gain exposure and navigate alternative career paths.

Since the 1990s, critical media scholars have increasingly explored the evolving relationship between capitalism, popular feminism, and culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012; 2018; Gill, 2007). Such scholars take care to remind us that individuals producing content on social media for the purposes of self-branding and marketing are working within a neoliberal environment (Dobson, 2016; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017; Fullagar, Pavlidis, & Francombe-Webb, 2018; Gill 2010; Kanai, 2015; McRobbie, 2002). As discussed in Chapter Two, postfeminism is often associated with neoliberal values of individual responsibility, choice, self-discipline, and autonomy (Banet-Weiser, 2012; 2018; Gill, 2007; Gill & Scharff, 2013), which can facilitate economic success when embodied and performed ‘successfully’. Some critical feminist sport scholars are examining sportswomen’s use of social media for self-branding purposes (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). Additionally, the long-established gender roles and stereotypes of sportswomen that continue to be reinforced in mass media, also appear to be repeated in the self-representation of many sportswomen on social media (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Weathers et al., 2014).

Increasingly individuals can engage in self-branding possibilities, especially with new technologies such as social media. These platforms accelerate and accentuate how users can “package, perform and sell” (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017, p. 195) a profitable personal brand online. Furthermore, individuals can become “Instafamous” and can have an online following which “rivals television network size” (Marwick, 2015, p. 150). According to Khamis et al. (2017), an essential aspect of self-branding on social media is that the individual is “charismatic and responsive” to their audience while “retain[ing] and assert[ing] personal agency and control within a general context of uncertainty and flux” (p. 200). Furthermore, it is essential to crafting an attractive, exciting or original narrative that can inspire, inform and is relatable (Khamis et al., 2017).

Arguably, digital culture reproduces rather than challenges postfeminism (Duffy & Hund, 2015) because the ideal self-branded woman extends the normative feminine

discourses and practices under the guise of individualism, choice, agency, and empowerment (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Gill, 2007; 2017; Tasker & Negra, 2007). According to Toffoletti (2016), such a view keeps dominant power relations intact, and she cautions feminist sport scholars on how one interprets empowerment in the sporting space. Drawing upon Gill (2007), Toffoletti (2016) encourages the use of postfeminism as a “sensibility” to detect a “set of characteristics through which patriarchal and capitalist logics operate” (p. 205) in sports media coverage.

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) examined the Instagram profiles of five global sporting celebrities to understand “*how* sportswomen are representing themselves online; to consider the social, economic, and technological processes influencing *why* they self-present in ways that focus on appearance” (p. 299, emphasis in original). In their analysis Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) revealed the athletes shared a range of images, with health and lifestyle related content the most shared (38.5%), followed by family and friends, fashion/beauty, training/sports performance, corporate sponsors, and media appearance. Their findings were consistent with previous literature around social media and sportswomen sharing private aspects of their lives (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). However, their analysis also revealed the “celebrity sportswomen are using social media to express their identities as multidimensional, and in so doing contribute to their own unique branding through the crafting of a marketable lifestyle” (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b, p. 305). Importantly, Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) also incorporated audience engagement (e.g., online comments, likes) on social media which they found played “a critical role in influencing the gendered work undertaken by female athletes to present an appealing brand” (p. 300).

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) also introduced the innovative conceptual framework of “athletic labour of femininity” (p. 299) to extend the understanding of contemporary consumer culture and social media in the lives of sportswomen. This framework will be adopted in the latter part of the chapter to understand how Muslim sportswomen as active participants in the sports industry and as digital

media content producers engage in self-branding. While there is a growing number of feminist scholars exploring how sportswomen are using social media for self-branding, with the exception of a few (Chawanksy, 2016; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b) there is little research on how athletes of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds navigate these aspects of their identities through the branding process.

This chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first, I situate my findings within Banet-Weiser's (2012) postfeminist concept of self-branding and authenticity to speak to the multiple ways these participants employ different self-branding practices. In the second section, I discuss the gendered digital labour involved in producing content. I conclude this chapter by shedding light on the multiple and diverse ways that contemporary Muslim sportswomen brand themselves in online environments and the affective processes involved in such gendered digital labour.

“Do it for the ‘gram” – Digital branding of self, sport, and culture

Social media allows individuals to manage their self-representation by strategically creating and sharing images, videos, and content. According to Banet-Weiser (2012), individuals are using social media for “recording and display[ing]” (p. 76) their everyday self, and in so doing, social media has become “the quintessential self-branding” (p. 76) tool where the individual is “a product, promoted and sold by individual entrepreneurs” (p. 76). To date, the self-branding literature has focused on what Puwar (2004) calls the ‘somatic norm’, an image of the “Western white middle-class women,” and particularly representations of heterosexual femininity which functions within the neoliberal brand culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 11). Keeping contemporary cultural conditions in mind, Muslim women do not easily fit within postfeminist discourses because Western communities typically see them as lacking agency due to cultural and religious norms (Mirza & Meeto, 2018; Rashid, 2016). However, Thorpe, Hayhurst, and Chawansky (2018) recently found that Muslim girls and young women are not free from postfeminist discourses. Continuing, they argue that international non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

need to take particular care when representing Muslim girls and women within neoliberal and postfeminist discourses as this can pose unexpected risks for Muslim girls and women.

Additionally, Mirza and Meeto's (2018) research about young Muslim women found they were encouraged by schools, teachers, and policy makers to challenge their culture through the Western postfeminist ideal of female empowerment. According to Rashid (2016), a postfeminist sense of individualism and autonomy does not account for the structural inequalities Muslim women encounter according to their socio-economic status in society. However, I argue that the participants in this research used their sporting lives as a form of 'branding' on social media in various ways to empower themselves and others in complex ways. While there are postfeminist sentiments in participant's comments, the Muslim sportswomen in my project did not wholeheartedly embrace Western notions of empowerment, and in some cases, pushed back on such portrayals through their social media usage. As is discussed in the following sections, some used social media to promote the self or the sport, while others took the opportunity to show a different narrative about Muslim women and/or their society.

“To capitalise on that talent”: Self-branding approaches

The self-branding practices of the Muslim sportswomen in this research varied and were negotiated according to their audience, community, and society. I observed a range of differences and similarities of self-branding practices among the participants. Sarah, who is a CrossFit athlete, uses her Instagram to promote her strength and conditioning coaching business and celebrates a 'strong woman' ideal. This is a counternarrative to the portrayal of the oppressed Muslim women particularly by displaying images of strength, community, and faith. Simultaneously, Sarah also exhibits notions of heterosexuality which is presented through an empowered, active body, and healthy lifestyle (clean eating) in a combination of feminine beauty (beautiful hair, flawless complexion, and bright coloured lipstick) (Figure 5.1):



Figure 5.1: Sarah's Instagram post

Before promoting herself as a strength and conditioning coach on social media, Sarah worked in architecture. She spoke about transitioning from her passion for architecture to her “bigger passion for sports” and wanted to “capitalise on that talent”. How Sarah was able to do that was by using her architectural training so that when she walks into a space she can “visualise it”. In particular, Sarah is referring to “using [visualising] the empty dead spot” at her local gym. This space, according to Sarah, was mainly vacant or used for smoking. Sarah’s ability to visualise a space enabled her to convince the gym owners to let her “use it and to brand it” for her coaching business. Four years later, Sarah’s strength and conditioning coaching business is thriving. Living in a conservative society where there are limited opportunities for women to work and “there is no way to market yourself”, Sarah saw the potential in using social media. Continuing, she explains that people in her country “have a lot of time” on their hands and “are always on social media”, which she also saw as an advantage for her self-branding strategies. Through social media, Sarah was able to attract other sporting opportunities where she developed and ran local fitness and sporting events for the Ministry of Youth

and Sports in her country. Sarah was featured in a well-known regional magazine, news articles, and video promotions. The concept of thinking of oneself as a “brand” or “a work of art” resonates with the neoliberal notion of the empowered self (Banet-Weiser, 2018, p. 77), and Sarah exhibited such neoliberal discourses in the embrace of her branding practices.

Similar postfeminist ideals of the ‘empowered self’ were also seen among Khadija, Lamya, and Haya, who spoke about how they developed their brands. Lamya recently launched a MENA region specific “social platform” which she refers to as her “baby”. Lamya acknowledges that she is “the face of the brand”, and this platform intends to “connect like-mind[ed] people and encourage them to live a more fulfilled life,” through activities including sport, travel, health, and adventure. Social media platforms connect individuals, which is a concept that Lamya utilises, however, the notion of ‘living a fulfilled life’ through sports and other activities is complex and challenging. For example, in Islam, for an individual to achieve a fulfilled life, various forms of activities such as prayers, charity, and health (sports/nutrition) are necessary. The aspect of living a ‘healthy lifestyle’ in Lamya’s branding strategy resonate with postfeminist discourse. So, while Lamya’s online presence is aimed at connecting individuals from her region, her online brand is also working within a Western postfeminist environment.

There are a range of differences among the participants even when they are coming from the same region (the Middle East and North Africa) and similar sporting field, such as CrossFit. Haya, a CrossFit athlete, uses Instagram for self-branding purposes. She “owns” and “manages” the box¹⁸ with her husband and started her self-branding journey on Instagram. Haya noticed that by documenting her CrossFit journey, she “benefited so much from social media” because it brought “more awareness” and “support” to her business. Specifically, she considered Instagram a great platform allowing her to “advertise” herself “as a trainer” and also “most social media accounts are related to fashion” in her country which created an

¹⁸ CrossFit facilities are often referred to as ‘the box’ because its resemblance to “a large shed-like container or warehouse” (Dawson, 2017, p. 4).

opportunity to market herself. Haya currently has 22.6K followers, comprised of local, regional, and international audience members. Haya also works with local brands, such as nutrition companies, and posts nutrition-focused pictures “for the girls who follow me and are curious to know what I am using”. She notes that some of the brands she works with are flexible and do not “ask for much” aside for “advertising” their products on her social media profile. These self-branding practices of using Instagram to promote CrossFit are similar to Sarah’s (discussed above) self-branding approach. However, a different and essential dimension of Haya’s brand is as a ‘mom athlete’, and particularly a ‘CrossFit mom’ where she shares images of herself engaging in CrossFit through her pregnancy and post-pregnancy with images of her children (Figure 5.2):



Figure 5.2: Haya’s Instagram post

In Haya’s first photo, she states: “photo from a collaboration shoot over the weekend. I’m looking forward to seeing the final video! Don’t let this awesome photo deceive you; my baby was dramatically crying in the background (major separation anxiety)”. In the second image, Haya shares a photograph of her with her second child, and the post references the challenges and joys of navigating motherhood from the beginning stages of the child’s birth to postpartum.

Interestingly Haya was one of the few participants in this research who spoke to issues of being a mom athlete on her social media. There has been an increase by women who are representing their pregnant and maternal bodies on social media (Longhurst, 2009; Mayoh, 2019; McGannon, McMahon & Gonsalves, 2017; Webb & Lee, 2011). For example, McGannon et al. (2017) examined mommy blogs of runners and found that some participants showed “agency and resistance of gender ideologies that position women’s true calling as mothers” (p. 129). That is, rather than “centralizing identities as mothers” (p. 129) they located their athletes’ role as an important aspect of their identity. The terms ‘strong’ and ‘confidence’ were emphasised by the women which was in “contrast to the use of words and phrases that construct women’s bodies within appearance of discourse as deficient, fragile or needing to be fixed through exercise to look a certain way post-pregnancy” (McGannon et al., 2017, p. 130). Haya also used similar terms like ‘strong’ and ‘confidence’ in several of her posts. Within some cultures and societies, marriage and/or children are emphasised over other aspects of their life such as sports. Additionally, there is often a misperception that family expectations may limit Muslim women’s role in sport (Benn, Dagkas & Jawad, 2011). This was not the case for Haya, she was proud of being an athlete and a mother as she stated in one of her posts, “society forces women to give up on their dreams and just focus on being good mothers. I think it is totally unfair because the fact that she is a mother, only means that SHE CAN [emphasis in original] do anything challenging.” Similar to McGannon et al.’s (2017) participants, Haya positioned her athletic side as an important aspect of her identity. The ‘she can do anything’ attitude is also similar to the postfeminist discourse of the “can-do girl power” sentiment (Gill, 2008, p. 18).

The notion of resilience, courage, and perseverance were also present in Haya’s images and in the interview which resonated with McGannon et al.’s (2017) findings of the “resilient mother runner” (p. 129) who share before and after stories on blogs speaking to “mental skills (e.g., focus), physical strength” (p.132). In a post Haya states:

Anyone who has tried CrossFit will tell you the workouts are challenging physically, mentally, and emotionally.

When you put yourself in situations where you have to push and break your own limits to achieve what you want, such as finishing a tough workout, you've just allowed yourself to grow as a person. Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

This is particularly important to Haya when she is training through a 'tough' session especially "after a c-section delivery" where she "basically lost all core strength!" Haya speaks about her experiences of "re-learning how to use abdominal muscles, how to engage them, breath properly, and move well. They are challenging but I am able to perform them correctly without any negative symptoms". These positive and resilient mental attitudes are, according to Gill (2017), "increasingly central to postfeminist culture" (p. 619). Sharing her post-pregnancy journey and other training images, Haya shows resilience which she uses to inspire her audience, including other mothers in her country and/or around the world, that "motherhood should not stop one from training".

Haya also regularly draws upon her own experiences to speak to issues and struggles for mothers returning to sports/competition after childbirth. This is like the "role mother/advocate" in McGannon et al.'s (2017, p. 129) research, where the participants were sharing information and offering support to one another. In another of Haya's posts, she mentioned that there is "barely any information" around mom athletes and training, locally or internationally (Figure 5.3):



Figure 5.3: Haya’s Instagram story screengrab

Due to the (perceived) lack of research in this area in her region, Haya spoke to specialists in “pregnancy/postpartum” which gave her further insight around this issue which she then shared with her followers. Of course, using online sources to self-diagnose health issues can be problematic, unreliable, and questionable since certain online information may not be credible (Eysenbach, 2008). However, it is important to note that Haya does not specifically state she is an expert in the area despite branding herself as an “athlete mom.” Haya does acknowledge that everyone’s experiences are different and therefore not to compare to her experience. Importantly Haya encourages her followers to speak to their doctors and local health experts for guidance.

Haya also offers support to her follower’s especially during the month of Ramadan:

There is so much to talk about, when to workout or what to do during this month. But don’t stress! Just be consistently active and you’ll be able to maintain your fitness. Let me help you out there and you just focus on

what's important during this Holy Month.

🌙❤️#RamadanWODwithHaya

In the hashtag 'WOD' is a CrossFit term referring to 'work out of the day.' The crescent moon emoji that Haya shared is a symbol of Islam and in this example, it is especially important since the moon phases provide the timeline of the start and end of Ramadan. Throughout Ramadan, Haya shares low impact WODs and/or movements that do not over exert the body, especially since Muslims abstain from drinking liquids and eating food from dawn to dusk. She encourages people to remain active and 'consistent' during this time and offers suggestions on how to do it safely.

Additionally, like Sarah, Haya has also had opportunities where she was featured on various campaigns. For example, Haya appeared in campaigns and/or advertisement for Reebok MENA, which is the regional office of the American sporting brand Reebok. Furthermore, Haya has been invited by local news (e.g., radio, podcasts, newspapers) to talk about the sport of CrossFit and issues around athlete moms. Among some Muslim communities, there is a common perception that after marriage and childbirth women will adhere mainly to family life or one should not be active (e.g., sports, physical activity) during Ramadan. Haya embraces self-branding opportunities to highlight the importance of balancing motherhood, being an athlete, and running a business and, in a subtle way, pushes back on some of these stereotypes. Haya and Lamya are both negotiating and navigating the boundaries of Western postfeminism but in relation to their culture.

Some participants uncritically embraced self-branding possibilities of social media for building their businesses, others spoke to navigating challenges and using social media to motivate their online audience. For example, Khadija has been conflicted with the "idea of personal branding". She admits struggling with "how much of [her] life" she wants to share on social media. Rather than revealing too many personal details, Khadija prefers to use social media to develop relationships with her audience. She says I want to "build my reputation" as a local community sports leader. She also uses social media "strategically" to help establish a 'network' with

organisations and local government officials which may be future funders in her local community sports projects.

In contrast, Noor, a competitive mixed martial arts (MMA) athlete does not “brand” herself “for companies”, but rather uses social media to help “motivate girls or anyone interested in martial arts” from her country. According to Noor, this approach was encouraged by her father who advised her to promote her sport on social media. Noor started by opening up her account to the public and “posting about” her “training and competitions” for other women to see. According to Noor “it kind of worked” because women quickly started reaching out to her seeking guidance on training as an MMA athlete or just general questions about the sport. Khadija and Noor used their online presence to focus more on supporting their local community. However, as Winch (2013) states, “in the hypervisible landscape of popular culture the body is recognised as the object of women’s labour: it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy” (p. 21). Although, Khadija and Haya are not focusing on ‘branding’, by being visible and engaging with the notion of ‘empowerment’ and connecting to their audience can be seen as postfeminist.

Hiba also approaches her self-branding strategies with caution. According to Hiba, she often receives several “requests” from advertising companies and is “hesitant” to work with some companies. Hiba’s concern is that the company will use her name “to sell or brand certain ideas” and importantly, these ideas may not align with hers. The concern originates from Hiba seeing others being “dragged into social media and just advertising for other people’s views”. She explains some people are not “aware that they are being used” to “sell something”. Hiba is fearful of being used to sell products that may contradict with her values. These values may be linked to her identity as an Olympic athlete, and as a Muslim woman. Another hesitation for Hiba is that “she feels guilty that she may be bragging about something” which also conflicts with her “values.” For Hiba and some of the other participants, there are some hesitations in engaging in digital branding practices that may be deemed inauthentic to their cultures and/or religion. Muslims around the

world try to practice Islamic virtues daily and one of them is humility. According to the Quran Muslims should try not to be selfish or arrogant as stated in one of the passages: “Allah likes not prideful boasters” (Quran 57: 23). Instead, compassion towards others and humbleness through prayer are encouraged. However, being used by sponsors or such conflicts with culture/religion were not the main hesitation for Hiba, it was more about time, approach, and balance with her athlete life. Hiba spoke about meeting Ibtihaj Muhammad, an American fencer during the Olympic opening ceremony:

I told her how proud I am of her and how much I feel she is representing Muslim women in a very positive way and I would say honourable way. I know she is very active on social media and I follow her on Instagram. How she represented herself on social media, not only benefited her but Muslim women in my [local] community and made fencing more popular and trendier. I would love to replicate what she has done, and I wanted to sit with her and ask how did she start? How does she balance being active on social media and being a public figure and also have time to work out? Also, how being on social media did not distract her away from her goal to win and reach her other goals? (edited for clarity).

Hiba understands that social media can be a distraction, especially as an Olympic athlete, training, and soon to be a mother (during our interview she revealed she was expecting). Additionally, as a public figure she is often attending events or conducting sports camps in her local community. Hiba reflected on her struggle to balance various aspects of her life and be an active social media user regarding branding. Hiba has not embraced the postfeminist elements of the ‘can do it all’ notion (Gill, 2008, Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a) of self-branding, instead she prefers to keep her private and public life separate.

Many of the participants adopted the concept of online self-branding. However, a handful used social media not only to brand themselves but strategically showcase

their sport and society. Dina uses Instagram to inspire other women in the region and promote her sport and has a little over four thousand followers with an average of 20 to 80 comments on her posts and up to 900 likes on her images. According to Dina “a female mountaineer is rare” in her country. At the time of writing, Dina was in the process of completing the Seven Summits (climbing the highest mountain peaks on every continent) and when successful, will be the first woman from her country to complete this challenge. Dina also uses Instagram to attract local, as opposed to international sponsors. When asked if Dina is targeting any larger companies like Patagonia or Columbia¹⁹, she stated:

I am just looking at local companies, government or banks and it's just for financial sponsorship. Also, I don't want to stick to one company to promote it and I haven't been approached or anything. But my focus is more on getting financial sponsorship because these hikes are getting more expensive²⁰ (edited for clarity).

Being the first woman from her country to summit all the highest peaks provides Dina with the opportunity to attract local sponsors. Dina also talked about being ‘mysterious’ on Instagram:

That maybe I am covered or perhaps I am not but I do show a bit of hair, but I am not going crazy or open with it. Also, if you see me somewhere on the street you may not recognise me since I don't usually cover (e.g., hijab) (edited for clarity).

Her images on Instagram showed her wearing hats, hijab, helmet (when she is climbing), draping her head with a scarf, headbands, or keffiyeh²¹ (Figure 5.4). Dina does this because she wants “to represent her country” in a respectful manner and

¹⁹ Patagonia, North Face and Columbia are all American companies who sell outdoor clothing and equipment.

²⁰ For example, the cost of climbing Everest can range from \$35,000 to \$130,000 (US) (Warren, 2019) and varies across the different mountain climbing expeditions.

²¹ Similar to a scarf and is wrapped around the head and/or face to protect one from the harsh elements of the desert (e.g., sun, sandstorms).

keeps her culture along with the online audience (from her local community) in mind hence the “mysterious element.”



Figure 5.4: Dina’s Instagram post

Dina maybe not be exoticizing herself by appearing ‘mysterious’, however, some audience members may interpret her image as the exotic Other (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Said, 1979). The previous quote speaks to the complexities for Muslim sportswomen in this research who are navigating social media in culturally specific ways. An important aspect of Dina’s self-branding approach is that the majority of her images show her in outdoor settings and related to her sport. Either she is on a hike in her region or somewhere around the world, climbing outdoors and at indoor facilities along with images of her equipment. Dina also sometimes shares images of her speaking at events or being interviewed by local news about mountaineering. For Dina and some of the other participants, they are able to subtly assert important aspects of their lives on social media and reorient their narratives through self-branding.

“I don’t shy away from who I am” : Understanding authenticity

Authenticity in brand culture is best described as a dialogue between an individual’s everyday selves and the “commodity self” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 13). Pooley (2010) uses the term “calculated authenticity” (p. 78) to explain how individuals have to be strategic, creative, authentic, and sellable. Recent research by Faleatua (2018) on branding practices by young women on Instagram in Australia found they practised the “authentic self” by “employing strategies to be seen a certain way by others online” (p. 722). Several of the participants in his project spoke about being ‘authentic’, which was intertwined with being authentic in their sports in a culturally-religious way.

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) state “for female athletes, constructing the self as an empowered, in-control and can-do subject occurs at the nexus of post-feminist discourses that celebrate women’s self-production and broadcasting of ‘authentic’ female identities” (p. 18). These authentic practices include; “a distinctive style of commentary (often using a sense of humour alongside images)” (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a, p. 21), “body-positive affirmations as love your body (LYB)” (p. 22), and/or “revealing something about the causes close to their hearts” (p. 24). The love your body (LYB) posts are what Gill and Elias (2014) define as:

Positive, affirmative, seemingly feminist-inflected media messages, targeted exclusively at girls and women, that exhort us to believe we are beautiful, to ‘remember’ that we are ‘incredible’ and that tell us that we have ‘the power’ to ‘redefine’ the ‘rules of beauty’ (p. 180).

Similar themes of humour, empowerment, vulnerability, relatability, and love your body (LYB) from Toffoletti and Thorpe’s (2018a) findings were reflected in some of the Muslim sportswomen’s social media posts. For example, in one of Rana’s post she shared an image on her Instagram (she also shared the same image in her Snapchat) with a close up of her face, with a faint smile, black eye, and gazing

directly into camera with the caption “when that jits [jiu jitsu] life finally catches up with you”.²² In our interview Rana shared why she posted that image:

For me, it was a warrior kinda of woman. I am SO [Rana emphasised] dedicated to spending time training and earning my stripes. I had my grading²³, I was putting in all this effort and I had been getting really better. The whole black eye thing was an accident in training. I took it in strides it was kind of fun for me, you know. So, yea to be honest it was something I was proud of it [laugh]. Also, that I am still doing it, and I survived (edited for clarity).

Additionally, Rana said when she first got the black-eye during the training one of the “guys” at the gym stated: “OH MY GOSH [Rana emphasised] just watch you are going to post it on your Facebook and someone is going to comment that you got beat by your husband [laugh].” Rana and her fellow athletes laughed about this because it is “such a stereotypical thing that someone would do.” She “kinda waited for someone to make that comment” but in fact did not receive that type of a statement. Rana’s image could be interpreted as the dominant media discourse about oppressed Muslim women from a backwards culture which abuse their women. However, that is not how Rana views herself, showing the ‘strong’ ‘warrior woman’ and pride in her achievement as an athlete is relevant to the love your body (LYB) discourse which is also present in Rana’s other images, captions, and the interview.

Yasmin, who is a rock-climber in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region shared a similar image as Rana but it was of her hand (Figure 5.5):

²² The image is not provided because Rana requested anonymity.

²³ The grading and stripes determine ones progress and belt rank in jiu jitsu.



Figure 5.5: Yasmin's Instagram post

The image was accompanied with a caption “I am sorry hand. But the price we pay for love #rockclimbing #lifeofaclimber”. One of the comments by a female athlete in the MENA region stated, “believe it or not, something in this image is powerful!” Yasmin replied “its the pride”. Another comment had a smiley face emoji followed by, “for the love of the game” with the hand emoji, a response by a Caucasian male athlete also living in the MENA region.

Yasmin has also shared images of other parts of her body with captions like “outdoor climbing always leaves its temporary mark #climberslife #rough #climbing #outdoor”. In another image, Yasmin shared her climbing outdoors and talking about Ramadan (Figure 5.6):

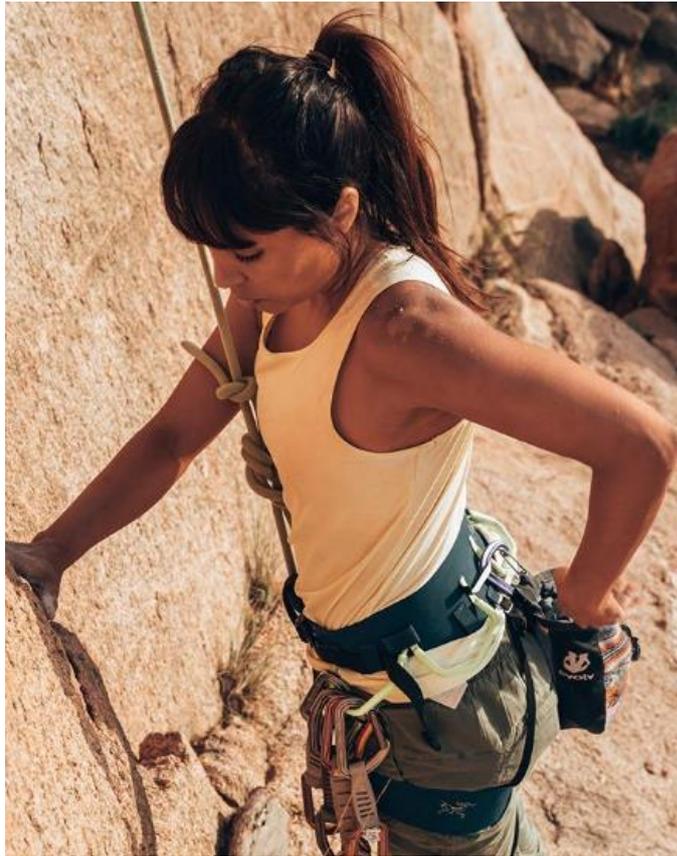


Figure 5.6: Yasmin’s Instagram post

In the image she states: “with burnt shoulders and exhausted body during Ramadan. We do not like to stop from playing around on the wall. #rockclimbing #femaleclimber”. As mentioned previously, Ramadan is important to Muslims. There are many Muslim athletes who continue to train during this time (e.g., Haya [p. 138]). Yasmin’s post is creating ‘relatability,’ a widely used aspect of self-branding (Khamis et al., 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a). The post in particular allows the wider Muslim ummah, to relate to the struggle of fasting and training. Additionally, Yasmin also posts pictures with empowering statements like “stand tall and break obstacles” the reflect the postfeminist. In these ways Yasmin is also sharing her ‘multidimensional’ identity which creates a unique ‘marketable’ brand.

The participants used social media to navigate (and challenge) the notion of ‘authentic’ and ‘redefined’ the ‘rules’ on the representation of Muslim sportswoman. In so doing, some are reframing and deconstructing what it means to be a Muslim woman, especially since women who are engaging in online self-

representation, their body becomes hypervisible. For example, Sarah is “very engaged” with her audience and wants to “inspire people” by sharing images focused on her sport, lifestyle, identity, and away from the objectification or sexualisation of her body. Sarah is aware of how social media works where many (Western) users objectify their bodies to gain more ‘likes’ and build audiences, but Sarah focuses more on engagement as opposed to ‘likes’ and increasing her audience and avoids mimicking images on social media. For instance, in Sarah’s Instagram images, as a CrossFit athlete when she is demonstrating a movement such as back squat for her followers, the camera is often positioned at a front angle or to the side and rarely behind her posterior (Figure 5.7):



Figure 5.7: Sarah’s Instagram post

In my observations of other CrossFit athletes (not the participants in this research), a common practice is the positioning of cameras, which are often placed behind, in which the ‘bum’ ends up being the central focus. As previous research has shown, camera angles can perpetuate the sexualisation of sportswomen (Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014), which Sarah avoids because she has control over the placement of the camera. Sarah explicitly avoids ‘sexualising’ her body, however, some of her images do challenge some rules of Islam around covering the body. In the Quran, women are encouraged to protect and cover their bodies, and many Muslim

communities have a strong belief that women should not show or reveal their flesh in sexually provocative ways (e.g., wear bikinis, short skirts, low cut shirts which reveal cleavage). Nevertheless, the passage does not just focus on women but addresses suitable attire for both men and women, which is to dress modestly by “protect[ing] their private parts²⁴” and not showing “off their adornment” (Quran 24:31). However, Sarah lives in an extremely conservative country with strict rules on how women must dress in public. Sarah does not dress in shorts and tank tops in public because she is required to wear the abaya, but the space she is training in has exceptionally high walls which prevent men and others from surveilling her sporting and/or fitness activities. For Sarah, social media is an ambiguous ‘borderland space’ comprised of private and public spaces which she navigates daily.

Muslim communities have a shared understanding that women should avoid flaunting their body in provocative ways. The bodily regulation and dress of Muslim women by both Muslim and Western communities often creates misunderstanding and little respect for Muslim women in their choice of attire. Such ideas around what Muslim women should or should not wear are further complicated by notions of the bad or good Muslim woman. In Islam, the female body should be covered, however, interpretations of how the body should be covered rest upon cultural norms and individual choice. As previous research has shown, Muslim women’s bodies are often positioned as ‘out of place’ because they do not fit the norm (Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015; Puwar, 2004; Testa & Amara, 2016). This was the case for Sarah, but she offers examples of the ways she negotiates such boundaries. By being active online, Sarah is hypervisible, which may provoke the feeling of being judged by her society. To balance her culture, sport, and religion, Sarah often shared images of her devotion to her faith. For example, in my observations of her social media, pictures of her praying were scattered throughout her profile with statements like: “Stop Drop and Sawee Duaa” (sawee stands for ‘do’, and duaas stand for ‘prayer’) followed by different emojis (e.g., prayer hands) and “#powerofprayers” hashtag. Additionally, by Sarah sharing

²⁴ Covering the genitals.

a private aspect of her life such as ‘praying’ demonstrates authenticity by “allowing the outside world access to one’s inner self” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 60). In this case the outside world, such as the Western world gets a glimpse of a Muslim sportswomen’s everyday life and potentially challenge the stereotypical representations of Muslims.

Haya also spoke about being “careful” with her Instagram because that is where she brands herself, especially as a “Muslim woman who dresses modestly” she avoids “bringing attention to [her] body.” Here Haya is referring to careful considerations as to “where the camera is positioned” when she is filming, taking pictures or going live on her Instagram. Similar to Sarah, Haya also avoids placing the camera behind her if she is “doing squats” and, in some instances, completely avoids posting certain CrossFit movements such as “handstand push-ups”. Haya avoids this particular movement because her shirt may slide down and reveal skin which conflicts with her religious practice. Haya’s identity and online practices are linked to faith, and as a well-known athlete in her region, she is careful with what she posts online. The ability for Sarah, Haya and other participants to embody political, cultural, and religious discourses also portrays the complexities of how Muslim women in this research are navigating their culture and religion when trying to self-represent and brand online.

It became evident during the research that the meaning of authenticity among the participants is connected to a range of personal, religious, and cultural practices. For example, Sarah also spoke about being authentic, where she avoids mimicking other “Arab and Muslim women” within her country and sporting field. According to Sarah, she feels some women are “very superficial”, and their online persona does not reflect their offline personality. Sarah’s authenticity is portrayed as the ‘true’ and ‘real’ self within a ubiquitous consumer culture. Additionally, Sarah’s Instagram feed shows candid images of her, smiling, spending time with her family, and friends outside of her sport. This leads to a sense of ‘a close friend’ or someone followers can see as an approachable individual which is also similar to findings from Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a). Additionally, these self-branding practices of

Sarah's "empowered femininity" through images of "muscular body" and "belief in oneself" resonates with Toffoletti and Thorpe's (2018b, p. 306) research on American MMA fighter Ronda Rousey. In my conversation with Sarah, she spoke about other ways she practices authenticity on social media. Sarah mentioned that she has a friend who works for an influential media company who can "easily push my account and give me more exposure". Sarah does not take advantage of her friend's potential impact because she considers it "misleading". Sarah wants to develop her online audience through her branding practices in an authentic manner and not by using her friend's powerful position to gain instant followers. Her authenticity is grounded in hard work, which is intertwined with her personal, cultural, and religious identities.

For others, being authentic relates to the notion of not mimicking the images and content of other social media users. For example, Lamya is frustrated and annoyed that all she sees online are "people looking more alike because they are seeing others and replicating it" with the "same lips, eyes, or they dress the same". Continuing, Lamya spoke about seeing similar trends in sports. She encountered that with a friend who went on a long hike with her and made her "take like hundreds of pictures" to get that "perfect" Instagram shot. She knows her friend will never go hiking again, and "just wanted that shot". Puwar (2004) speaks to the concept of "embodied rituals" where the racialised and gendered body is "pressured into mimicking hegemonic cultures" (p. 116). In Lamya's friend's case, she is 'mimicking' the hegemonic culture of getting that 'perfect' Insta shot. Lamya, alternatively, avoids it along with the other participants in this research. For some of the participants in this research their self-branding practices reflected Western postfeminist concepts of being authentic, however, they were constantly trying to remain culturally and religiously authentic to connect with their communities.

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a; 2018b) discuss that those sportswomen who emphasise both physical prowess and sporting achievements along with Western ideals of beauty tend to attract the largest audience. Some Muslim sportswomen explicitly practice beauty alongside their sporting identities, such as Ibtihaj

Muhammad, an African American Olympic fencer who has a modest fashion line called Louella. However, among my participants none of them spoke about beauty in either Western or culturally specific in terms of self-branding practices. However, in my observation it is hard not to notice that some of these women practice some form of beauty (e.g., sometimes wearing make-up, fashion brands, taking part in sporting fashion shoots for Vogue Arabia). Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) developed the concept of ‘athletic labour of femininity’ to understand sportswomen’s online representation and branding practices in “postfeminist consumer culture” (p. 313). Their research revealed that the sportswomen were willing to “promote a sporty and hetero-sexy, ‘current’ femininity through a focus on styling, fashion, leisure, personal grooming and self-care” (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018b, p. 306).

I extend Toffoletti and Thorpe’s (2018b) concept of ‘athletic labour of femininity’ to discuss Muslim sportswomen’s digital practices as ‘athletic labour of Muslim femininity’. For the Muslim sportswomen, there is an intersection between ideals of Western beauty and Muslim athletic beauty. The participants may not necessarily be flaunting their bodies online in any sexually explicit ways, but some are displaying it humbly and modestly, sensitive to their cultural and/or religious norms around how a body should be displayed in public. They are embracing the beauty in their own culturally specific ways and some are pushing back on Western discourses around beauty. Additionally, the Muslim sportswomen are not exoticising themselves when they share their images. However, this depends on how the audience interprets the image which will vary from person to person (Hall, 1997). Some audience members may view the Muslim sportswomen’s images and exoticise them through what Hall (1973) refers to as “‘preferred readings’—have[ing] the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them” (p. 169), which means, that certain groups or individuals have been historically represented a particular way. This limits the range of perception of the viewer/reader/audience and creates stereotypes, such as Muslim women being seen as the exotic Other (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Khoja-Moolji, 2015, Said, 1979).

In Duffy and Hund's (2015) research on beauty bloggers, their participants presented themselves 'authentically' by being vulnerable and by addressing taboo topics, such as depression. In my research, many of the participants also referenced being authentic with some mention of vulnerabilities; "I am a genuine person...I don't shy away from who I am" (Khadija), "I am very honest and genuine on my account. I feel like I have a responsibility for the people following me" (Haya). However, in some cases, authenticity did not always translate. For example, Khadija shares some of her sporting adventures, however, some of her followers get a different impression of her, as "someone who is like hiking every weekend." Khadija sometimes feels that Instagram "distorts reality" and thus does her best to represent herself authentically.

Mona^s, also spoke about being more authentic. Her approach was to be more accessible to her followers. For example, she often invited her followers to join her on many adventure related sports. For instance, Mona^s shares statements on Instagram such as, "hey guys heading to the mountains, here is the itinerary, come if you want". In my observation, Mona^s shared images with her friends and family engaging in 'fun' events (e.g., base jumping, surfing, snowboarding, camping) which she hopes "inspires" people to participate in these activities and "get to know" Mona^s "outside of social media".

In their research on action sports cultures, Wheaton and Beal (2003) argue that "'authentic' membership status is influenced by factors including commitment, attitude, gender, class, and race" (p. 173). They interviewed windsurfers in England and skateboarders in California to understand how they interpreted images in magazines and videos to understand authenticity (Wheaton & Beal, 2003). The windsurfers viewed authenticity as "searching—symbolically—for their own private utopias" (Wheaton & Beal, 2003, p. 165). Some of the participants in action sports, such as Mona^s revealed similarities, regarding the notion of "'soul' windsurfer as at one with 'nature'" (Wheaton & Beal, 2003, p. 164) were present in many of her images (Figure 5.8):



Figure 5.8: Mona's Instagram post

Mona^s also shared “aesthetically pleasing” (Wheaton & Beal, 2003, p. 163) images in her Instagram posts in which the “rural is presented as utopic” (p. 164). The images Mona^s shares are a dominant representation of most Western action sportswomen (Thorpe, 2018) which may be a form of relatability within the action sports community at the same time challenges the representations within action sports around ethnicity.

The depiction of vulnerability was another approach that some of the participants used to speak to representation. For example, Zenith has a sizeable online following (14.8K on Instagram, 35K on public figure Facebook page), and she uses her social media accounts for empowerment and positivity. Due to her online presence, she is often contacted by advertisement companies on Facebook (DM), but she said she always asks for their “credentials” to make sure the companies requests are “authentic”. During my digital observations, one of Zenith's posts stood out; it started with the statement: “I am not a model, I am overweight, and I am dark skinned”. In my conversation with Zenith, she revealed that it was in response to a brand that reached out to her and was describing her initial interview with the company and questioning in her mind why they wanted to work with her. Zenith's critical view of herself was based on Western beauty ideals. According to Jha

(2016), beauty is linked to economic mobility, though within the confines of specific attributes; “physical attractiveness, whiteness, and youthfulness have accrued capital just as darker skin colour, hair texture, disability, and aging have devalued feminine currency” (p. 3). The re-circulation of images, which are the production of colonialism, affects women of colour economically and socially (Jha, 2016). Meaning the ideal Caucasian, thin, and fair attributes are often viewed as more desirable in some societies in the Global South due to colonialism (Jha, 2016). However, the brand representative responded that the company did not want to reiterate Western beauty ideals. According to Zenith, they claimed not to “require a model; we require a brand influencer”. A social media influencer is an effective spokesperson who can shape “audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011, p. 90). They also target desired audiences through images and videos, making them relatable to average consumers and often use platforms like Instagram and YouTube (Ayish & Al-Najjar, 2019; Glucksman, 2017).

According to Zenith, this is the moment she “understood the meaning of influencer”, and that she would “not be modelling” but “representing the brand” and offering the company a connection to a seemingly ‘authentic’ Muslim woman’s identity. The company wanted to show diversity among the women in their country. Zenith describes her relationship with the company as sitting well with her ethics. In contrast to brand companies from the past who “always tried to change me into a model,” the current company “did not camouflage my identity and I still wear their clothes” (Figure 5.9):



Figure 5.9: Zenith's Instagram post

Zenith sees this corporate relationship as a win-win. She explains that teaming up with the company brought in new followers, because it gave Zenith a bigger “platform to express” herself. Additionally, they [the clothing company] understood that very original uniqueness in me”. In the interview Zenith explained her caption of not being a ‘model’:

I love working with them (the company) because they are giving me the platform to express myself while wearing their clothes so that is why I wrote that post. So, whatever labels you have fat, skinny, dark or whatever. This brand will preserve your identity as a woman or whatever religious sect you are. Also, if there are doing any campaign overseas they will take you along (edited for clarity).

Zenith's relationship with one of the biggest brands in her country also exhibits an interesting power relationship. In her eyes, the brand is providing an extended form of autonomy by allowing her to be who she is through their clothes. Though, of

course, the brand is also using her online presence and influence for their economic growth and ascendancy.

As researchers have revealed, when sportswomen focus on their heterosexual femininity, they are likely to attract viewers, particularly male viewers less interested in their sporting achievements (Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b). For those sportswomen who offer self-sexualised images on their social media platforms, their comment sections are often peppered with salacious and sexist remarks (e.g., “nice ass”) that suggest they are not being respected for their athletic prowess or achievements. Gill (2007) states that postfeminism intersects with the neoliberal notion of autonomy and free choice where “young women are hailed through a discourse of can-do girl power,” at the same time “their bodies are powerfully re-inscribed as sexual objects” (p. 25). While many of my participants seem to be performing the former (a Muslim-specific version of the can-do girl power discourse), they were unanimous in rejecting the re-inscribing of their sporting bodies as sexual objects. Additionally, through attributes of “confidence, self-esteem, and competence” (Brand-Weiser, 2018, p. 13), some are considered by brands as valuable for promoting and advancing their capitalist aims of reaching more diverse audiences and consumer groups.

“Sometimes I think a lot about it, maybe too much”: Gendered digital labour

Those involved in creative self-branding and self-promotion in digital spaces are engaging in various forms of labour, particularly in the production, sharing and consuming of content. Through these labour practices, individuals are continuously maintaining and building relationships to support their career pursuits. A growing body of literature examining digital labour reveals these practices as “simultaneously physical, cultural, technological and also psychological” (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017, p. 4). According to Banet-Weiser (2012; 2018), in the contemporary branding culture, such labour has exploitative elements. There are different forms of ‘labouring’ which go into online work, including ‘emotional

labour' (Hochschild, 1983), 'aesthetic labour' (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009), 'relational labour' (Baym, 2015); and 'creative labour' (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011). Here I focus, particularly on emotional labour in the digital.

Emotional labour is gendered (Hochschild, 1983) and, in a new context, self-branding is gendered (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Media feminist scholars have brought attention to gendered emotional labour in relation to digital culture (Arcy, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012). Digital labour requires an endless curation of a 'visible-self' both on and offline (Dobson, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Dumont, 2015; 2017). For example, in Duffy and Hund's (2015) research of fashion bloggers, they found their participants "carefully curating" aspects of their "glam life" (p. 2). The time spent creating content involves emotional effort including participating online which may or may not lead to monetary gains (Arcy, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2016). According to Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b), the practices of 'athletic labour of femininity' "sits at the intersection of feminist theories of aesthetic labour and self-branding" (p. 301). Furthermore, Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b) state:

Capturing the 'right' feminine sporting 'look' is not of itself a job requirement for being a sportswoman, investigating how aesthetic labour is undertaken by elite athletes can provide a clearer picture of how the athletic labour of femininity governs modes of female athletic self-expression online (p. 303).

In my research, the participants approach to digital labour varied. However, most carefully curated the content they were sharing with their online audience. For example, Sarah, Haya, and Zenith all spoke about the amount of time they spent posting content and engaging with their audiences; "sometimes I think a lot about it, maybe too much" (Sarah), and it "takes me a long time to post, just one post" (Haya). Haya also explained that with "specific posts" she would prepare "a week in advance", just in case she gets too busy with clients, kids or is "too stressed or not in the mood". She prepared posts in advance in the knowledge that letting a week go by without posting is "not a good thing" for maintaining an active and engaged following.

Participants also noted the extensive time involved in responding to follower's comments; "I read every single comment" (Sarah). To the participants in my study, their social media usage is not motivated by acquiring likes or increasing their number of followers, but instead they want to "inspire" others by sharing their digital journey and be "very engaged" with their online followers. These engagements are around replying to comments and questions their follower's post or send via direct messaging. For example, when Rania initially started using Instagram, she enjoyed receiving 'likes' on her images. However, Rania no longer focuses on 'likes' nor does she "care about" them but posts pictures which she enjoys sharing. This requires an additional investment of time and energies responding to comments. The athletes may not be focusing on the likes, however, likes subconsciously impact what they are posting. Recently, Instagram announced they are testing a new feature that hides the numbers of likes from followers, so users can focus on what they share and not on the number of likes on images (Martin, 2019). This feature was not available during my observation phase, but it is something to consider in future research projects around digital practices. Importantly, the time and effort devoted to engaging with their followers and creating content is a form of digital labour (Arcy, 2016; Duffy, 2016).

According to Lee (2005), Instagram has shifted the practices of traditional photography in which individuals "actively participate in the process of generating, transforming, reprocessing, and, finally, making meaning from images" (p.1) to share with their audience. However, traditional photography can also be a form of gendered labour. For example, mothers used photographs to negotiate and mediate emotional relationships with their family (Rose, 2004). Jomhari, Gonzalez, and Kurniawan (2009) examined photo sharing websites (e.g., Flickr) and interviewed nine mothers from Malaysia living in the United Kingdom. The mothers preferred the online medium because they could easily share everyday experiences with family members living overseas, which allowed them to stay "emotionally connected" (Jomhari et al., 2009, p. 238).

The participants in this research who were self-branding often shared high-quality images and rarely used Instagram filters in their posts. The photos were often taken with a DSLR camera or a GoPro. With the advancements of technologies, cell phones are also marketed as camera-worthy devices to capture the same quality images as DSRL cameras. In my observations of Muslim sportswomen's Instagram accounts, it was apparent that many participants photographed their images using their cell phones and wrote their text, with a few exceptions. Yara uses high-quality action shots on her Instagram profile, which are often taken by her "good friend, who is a photographer" who "also trains" and "is always at jiu jitsu, always taking pictures. I just use them, [because] they are really awesome and are not [taken] from an iPhone". Other participants also inform their audience if the image was taken by someone else by simply stating in the text of the image: "Thank you @[name of the photographer] for your time and effort in making these shots happen! 😍 #droneshot #gopro" (one of Dina's images). The smiley face emoji with the heart eyes often signifies enthusiasm and/or admiration towards images and captions.

Some used professionally shot images while others curated their own images. Nevertheless, the 'quality' of the images still mattered for some of the participants, who avoid posting "bad quality pictures" (Dina). According to Thien (2005), "an emotional subject offers an intersubjective means of negotiating our place in the world, co-produced in cultural discourses of emotion as well as through psycho-social narratives" (p. 453). Rania spoke to the importance of hers posts:

Instagram has been my companion each day for the past five years and counting. I love it, I look forward to posting every day, it is part of my routine. Sometimes I post late but I still post every single day. I love it because of my many things, it helps me look back and reminisce about something. It also helps me look at the world with a very reflective eye because I believe the world is a deep and beautiful place (edited for clarity).

Rania has been posting daily for the last five years and puts "effort" in her posts because her Instagram is about "reflecting" on daily life and also a form of

motivation. Posting content gives her a break from the busy life of working and training. In my observation of Rania's Instagram feed she often spoke about a range of topics, family, religion, and sport. Her reflection allows Rania to 'negotiate' the world according to her own experiences.

There were other creative ways the participants practised digital labour. Some of the participants were well equipped because of previous marketing experience, while others took additional courses to be successful at branding themselves online. For example, Dina uses a lot of hashtags where she searches "names and hashtags" and follows "other people" and examines their images to see who they have "tagged" and who they "follow". After such extensive research, Dina will then start following appropriate others, and through this approach, her own Instagram page "keeps growing". Sometimes Dina will send DMs to individuals either asking specific questions or if she wants to "collaborate" on something. As for Mona^s, during my observation of her Instagram account, I noticed her captions change from purely English to a combination of English and Farsi, and towards the end of my observation period, most of her posts were in Farsi. When asked, she explained that she had learned through experience that when she posts in Farsi it allows her to better engage with her local community who may not necessarily know English. She notes that her audience changed; while she "used to have mostly foreigners" as her audience, a lot more people from her own country are now following her online sporting journey.

Some of the participants took a highly entrepreneurial approach to their use of social media. For example, Mona^s purchased the "business Instagram account" which gives her insight into her posts and helps her analyse the content and determine the best times of the day and week to post. Zenith used to work as a "social media marketer for many, many, many people" and has a strong grasp on why specific images "get more likes" which she said is based on the timing of the day, combined with the quality of the content and images. Zenith's experiences prepared her to "never posts in the mornings or really late in the night", otherwise posts will likely get lost in people's online feeds. Furthermore, Zenith also prepares snaps early,

which allows her to quickly share her content across multiple platform such as Instagram stories²⁵. She also has a laid back approach with engagement where Zenith does not “force” herself “to comment” on every image or “snap”. Similarly, Mona^s also did not “post pictures every day”, however for her it, “depended on what is happening at that moment of time” and if Mona^s “can’t produce any nice content [she] won’t post it.” However, Mona^s used her “Instagram stories a lot” and shared about “twenty-five stories a day or more”. As others have revealed, action sports athletes use social media in different ways to those from more traditional sports, often using online platforms to create alternative career pathways (Dumont; 2015; 2017; Dupont, 2019; Thorpe & Dumont, 2018; Woermann, 2012).

Some of the participants did additional work offline to develop their online skills. For example, Dina and Haya both took online social media courses. Through a combination of taking social media courses, “listening to podcasts” and “reading articles on being successful with your social media account” (Haya), they learned how to “keep your followers engaged” (Haya). According to the social media courses, to build an online audience, it is important to be consistent with images and posts and work on “sticking to one thing and not jumping around like you “shouldn’t talk about makeup and the next thing is food” (Dina). Haya further states that if one does not remain consistent with posts “you will be forgotten” and the “audience will lose interest”. They both learned to pick something they were passionate about and brand it, and through hard work, success can be achieved, a notion of postfeminism (Banet-Weiser, 2012). Hiba also took a social media course, but it was to help her “mentally be prepared for negative comments” she may “face (during interviews) or receive online” at the Olympic Games. According to Hiba, this course was helpful for her as an Olympic athlete who is trying to find a balance between her private and public life. Hiba’s, Dina’s, and Haya’s motivation and/or need to enrol in social media courses speaks to emotional work involved in branding practices (Arcy, 2016; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2016). In sum, for the

²⁵ When I started my observation, Instagram had just launched Instagram story which was a feature that Snapchat was known for. I observed many of the participants transitioning to Instagram story and only posting important content on their Instagram feed. They may not have been posting daily on their feed but were sharing frequently on the Instagram stories.

participants who are self-branding, their practices entail navigating culture and religion, curating images through various visual devices (e.g., cell phone, cameras, GoPro), and engaging with followers on social media to develop relationships with stakeholders, fans, and sponsors.

Chapter summary

Social media platforms allow the participants in this research to self-brand themselves in various ways. The participants practised a multitude of offline and online gendered digital labouring practices to articulate aspects of their sporting and social lives. Some of the participants appear to embody aspects of a postfeminist sensibility as empowered individuals achieving success, while others are navigating religion and culture when trying to self-brand and some are simultaneously embodying both postfeminism and cultural-specific ideals.

In summary, the participants authenticity appears in the form of showing vulnerability, relatability (e.g., struggling to train during Ramadan, eating healthy, getting children to school), not wearing makeup or wearing makeup, sharing images of their country, or proudly showing their religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in the form of 'athletic labour of Muslim femininity'. For the Muslim sportswomen, their self-branding practices were at the intersections of Western postfeminism ideals and their culture where they employed a range of self-branding and gendered laboured practices, and some of the participants are resisting and recreating dominant discourses of postfeminism, and consumerism in culturally specific ways. In Chapter Six, I focus more attention on the various forms of agency and politics of Muslim sportswomen in digital spaces.

CHAPTER 6:
MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN AS
DIGITAL SPORT INVADERS: HASHTAG POLITICS
AND EVERYDAY VISIBILITIES

The online environment represents an important frontier for examining social transformations, of sports, race, culture, gender, and identity. To understand the social transformations of digital spaces, it is important to consider broader social and technological changes occurring in social media and feminist politics. The rise of new technologies and specifically social media has ushered in new forms of feminist politics, which some have termed ‘the fourth wave’ (Cochrane, 2013; Munro, 2013; Ray, 2018). According to Cochrane (2013), the fourth wave is “defined by technology: tools that are allowing women to build a strong, popular, reactive movement online” (p. 1). Jackson (2018) elaborates that while political movements have been central to feminism for years, social media is enabling new forms of agency, “empowered by a feminist pedagogy – gathering and passing on knowledge” (p. 47) emphasising intersectionality (Benn, 2013; Parry et al., 2018; Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016) to address a range of injustices.

Similar to previous waves of feminism, the fourth wave is “energized by social and political activism” (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 56; Parry et al., 2018; Thelandersson, 2014). Yet in the context of the Web 2.0, feminists use of social media aids in enabling the “call out” culture where sexism and misogyny are challenged (Munro, 2013; Parry et al., 2018; Thelandersson, 2014). For example, the ‘Take Back the Night’ and ‘SlutWalk’ movements occurred with the support of digital platforms to communicate and organise protests against rape culture (Cochrane, 2013; Fullagar et al., 2018; Zimmerman, 2017). Another example is the #MeToo movement, a form of Twitter hashtag activism, which went viral in late 2017 and sought to address widespread issues surrounding sexual harassment and assault via individuals posting of experiences of harassment and sexual violence on Twitter. The visibility afforded by the common hashtag, #MeToo, created a wave of public

revelations of sexual misconduct and assault in women's everyday lives (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018; Soucie, Parry, & Cousineau, 2018). The moment also culminated in exposing structures of sexism and violence within different industries such as the activities of serial rapists, Harvey Weinstein of the entertainment industry and Larry Nassar of the sports industry (gymnastics). Such examples reinforce Munro's (2013) and Soucie et al., (2018) beliefs that digital media has created new discussions and change around feminist issues relating to political, social, and economic oppressive structures along with new power imbalances of the ever-evolving digital media landscape.

Despite the rise of global digital social movements, racism, sexism, and other inequalities persist — questions as to whether social media has the potential to transform inequalities and power imbalances abound. However, as a growing array of scholars illustrate, social media provides the opportunity to be visible and challenge particular discourses around marginalized communities, including in sport spaces (Bennett, 2014; Jackson, 2018; Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013; Mann, 2014; Meikle & Young, 2011; Piela, 2010b; Shaw, 2014; Williams, 2017). The opportunities afforded by social media are particularly valuable for communities that have long been ignored, stereotyped or trivialised in the mainstream media. As I demonstrate in this thesis, social media platforms are key spaces for Muslim sportswomen to create counter-hegemonic understandings of the self and Muslim women.

In this chapter, I draw on Puwar's (2004) discussion of 'space invaders' to examine how Muslim sportswomen are 'invading' digital spaces to navigate their social, cultural, and religious identities as to challenge dominant representations of Muslim women in need of 'saving' (Abu-Lughod, 2002). I also explore how the participants in this research articulate their politicised identities in a broader context of increasing Islamophobia, racism, misogyny, and sexism. In so doing, my discussion consists of three main parts. First, I discuss the relationship between politics and Muslim women and how Muslim women are using social media to engage in various forms of politics. Second, I discuss how the participants in this research are

using hashtags in creative ways to re-appropriate digital spaces and build local, national, and international communities. I conclude with how social media allows the participants in this research to be visible and challenge dominant discourses of Muslim women.

Power and the visibilities of Muslim women in digital spaces

Muslim women are a symbolic battleground in the war against Islam (Mirza, 2012; 2013b; Razack, 2007; Sharify-Funk, 2008) and have been politicized by both the Western and Islamic world to legitimize American wars (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq) or to enforce political, economic, and social reform and fight terrorism (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Sharify-Funk, 2008). The Western discourse on the ‘War Against Terror’ often uses targeted cultural practices such as honour killings and arranged marriages to further contribute to the ‘Orientalist’ tropes of Muslim cultures that contextualise it as barbaric (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Said, 1979) and position Muslim women as victims. Furthermore, images of veiled woman have been weaponized by Western media to frame Muslim women as being voiceless and victims of their ‘backward’ culture who are in need of ‘saving’ from the third world men and their culture by the enlightened ‘West’ (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mirza, 2012; 2013b; Mohanty, 1988; Sharify-Funk, 2008; 2009; Spivak, 1988). Such misconceptions are all-pervasive across an array of media outlets, including digital spaces.

The dehumanisation and vilification of Muslims are deeply embedded in various structures of society that permeate online spaces as well (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). For example, the use of algorithms to organise and populate (mis)information on social media presents a problematic form of marginalisation that is affecting the Muslim ummah, particularly Muslim women. There is a growing interest among digital scholars on the macro politics of data practices (Benjamin 2019a; 2019b; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Noble, 2016; 2018 Slaker, 2017), and how algorithms replicate offline stereotypes which propagate racial and gender bias. For example, in her book, *Algorithms of Oppression*, Noble (2018) addresses concerns around data bias through an extensive case study on Google Search to show how algorithms discriminate against people of colour, and particularly women of colour. Noble

(2018) states the formulas that drive the data are not “benign, neutral or objective” (p. 1) but replicate historic discriminations/stereotypes along with coder’s prejudices. These unchecked biases on how images are classified and coded on Google reinforce racial and sex-based stereotypes (Noble, 2018). For example, when Googling “Muslim woman” (Figure 6.1) and “Muslim sportswoman” (Figure 6.2), the images appear homogenous and tend to reinforce dominant stereotypes of Muslim women.

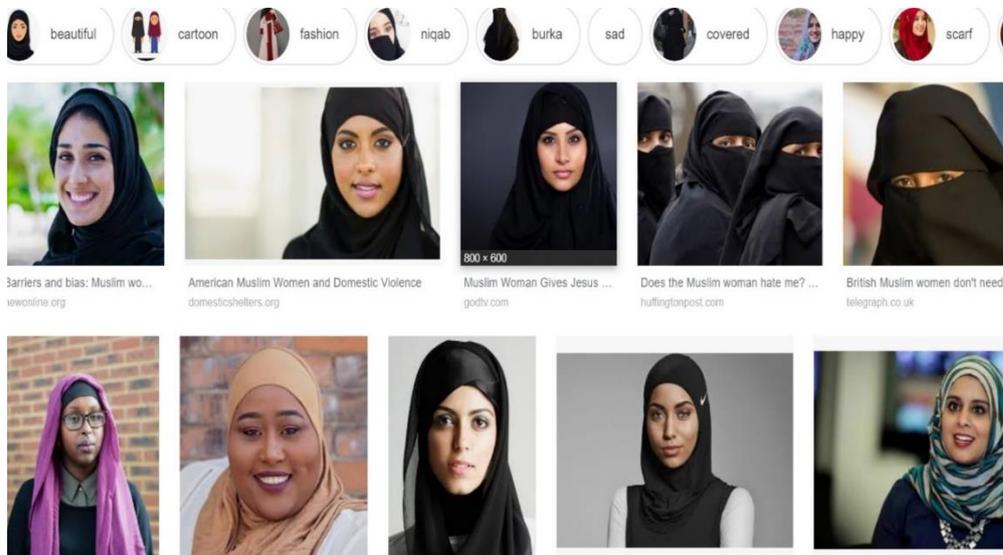


Figure 6.1: Google Search results of “Muslim woman”

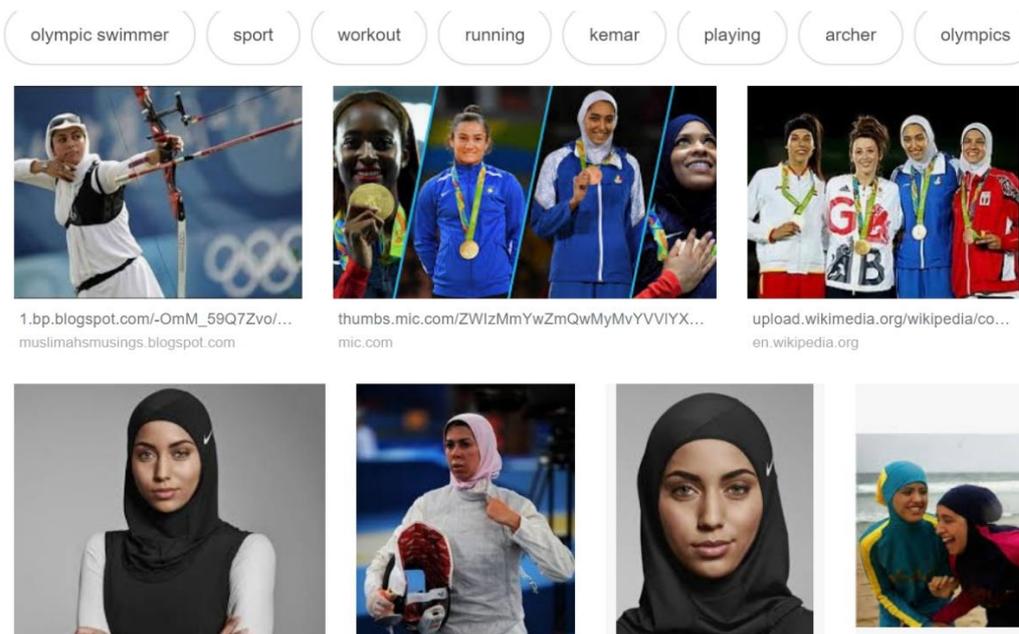


Figure 6.2: Google Search results of “Muslim sportswoman”

The first few images in each of the searches primarily focus on the hijab and in the case of sports, mainly pictures associated with the Olympic Games. Google Search also offers suggestions to explore other photos associated with Muslim women. For example, in Figure 6.1, the first suggestion is “beautiful” followed by “fashion”, “burqa” and “sad”. These suggestions add to the exoticisation of Others (Fanon, 1967; Mohanty, 1988, Said, 1979). That is, the representation of Black and Brown bodies is largely controlled through Western knowledge systems which continue to depict Muslim women as the exotic Other or barbaric (Mohanty, 1988; Said, 1979). The stereotypical images reiterate Noble’s (2018) concern about discriminatory practices being present online. As for sports, the Google search suggestions were related to the Olympic Games, which are important but tend to overlook the many other forms of sport and fitness that Muslim women are engaging in. Though my research does not focus on algorithms, it is important to acknowledge the critical conversations that address how offline prejudices are embedded in, designed into, and reproduced in technological infrastructures. However, social media’s capability to produce social change is simultaneously promising and precarious (Fischer, 2016; Fotopoulou, 2016; Lawson, 2018). It is in this context of on- and offline stereotypes that my participants actively use digital space to offer counter-narratives and powerful forms of digital activism. Arguably, by asserting their presence and ensuring their visibility in online areas, Muslim sportswomen are engaging in forms of everyday digital politics.

Muslim sportswomen as digital space invaders

In her influential book, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Puwar (2004) provides case studies of Britain’s institutional spaces, such as the Parliament/civil service, art world, and academia belonging to privileged White male bodies. When these positions are occupied by Others, such as women and/or ethnic minorities, they are considered space invaders (Puwar, 2004). By entering previously excluded positions, these space invaders are disrupting the status quo. Additionally, some also have to constantly reposition themselves from within the spaces through embodied rituals (Puwar, 2004). These rituals were composed of mimicking language and etiquette of the ‘somatic norm’ which were subtle, yet

powerful codes of behaviours performed to create alternative readings about their selves in relation to the occupied space (Puwar, 2004).

A number of sport scholars have taken up Puwar's concept of space invaders to explore how athletes and participants in different sporting cultures navigate and negotiate dominant power relations and structural constraints in sporting spaces (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Adams, 2014; Brown, 2015; Fletcher, 2014; Ratna, 2010; 2011; Wheaton, 2017a; Willms, 2017). Additionally, Puwar's conceptual framework to examine how Others negotiate space has been extended in the digital space. For example, Leurs (2016) extends Puwar's (2004) concept of space invaders in his analysis of how Moroccan Dutch youth are negotiating their complex identities (gender, youth, culture, religion, and ethnicities) into digital spaces. In particular, Leurs reveals how youth are navigating issues of Islamophobia, anti-immigration, and multiculturalism in Europe, along with digital hierarchies such as Google Search algorithms which perpetuate stereotypes by adhering to "white, male, Western and middle-class" bodies (Leurs, 2016, p. 62). Leurs' (2016) found Moroccan-Dutch youth were using online platforms to assert their complex offline identities in online spaces and become 'digital space invaders'. They did so through either establishing sites tailored to their diaspora, a safe space to explore their identities, or contributing to online discussion boards to control their narratives (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2014).

In the remainder of this chapter, I extend Puwar's (2004) concept of 'space invaders' in dialogue with Leurs' 'digital space invaders' to explore the digital practices and politics of Muslim sportswomen. Herein I discuss Muslim sportswomen as 'digital sport invaders' who are subtly bringing in the complex nature of their offline lives into digital spaces and offering alternative representations of sportswomen to subvert narratives where they are positioned as 'out of place.' I begin with a discussion of their use of hashtags as a unique form of political activism and conclude the chapter by exploring their everyday visibilities as a form of 'digital sport invading.'

Muslim women, digital politics, and sport

Muslims have been using social media for political purposes for over two decades. In fact, Muslims have been going online to challenge stereotypes since the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing in the United States (where Muslims were blamed for the attack but were not responsible) (Alley-Young, 2014; Bastani, 2000; Sharify-Frank, 2009). However, conversations about social media and Muslim activism is most often associated with the Arab Springs uprising of 2011. There are ongoing debates about whether social media facilitated these revolutions in the region or whether social media was an instrument enabling activists to harness digital technologies (Brown, 2014, Massoumi, 2016; Nouraie-Simone, 2014). Importantly, women from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were at times at the forefront and leading online and offline revolutions (Brown, 2014). For example, Lina Ben Mhenni, an internet activist from Tunisia, used her blog *A Tunisian Girl*, to document protests through images and texts occurring in her country (Hilleary, 2011). Additionally, social media had already been embraced by women in the region before the Arab uprisings where they were using digital spaces to discuss feminism, religion, gender-based discriminatory laws, and politics (Nouraie-Simone, 2014).

According to Khamis (2013), social media has been an important and effective tool for women in the MENA region to raise women's voices and educate women about their fundamental rights. For example, Altoaimy (2018) explored how Saudi women used Twitter to share their opinions on social issues in their country, particularly regarding Saudi women not being able to drive and the use of hashtags to raise awareness around driving rights. In the summer of 2018, a royal decree was passed allowing Saudi women to drive. Despite the win, key activists behind the movements remain in custody by the government. Saudi women continue to mobilise on social media, particularly using Twitter to oppose the Guardianship law which requires Saudi women to seek permission from a male guardian to take part in essential tasks and activities such as travel, marriage, getting an education, and work. Caving to intense social pressure through the use of the hashtag #IAmMyOwnGuardian, a royal decree was passed in May 2017 giving Saudi women basic freedoms, such as allowing them to travel and study without gaining

consent from male guardians. Despite some progress, discriminatory practices remain in the country and other regions. It is essential to point out that the literature around Muslim women's social media activism has mainly focused on the MENA region. However, Muslim women from around the world have been initiators of offline and online activism to raise awareness about issues within their communities, and the participants in this research have themselves initiated various forms of subtle and overt activism.

More broadly, the digital space has impacted and reshaped feminist struggles and strategies, specifically for young feminists (Baer, 2016) and enabled a "new direction of activism" (Harris, 2008, p. 482). Social media allows women to practice solidarity and agency. In her book, *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age*, Keller (2015) examined teenage girls blogs and found them to be highly disruptive to dominant views that adolescent girls do not care about feminism or activism. Importantly, the young teens used social media to connect with activists, educate their peers and make feminism visible in popular culture and create identities (e.g., feminist, activist) (Keller, 2015). According to Keller (2016) "being a feminist publicly" is a form of activism (p. 271) which allows others to access feminism.

Similar to the young female bloggers in Keller's research, the representation of Muslim sportswomen through images on Instagram and Snapchat or hashtags and/or texts on Facebook and Twitter creates archives that are available to others and presents images and narratives that are in contrast to biased depictions in mainstream media. A few of the participants in my research spoke 'explicitly' about feminism. Nayla commented on exploring different "flavours of feminism" which may help her in "deconstructing" her experiences as a biracial, migrant, Muslim woman and aid in "pushing back against misogyny and patriarchy" within her local community and the Muslim ummah. Another participant, Manaar, is explicit about her feminist views, in which she often spoke about, or promoted content, exploring the intersection of sports, faith, and race, in media and the systems of powers of which discriminate against women and people of colour. While many of the participants were not as explicit as Manaar with their feminist politics, as I will

illustrate, the content many shared pertaining to women in sports, or women or minorities in their sporting fields, was underpinned by feminist sentiments.

Some of the participants shared broader social and political issues on their social media. Such practices enable women to educate their followers about their online activism (Keller, 2015). For example, some participants described sharing articles on Facebook or retweeting articles of relevance to political and social conflicts from around the world (e.g., the Syrian crisis, the persecution of Palestinians, immigration issues in the United States and Europe). For example, Rania considered herself to be a “passive activist” on Twitter, explaining that the Twitter retweet function enabled her to easily share news articles of political relevance. Rania’s use of Twitter could be considered a form of “slacktivism” (Glenn, 2015) where individuals demonstrate awareness about certain issues by liking content online without engaging in action. However, according to Bonilla and Rosa (2015), ‘slacktivism’ does not consider how online activism, whether it is retweeting content or utilising a hashtag, contributes to increased visibility of marginalised communities by allowing them to form connections and solidarity. Even though Rania may have been passively (not adding her comments or perspective on the issue) retweeting content, it was her way to increase the visibility of issues important to her as an individual belonging to an often marginalised and silenced group.

Nadia, alternatively, was more overt with sharing her political opinions online, but she also admits to some caution in the type of content she shared. According to Nadia, when sharing content around issues of “sexism”, she either got “support” from her online audience or people “just made an opinion” about her being a ‘feminist’ when speaking to issues around gender equality in her country. Nadia’s political activism included sharing articles on Facebook about sectarian violence occurring in her society. For example, the “Ahmadiyya or Ismailis”²⁶ who belong to the marginalised communities in her country are often persecuted. By sharing

²⁶ Ahmadiyya and Ismailis are a denomination of Islam and both communities are persecuted for their religious beliefs.

content and speaking out against the harassment, Nadia is potentially opening herself up to online and offline abuse (Chapter Four). Therefore, Nadia admitted to purposefully limiting what she shares around sectarian issues. Similarly, Nayla also admitted to rarely posting political content. Her reasoning was, “privacy concerns” and “paranoia” of the “[United States] government” surveilling Muslims, especially for Nayla who sees herself as receiving additional surveillance because of her “Arab Muslim and immigrant” background.

As discussed in Chapter Four, government surveillance of Muslim communities has been a significant issue, and such forms of surveillance continue into the digital space. Along with the current political climate, where violence against Muslim communities has increased due to Islamophobia and other forms of marginalisation (e.g., xenophobia, sexism, racism) are also concerning for my participants. Being politically visible and sharing information on important social and political issues comes with consequences by means of surveillance or online abuse. However, for most of the participants in this research, social media provides a valued space to support and promote important causes in subtle ways. In the remainder of this chapter, I specifically address how Muslim sportswomen are challenging dominant representations of Muslim women through their use of social media.

In the following section I reveal Muslim sportswomen as ‘digital sport invaders’ in how they use social media to offer alternative representations of Muslim women in society and sport. In so doing, this discussion also illustrates how Muslim women are problematizing dominant representations of Muslim women. The participants in this research are reconstructing what it means to be Muslim sportswomen and pushing back on some of the misconceptions of Muslim women through text, language, and images on their social media. For the participants in this research, digitally sharing aspects of their lives online is an act of everyday resistance to all-pervasive stereotypes and challenging what it means to be a Muslim sportswoman in contemporary society.

Re-appropriating hashtags

The hashtag (#) is historically associated with Twitter, however, it is increasingly being applied to other social media platforms such as Instagram. Individuals use hashtags to organise events and control communication. Including hashtags in a post signifies that the user is willing to be visible to, and participate in, a larger group of others using (or searching) for similar hashtags. By attaching a specific word with the (#) symbol, a user can connect with stakeholders and amplify a cause to reach large audiences to take part in discussions (Gilkerson & Berg, 2017; Mendes et al., 2018). However, structures of social media platforms vary widely because some platforms are more enabling of politics than others. For example, Facebook's infrastructure easily allows users to create organised events, groups, and pages, more so than Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram. Hashtag use on Twitter, however, can be more impactful in amplifying a cause compared to other platforms especially when celebrities, politicians, or micro-celebrities (individuals with large amounts of followers) tweet or retweet social and political content. Rogers (2017) encourages researchers to understand that the same hashtag used on a different social media platform may have a different outcome and therefore, should not be collated under a single category. Based on my sustained observations within and across various digital platforms, I concur with Rogers (2017) because each platform's structure is different, and hashtags are used in different ways across the platforms with varying impacts.

The use of hashtags on Instagram by the participants in this research varied considerably. Some of them used hashtags more liberally, for example, Iman states, "no one needs to understand your hashtag, you can just create one." Some of the participants were not just creating a new hashtag, but some often used the hashtag symbol with a series of keywords relating to the topic of their post. While Mona^s also used existing hashtags to make her "pictures go viral", she also creates her own hashtags which "always have a message relating to inspiration" or encouraging followers to "get out there and kick some ass [laugh]" in life and sports. For Batul, her Instagram posts are often accompanied by several hashtags: #Always #prepare #yourself #mentally and #physically to have a #successful #meeting with the #MajesticMountains!! and #RespectNature #NorthFace #Snow #Pakistan #Glaciers

#Adventure #Athletes #Record. In Batul's case, the heavy use of hashtags allows her posts to get more 'likes' which often ranged from a few hundred to thousand likes. Additionally, Batul is also using specific hashtags like #NorthFace or #Extremesports which are associated with her particular sport, and by sharing her images and linking them to broader hashtags, she is subtly adding diverse images to specific hashtag categories on Instagram. Indeed, when searching #NorthFace or #Extremesports, most of the photos are White and/or male, so images of Muslim mountain climbers or snowboarders challenges the digital boundaries of who is in/out of place in these digital communities, and their sporting cultures more broadly.

Hashtag feminism has changed communication in which global activism is facilitated through both offline and online platforms (Baer, 2016; Soucie et al., 2018). Hashtags are innovatively utilised by Black feminist-activists to address social issues especially since traditional media has ignored, distorted, and erased conversations about Black women (Berridge & Portwood-Stacer, 2015; Jackson, 2016; Love, 2019; Morrison, 2019; Williams, 2015). Additionally, hashtag feminism creates opportunities where "issues frequently confined to small circles" (Bennett, 2014, para. 13) are brought to the masses. For example, hashtag activism is vital in shedding light on issues of violence against women (Bowles-Eagle, 2015; Fullagar et al., 2018; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Williams, 2015). Additionally, research by Dreher, McCallumb, and Wallerc (2016) and Carlson (2013) found that Indigenous women also innovatively used social media and hashtags to address issues involving Indigenous communities. In doing so, women of colour are radically disrupting and changing feminist politics on social media (Love, 2019; Okolosie, 2014). Social media creates opportunities for feminists to connect locally and globally, build communities, and address inequalities. In my digital observations and interviews with Muslim sportswomen, many explained how they are using hashtags to draw attention to themselves and being visible (those with public accounts), make connections with larger online communities, and overtly and subtly challenge dominant representations of Muslim sportswoman. Herein I offer examples of #hashtag activism among the women in my study: #WomenCrushWednesday, #ForgotToBeOppressed and #FIBAAllowHijab. As I

illustrate, each of these examples is different in the cause, as well as the scope of the campaign, but I have selected these examples to highlight the variety of ways that Muslim sportswomen are using hashtags to build their local and international community and draw attention to social, cultural, and political issues that they feel strongly about.

#WomenCrushWednesday

Some of the participants spoke about using their platforms to connect to their communities and to inspire other girls and women to take up sports. Haya not only uses her Instagram page to inspire others but shares sporting stories of Muslim women or women from her region to further promote women in sport:

I love discovering people through social media, I mean I started this thing recently where every Wednesday is #womancrushwednesday. I am discovering so many Arab women, and I like to focus more on Arab women. I am finding so many Arab women that are successful within their field of sport that I have never heard of.

One example of her efforts is in the re-appropriation of the popular hashtag #womancrushwednesday. The hashtag #womancrushwednesday, or sometimes used as #wcw, commonly show sexualised images of women, sexy selfies, or individuals showing admiration of a significant other (Figure 6.3). However, Haya discovers different talents and different people by searching through hashtags and uses her Instagram page to celebrate their achievements by sharing an image of them and using the #wcw hashtag. In so doing, Haya uses the hashtag differently by highlighting the success of Arab sportswomen and subtly pushing back on the sexual nature of the hashtag. By using #wcw and focusing on Muslim women and Arab women, she is ‘invading’ the hashtag space to show the diverse ways Muslim or Arab women are taking part in sports (Figure 6.4):

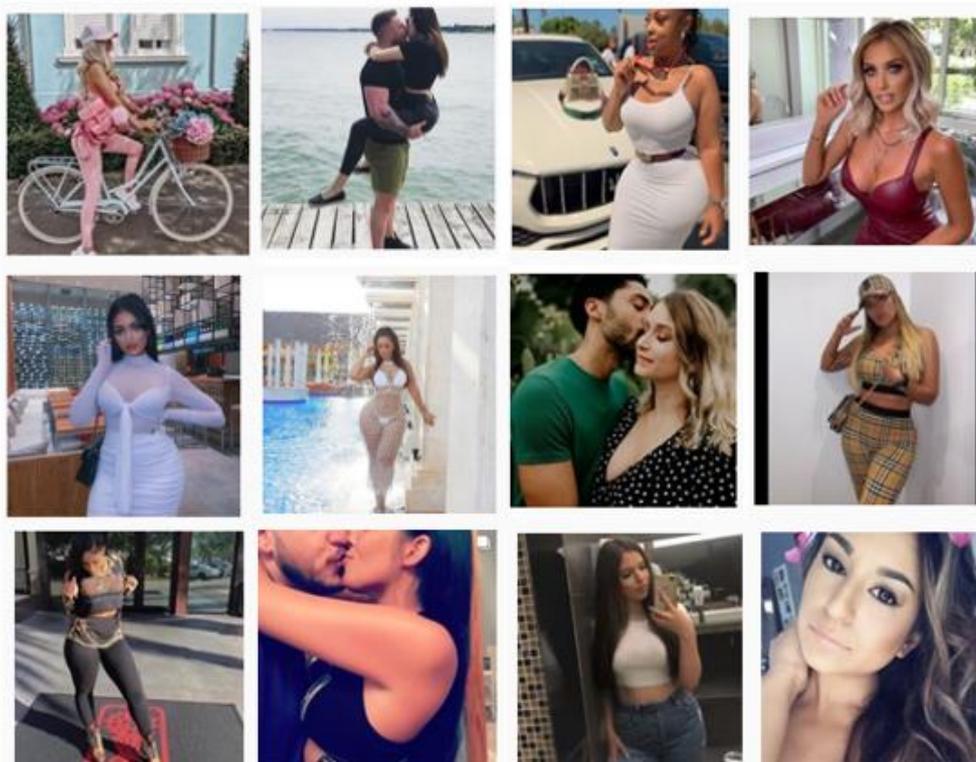


Figure 6.3: #WCW search results



Figure 6.4: Haya's Instagram post

The women that Haya features on her Instagram have a strong following (12k to 27k), and thus she does not have to do this to boost their profiles. Nonetheless, this

is something she does to “uplift” other women. For Haya, her Instagram has not been about “getting the most likes”, for her it is a space for her to brand herself (Chapter Five), but also to show solidarity across sports and the MENA region through visual storytelling.

#ForgotToBeOppressed

A handful of participants brought in humour when discussing social issues. Similar to Haya, Maria is also re-appropriating content, but for her, it is the word ‘oppressed’ where she brings in sarcasm as a form of humour in her hashtag: “forgottobeoppressed” (Figure 6.5):



Figure 6.5: Maria’s Instagram post

As discussed previously, there is a tendency for media to lump Muslim women into a single category, which is as an ‘oppressed’ group. Similar to many of the other participants, Maria is aware of the dominant stereotypical portrayals of Muslim

women in media. The literature on social media in Chapter Four has explained how young women use humour to deflect from humiliating experiences (Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; Shifman & Lamish, 2010). However, according to Hart (2007), “humour and laughter can serve as a powerful tool in social protest” (p. 1). According to Morrison (2019) the use of humour in hashtags not only allows for “grass-roots collective participation and viral spread of content, and, crucially, the use of humour to destabilize the institutional framing of these conflicts by dominant groups” (p. 23). For Maria, the humour worked in two ways: one was to speak back to the stereotypes of Muslim women as the other to “educate” her followers. For example, Maria shared another Instagram post where she addressed balancing two different sports and competition and ended her post with, “hi, I am the hijab-clad powerlifting jiu-jitsu mom. Any other stereotypes I can smash for you today?” Such comments attract approximately 10 to 20 likes and are accompanied by a series of emojis (laughing face or clapping hands). The clapping hand emoji is sometimes viewed as celebratory, however, it is also used for emphasising a specific point which was a response by one of Maria’s followers. As for educating her followers, Maria also shared content about Muslim converts.

As a convert herself, Maria represents a “totally different spectrum of life that her friends and family have ever known”. Through her posts on Facebook and Instagram, she likes to initiate conversations and debates about what it means to be a Muslim woman. For example, in our email correspondence, when I was assigning identifiers/pseudonyms, she preferred to be called Maria, because:

I purposely choose to represent without a traditional Arabic Muslim name because I’m making a point that you can be who you are in your own culture and be Muslim. If you already have a name with a good meaning, then it is a Muslim name you don’t need to ‘Arabize’ or change your entire being to be Muslim.

Here Maria is speaking to issues of diversity amongst Muslims, as well as challenging others understandings of what it means to be a Muslim woman. Individuals who convert to Islam often encounter their own (and others) struggles

in the interpretation of a ‘good Muslim’ or a ‘proper Muslim’, which is intertwined with culture, language, and religion (Sultán, 1999). For Maria, she is initiating conversations about being a convert. Interestingly, Maria also stated, “let’s be honest, no one is inspired by a White woman in a hijab, so my social media use is for me.” Despite her statement that no one will be inspired by her, many of Maria’s images address not only her Muslim side but also her sport. Maria is a powerlifter, and in some of her posts, she speaks to women encountering body image issues and also shares her vulnerabilities as a powerlifter and often shares “positive messages” on Instagram and Facebook to celebrate differences. Maria does not necessarily feel like she is making an impact, but her use of social media hashtags are a form of storytelling. For Maria and others, Instagram allows them to challenge dominant narratives around Muslim women.

Another participant, Yara, also tries to ‘educate’ people about Islam. In a Facebook post, she writes, “it is ‘Islam Awareness Week’ at university! Get yourself educated fam; we don’t bite” followed by a smiley face emoji. With the caption is an image of Yara wearing a shirt with the following phrase: “build bridges, not walls”. Her posts received a little under 100 likes with ten comments. Some comments focused on her shirt, asking where she got it from, others expressed how much they loved her picture. While some posted a humorous response such as “you may not bite, but your wrist locks are much worse” (in reference to her sport). Though Yara did not use a hashtag in this particular post, mainly because it was on her Facebook page where she rarely uses hashtags, the post speaks to the importance of ‘educating’ and being available for others to ask questions about Islam. Maria and some of the other participants who are using hashtags like “forgottentobeoppressed”, “smashstereotypes”, “unapologeticallyMuslim” or “badassMuslimah’s”, highlight the multiple and diverse ways that hashtags become attached to larger narratives. As Clark (2016) explains, a collective of hashtags has a “discursive influence on collective storytelling; online personal expressions can grow into online collective action” (p. 800). Social media allows the participants in this research to reframe their lives and potentially share empowering images and narratives.

#FIBAAllowHijab

There is an understanding that hashtags can be powerful forms of activism when large numbers use and reuse the same #hashtag directed towards a specific cause or organisation (Clark, 2016; Morrison, 2019; Soucie et al., 2018). For the participants in this research, they embraced hashtags to speak to a range of issues relating specifically to Muslim sportswomen. One important example is the #FIBAAllowHijab campaign directed at the International Basketball Federation for their ban on women wearing head coverings while playing the game. For Asma, Twitter is an important platform for her to campaign about important issues. She played a key role in the #FIBAAllowHijab campaign, by using this hashtag to shed light on discriminatory sporting policies against Muslim women in basketball. As a basketball player herself, when posting any content related to basketball on any of her platforms (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), she “always used the #FIBAAllowHijab” hashtag to raise awareness about the campaign. Commencing in 2015, the campaign was finally successful in overturning the ban in May 2017. Asma publicly celebrated this achievement by tweeting and retweeting content related to overturning the ban (Figure 6.6):



Figure 6.6: Asma’s retweet

Khadija also used Twitter to shed light on important issues surrounding the opportunities and constraints facing Muslim sportswomen. She explained that “around the time of the FIFA hijab ban, a lot of the discussions and advocacy was happening online”. Similar to the FIBA hijab ban campaign, a digital campaign targeting Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and their hijab ban for Muslim women in football (soccer) led to it being overturned in 2012. Khadija was instrumental in the campaign and used Twitter to stay abreast of meaningful discussions around this and other issues impacting Muslim sportswomen. For the participants in this research, the use of their social media accounts is a valuable tool to challenge discriminatory practices against Muslim women in which they have been highly successful.

The impact of challenging discriminatory practices through the use of social media is essential to the broader Muslim women sport’s community. I observed solidarity and support, not just by the Muslim ummah but among my participants where many did not know each other (Figure 6.7):



Figure 6.7: Haya’s Instagram story screengrab

Haya in her Instagram story shared the FIBA ruling, stating, “how awesome is this?” along with three clapping hand emojis, celebrating the success, despite not being a basketball player. Haya, who also covers but has not encountered discriminatory practices relating to covering in her sport, often shares stories about other Arab and Muslim sportswomen. Haya was not the only participant to share important changes such as the case for overturning FIBA ruling. Many others shared the success on their social media, thus building a sense of local and international community, and shared activism across Muslim sportswomen and the Muslim ummah. Research has revealed the power of Instagram for building online communities and maintaining and building a social connection (Olive, 2015; Tobin, & Chulpaiboon, 2016). For Muslim women, the relationships transpired as a form of solidarity by sharing stories about other Muslim sportswomen in this research. The engagement of consciously using identifiable hashtags on social media allows for the Muslim sportswomen to not only increase their visibility, and support one another, but also advocate for important issues about sports both at the local, national, and global level.

Digital visibilities as everyday politics for Muslim sportswomen

Puwar (2004) speaks to the concept of “somatic norm” (p. 1) where Whiteness is the default. The spaces commonly associated with sports have traditionally consisted primarily of White men, and when women and/or gendered, ethnic, racialised minorities enter sports which privileges the ‘somatic norm’, they are treated as imposters or ‘sporting space invaders’ (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Brown, 2015; Wheaton, 2017a). These ‘sporting space invaders’ encounter racist and/or sexist stereotypes, such is the case for Black sportswomen who are portrayed as asexual or hypersexual in the media (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Brown, 2015; Douglas, 2012). Additionally, Black and Brown bodies in sporting spaces receive “extra surveillance” (Adjepong, 2019, p. 7) in an attempt to control their representations (Adjepong & Carrington, 2014; Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Collins, 1990; Cooky et al., 2010; Douglas, 2012; Puwar, 2004). In another case study examining the representation of Asian American sportswomen, Willms (2017) found the participants were characterised as “unathletic”, reinforcing stereotypical images focused on “Asian American women as small and dainty” (p.

174). As for Muslim sportswomen, they are also often considered ‘out of place’ in high-performance sport settings (Amara, 2012; Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Pfister, 2010; Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015). Such portrayals are reinforced in mainstream media (Amara, 2012; Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015) where Muslim sportswomen have very little control over their representations and are often stripped of their agency. As I illustrate below, social media allows some Muslim sportswomen opportunities to push back on these dominant discourses and present alternative representations of what it means to be a Muslim woman, and a sportswoman more broadly. In so doing, visibilities of Muslim sportswomen are a subtle form of everyday political activism.

Self-representation as politics

Self-representation on social media is said to be a “contemporary phenomenon that is intimately entwined with digital culture” (Thumim, 2012, p. 3), and new forms of identity politics. An aspect associated with self-representation is the “selfie” which is a “self-portrait made in a reflective object or from arm’s length” (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p. 78). The scholarship on self-representation has revealed individuals using social media to gain fame (Marwick, 2015), to negotiate faith (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Beta, 2014; Piela, 2010b; 2016), and explore sexuality (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015). A growing body of scholars are exploring the identity politics involved in self-representation (Holowka, 2018; Kargbo, 2013; Yaldin-Segal, 2018). According to Senft and Bayn (2015), self-representation “can act as a stand against racist, classist, misogynist, ageist or ableist views” (p. 1597) in which individuals can share their experiences on social media, to build communities of support, to invoke advocacy and, in some cases, prompt social action. Scholars have explored the ways Black and Brown ‘fat’ bodies represent themselves on Instagram and Tumblr (e.g., fativism) to challenge the mainstream representation of fat bodies (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013; Lewis, 2019; Meleo-Erwin, 2011; Williams, 2017). Others have focused on the use of selfies within the disability community to advocate for representation of disabled individuals (Ellis, Goggin, & Kent, 2015; Kargo, 2015; Pearson & Trevisan, 2015; Trevisan, 2014; 2016; Yaldin-Segal, 2018). Recently, Mayoh (2019) examined how pregnant women use social media to resist dominant discourses around pregnancy,

focusing particularly on the use of hashtags and unfiltered images of “large, soft, pregnant bodies with markings of pregnancy such as stretch marks, loose skin and prominent veins” (p. 3). Chawansky (2016) also has examined forms of ‘digital activism’ among Black LGBTQI sportswomen using Instagram to be more visible. Herein I explore how Muslim sportswomen’s use of selfies can be a powerful act of rejecting dominant discourses about Muslim women and a form of digital sport invasion.

Activism does not have to be outcome-oriented. It can also be about creating a public self, where one is seen as a citizen (Harris, 2008). This holds true with some of the Muslim sportswomen who are trying to subtly and explicitly change perceptions about Muslims, especially with Islamophobia, racism, and sexism on the rise (Quinn, 2019; Zempi & Awan, 2019). For example, Rania spoke to her experience as a competitive sportswoman. When she started boxing and walked into the gym, Rania was aware of her “visible Muslim” “feminine” body being out of place in a sport that is dominated by men. However, her desire to represent the Muslim ummah propelled her to embrace her Muslimness; “the physical appearance as a Muslim woman served as a form of balance or invitation of breaking down these misconceptions of others”. Keeping this in mind, Rania who rarely shared images of her sporting life decided to post an image about her first competition which “spread like wildfire” on social media and motivated her to share more content about sports and being more visible online. By sharing her images on Instagram and Facebook, Rania wanted to share “positive news stories about the Muslims that would shift the focus even for just a bit and [hopefully] normalize what it means to be a Muslim” especially due to the “heightened number of negative stories about Muslims in the media and the several atrocities attributed to Muslims”.

Another participant weaved in aspects of Islam trying to make it relatable for both Muslim and non-Muslim. Khadija likes to share “inspirational Quranic ayats” because sometimes they relate “to a situation” in her life and by sharing a specific verse “it may inspire others” who may be going through something similar, and though it is an Islamic ayat it is something others (outside of Islam) may relate to

or be inspired by. Mona^m's approach is more local than global and believes in “coexistence” which I also observed in the types of content she shared on her Instagram and Facebook platforms. According to Mona “it kills” her “to see us [the world] fighting over religion or sect or not knowing the differences between race, religion, and cultural traditions”. Additionally, Mona^m feels that her own “culture, religion tradition which are SOO intertwined—don’t do Islam justice” because “the portrait the world is seeing is not Islam”. Mona^m tries to show a different perspective of her country and also tries to show her local community is balancing faith and culture through sports by supporting “social impact” projects. For example, when Mona^m is on a climbing expedition, she uses her images to shed light on “mental health issues” and/or raise funds for various causes, such as cancer (Figure 6.8):



Figure 6.8: Mona’s Instagram post

Mona^m reposted the image of her near Everest base camp. In the image, she thanked the photographer Elia Saikaly for “showering” her with compliments. The reposted image also included Elia’s caption which stated: “amongst many other notable mountaineering achievements. What’s most impressive about Mona’s athletic

accomplishments is that she is always living on the edge for a cause, supporting charities that are close to her heart while reaching the summits of the world's tallest peaks." For Muslims, zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam, which requires Muslims to give to charities. Zakat translates to 'that which purifies' which has principles of social justice whereby giving to charities one is not only providing to the needy but also supporting the ummah (Lessy, 2009). The term ummah has religious, cultural, and political dimensions which collectively unite Muslims (Akram, 2007). For Mona^m, she connects her sport to charities, and when she is sharing her image, she always references the cause she is supporting and encourages her followers to donate. For Mona^m, her use of Instagram is unique because she is trying to promote the importance of "co-existence" with her followers and also providing a counter-narrative about herself and her country. Importantly, through her charity work, she is trying to strengthen the Muslim ummah in her country, as she previously stated her country does not do "Islam justice." Mona^m, Khadija, and some of the other participants are using their Instagram accounts to show Islam through their experiences, which is in contrast to how Muslims are often portrayed in the mainstream media.

The images shared by the participants not only reveal the diverse ways Muslim sportswomen participate in sports but also the various ways they self-represent. According to Kargbo (2013), "it is through the camera lens that we learn *how* to view ourselves and, equally important, *how others view us*" (p. 166, emphasis in original). For example, Asma shared a photo series on Instagram, a concept she created addressing marriage expectations among Muslim women in which she views herself as an empowered woman (Figure 6.9):



Figure 6.9: Asma's Instagram post

Asma's photo series started with the first image, where she states the following:

In one of the leagues, I played in. There were women over 40. They hardly ran, they just outsmarted the younger players by passing a lot then taking the shot or driving to the basket when a gap was created. This did two things for me. 1. Showed me that no matter how old I am Basketball can be part of my life. 2. Marriage and having a family should not stop you from playing a sport. I know the world treats women differently, we have more childbearing responsibilities than men do. We are expected to be a certain way. But I just refuse to lose everything I worked hard for, your identity should never be lost because of marriage, so for me this image explores the idea of marriage and expectations.

Marriage expectations by the family are common among Muslim women across different cultures. Several of the participants spoke to this expectation in their

interviews. However, Asma was one of the very few that addressed this on her social media. Asma advocates for the importance of sports and that one can do both, be married and play sports. In this particular photo series, she specifically used a traditional wedding “thob (sari)” and wore that with a basketball jersey and shoes to speak to her statement of not losing your identity due to marriage. Many of Asma’s followers celebrated her images through heart emojis or statements like “this is amazing” or “thank you for sharing this!”. This particular photo series corresponds with Kargbo’s (2013) statement of social media creating “a space for re-imagining new forms of attachments and identification” (p. 171), but for Asma it was also ‘re-imagining’ cultural conversations in new ways around marriage. Additionally, this photo series along with many other images on Asma’s Instagram, address another important issue, which is the visibility of Black Muslims.

Asma did not specifically speak to this in the interview but from Instagram images, Tweets and Facebook posts, it was apparent especially when she used hashtags such as #sudanese diaspora #africandiaspora #blackgirlmagic to celebrate her Black identity. When it comes to defining Muslim, the Arab and South Asian Muslim communities often hold power on the representation of Muslims. The Black Muslim community is often ignored by the wider Muslim community which brings in the conversation of racial and ethnic inequality within the Muslim ummah. Asma’s presence on her various social media platforms can be read as a form “counter-narrative and counter-image” (Kargbo, 2013, p. 162) to challenge the expectations of Muslim women generally, and of Black Muslim women specifically, within the global Muslim ummah.

Zenith also uses her Instagram and Facebook page to speak to issues within her society which translate across cultures and religions (Figure 6.10):



Figure 6.10: Zenith's Instagram post

In the image she shares the following post, “کہنا ہے کام کا لوگوں گے کہیں کیا لوگ” / ‘What will people say? How many times have you stopped yourself from doing what you love because society would judge you? How many times did you put them first instead of yourself?’” She ends the caption with, “well, I am here to tell you that “logon ka kaam hay kehna, unhey kehney do. Tumhara kaam hay karna, toh karo! Kal yehi log tumharey liye talliyen bajaye gey” followed by a kissing face emoji. This translates to “people will always say something, let them. You have work to do, you do it! Tomorrow people will be clapping for you (celebrating your success)”.²⁷ Zenith received about 900 likes and 12 comments all supporting her statement from both genders within her society. A female follower commented “that caption!” with a thumbs up emoji. Another follower, a male stated, “you are a great inspiration for everyone, I can proudly say you are from [country]” followed by a heart emoji and initials of the country. This particular statement is not just relevant to Zenith and her local community or the Muslim ummah but extends across

²⁷ Translation provided by me (the researcher) since I speak the language.

cultures (e.g. Arab, Indian)²⁸ and countries. This phrase is culturally rooted and speaks to the barriers women encounter in life, such as playing sports, working, and/or travelling which varies across religion, ethnicity, class, age, socio-economic background, and countries.



Figure 6.11: Screenshot from YouTube (taken July 2019)

Interestingly, a similar phrase ‘what will they say about you?’ was used by Nike (Figure 6.11). The video starts with a woman running in public, followed by a young woman skateboarding down a street in her abaya and headscarf as men and women looked on with concern. The video is in Arabic with a translated subtitle, and the opening statement is, “what will they say about you?” (NikeWomen, 2017). This video was a marketing manoeuvre targeting the MENA region about women’s participation in sports (Ahmad, 2017). One of the common perceptions is that Muslim and/or Arab women are prohibited from playing in sports due to family and/or society. This may be true in some cases, but as research has shown it is more complex than culture and/or religion prohibiting participation (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010). However, Nike utilised this particular perception under the guise of ‘social activism’, for economic growth in the MENA region.

²⁸ Not all Arabs are Muslims and some cultural/societal norms extends across religions.

Mona^s uses Instagram to empower women and share a different narrative about her country. She always considers her culture, society, and religion: “contemplates what I post on my Instagram as an [Muslim] woman” and that her posts “follow the Islamic rules.” In some countries, societal norms are interwoven with political, cultural, and religious beliefs which do impact women’s opportunities to participate in society. However, Islam does not prohibit women from working, seeking education, or taking part in civic duty (Al-Ansari, 2011). Mona^s’s country’s Islamic laws require women to dress modestly by wearing a headscarf and long loose pants and shirts covering their body or a chador (similar to a long loose coat that covers the entire body). This was reflected in several of her Instagram posts, where she dressed according to her societal norms, however, Mona^s did not shy away from sharing her sporting achievements (Figure 5.12):



Figure 6.12: Mona’s Instagram post

According to Mona^s, images of her on the podium (Mona is in third place) “made a lot of people proud” of her achievement and received “messages of support.” Mona^s in describing that moment found the experience “more rewarding than standing on a podium” because she was proud to represent her country at an international sporting event. By sharing her sporting achievement with her local community she hopes to “inspire other young women” to take up sports and snowboarding in particular. Mona^s also “tries to show other people that [her] country is not what you

see in the media” and uses some of her Instagram posts to “try to change the image” which is often reflected as backwards in mainstream media. Her images on Instagram are professionally shot (often by a photographer friend) of her in action, across different parts of the country (e.g., mountains, beaches, cities), and these images challenge the mainstream media’s portrayal of her country and Muslim women. Additionally, as an action sports athlete, she also challenges the ‘somatic norm’ of a White male dominated sport.

There are subtle ways some of the participants showed the power of visibility of Muslim sportswomen (Figure 6.13). In the image Yara is at a competition, in her uniform and belts (purple belt and stripes represent the rank of the athlete), and her caption states, “ladies and gents! October 27th!! Fight to Win Philly is happening in about a week. Get your tickets now online (link in bio)! Get them before they sell out!!!!!!”.



Figure 6.13: Yara’s Instagram post

In our conversation Yara did not speak to a particular form of activism, however, I did observe her sometimes sharing content about ‘female empowerment’ or other

issues (e.g., Islam Awareness [p. 181]). However, in this particular image her presence among a crowd which are all men, in a male dominated sport, in front of the United States flag, in a county where issues of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism are extreme and far too frequent, I argue that her visibility is not only important but powerful. As Harris (2008) stated, social media has enabled a “new direction of activism” (p. 482), which does not have to be out-come oriented. Yara’s presence is a form of subtle activism by being visible through representation on social media. The participants in this research do not need Western companies and/or organizations to ‘save’ them or speak on their behalf. They are capable of challenging their own cultures/religions/community on issues related to them along with the perception of the Western notion of the ‘oppressed Other.’ The Muslim women in this research have the agency to increase the visibility of their diverse lives and identities. The visibility of the participants on social media has allowed some to ‘invade’ the online public spaces by speaking to their experiences and challenging expectations and norms of Muslim women in national and international contexts.

Chapter summary

Despite issues of surveillance, abuse, and trolling, social media offers Muslim sportswomen a space to self-represent themselves and in so doing, regain some power in their own representation and narratives. The self-representation for some of the participants in this research are subversive forms of politics, with social media providing them with creative opportunities to reframe their selves according to their sport, culture, religion, and society. Additionally, social media afforded them opportunities to be visible when mainstream media has often ignored or stereotyped Muslim women. Social media provides the participants in this research with a way to resist how their lives are spoken about and viewed. For the women in this project, social media created a space to show aspects of their everyday lives, resisting stereotypes, and myriad of social and cultural norms of their society. Muslim sportswomen who share aspects of their lives on social media are choosing to make their lives more publicly available. In sum, Muslim sportswomen are navigating their complex identities based on issues of race, sporting lives, socio-economic background, religious practices, geographies, family, politics and

cultures, and thus “reclaim[ing], renam[ing], and re-inhabit[ing]” (Said, 1993, p. 226) their subjectivities and representation via their social media usage.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION: MUSLIM SPORTSWOMEN IN THE DIGITAL BORDERLANDS

“complexity is just simplicity which refuses to be anything else”

nayyirah waheed

This thesis originated from my professional, academic, and personal experiences as a Muslim woman, a sports enthusiast, an activist, and an active social media user. Through my own knowledge and experience of these intersections, I found a need to fuse sports, technology, and culture to address a fundamental research gap in the sociology of sport and media studies; the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen. To bring the research to light, I applied an intersectional feminist approach to understanding three questions: 1) How are Muslim sportswomen using social media to represent aspects of their sporting lives? 2) How are various aspects of Muslim sportswomen’s identities (e.g., family, religion, culture) influencing their engagement with social media platforms? 3) How are Muslim sportswomen negotiating different sporting, social, and cultural value systems within and across social media spaces?

The internet is a prominent part of life, where everyday reality is shared, consumed, and circulated through and across numerous networks, devices, discourses, and socio-cultural imaginaries. However, while the internet is an everyday phenomenon, there are those that are not always seen, have less of a voice than others, and experience inequalities (re)produced by the Internet (e.g., surveillance, online abuse) in fragmented ways. Past research has addressed this by focusing on how marginal voices can gain access to or benefit from resources, but this thesis tells a different story and it starts from a different premise. The marginalisation of voices occurs online in everyday ways, but the focus of attention has tended to be on that which is politically marginalising. When one sees the Other, such as Muslim sportswomen, spoken about in the media, one sees a narrative that furthers their position as outsiders and as needing saving. However, in this research, I have shown how they have always been there and the task is maybe to reflect on how we (as

researchers) may “theoretically reconsider and reframe” (Ratna, 2018, p. 197) research surrounding the lives of Muslim sportswomen (Samie, 2017). This is what I intended to do with this thesis by incorporating various strands of feminism and drawing from a range of disciplines but always in conversation with my research questions, as well as my own lived experiences as a Muslim sportswoman. Drawing upon digital ethnographic observations and interviews, I illustrate the multiple ways the Muslim sportswomen who are culturally and racially/ethnically (e.g., Black Muslims, Muslim converts) diverse, engage with numerous social media platforms by challenging stereotypical narratives about Muslim women, in what I refer to as, *digital sport invaders in the digital borderlands*. This approach offers a new and different understanding of Muslim sportswomen’s everyday lives.

The theoretical concept of interstitial space and borderlands, specifically Chicana consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987), influenced the overall thesis design. I set out to explore how Muslim sportswomen navigate multiple cultures and intersecting identities, sometimes ones with conflicting political, cultural, and religious ideologies. The interstitial space, the digital borderlands, become a space for exploring marginality, difference, belonging, and self. Anzaldúa (1987) spoke to her experience of living at the border and navigating her own multiple identities and being uncomfortable in these margins. Indeed, during this thesis, at times I also felt various combinations of pride, shame, and fear, concerned as to how this project may impact my Muslim ummah. I worried about letting my community down and even being shamed for critiquing my community. In other words, at times I felt the discomfort at the margins of academia, feminism, and the Muslim ummah. Often feeling unsettled by these emotions, I recoiled into safe spaces where I could quietly absorb new information (e.g., theories) before travelling out again to explore other theoretical approaches. It was through these actions of navigating multiple interstitial spaces between theories, method, empirical material, and culture, that this thesis and the numerous voices of the women in this research inspired me not to limit myself to one concept or theory. Anzaldúa (1987) encourages individuals to move beyond both representational and physical spaces to be open to radical creative and new ways of thinking and this is what I strived to do.

This thesis pushes against borders and disciplinary boundaries into various intersecting spaces to explore the importance of ‘in-betweenness.’ Throughout I sought to weave in multiple contextual understandings of Muslim sportswomen and their lived experiences. These spaces activated creative and resourceful “ways of perceiving, conceiving, and taking part” in the production (Steele & Keys, 2015, p. 113) of this thesis. Rather than drawing upon one theory or concept, I engage through feminism with various cultural scholars, sport, and media studies and other disciplines (e.g., geography, digital humanities, education). A variety of feminist approaches such as intersectionality, postfeminism, and fourth wave feminism provided a useful theoretical lens. Such an approach avoids painting Muslim women with one broad stroke, something I wanted very much to avoid, especially since Muslim women have been historically stereotyped as a homogenous group (Benn & Dagkas, 2013; Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2010; Mohanty, 1988; Samie & Sehlikoglu, 2015). Furthermore, with the rise of Islamophobia, surveillance, and Orientalist narratives, I find it of the utmost importance to redefine the meaning of being a Muslim woman, to capture the multiplicities and pluralities of such identities.

I have argued in this thesis that an intersectional feminist approach is a necessity when addressing questions of social media usage and representation. Through this research I have shown that Muslim sportswomen are not bound to any single platform; instead they move across and within multiple platforms to gain control of their digital lives. Their stories show how some carefully negotiated and navigated concepts of surveillance, self-branding, and the politics of representation to subtly, but also sometimes overtly, challenge dominant stereotypical portrayals of Muslim sportswomen. In this regard, social media is a powerful site for the construction of counter-hegemonic representations (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013; Mann, 2014; Love, 2019; Piela, 2010b; Roy, 2018), and Muslim sportswomen’s use of social media is no exception.

Digital ethnography and reflexivity

An intersectional feminist analysis enabled me, as a researcher, to examine the different dimensions of Muslim sportswomen's lives disconnecting them from the single category of the oppressed Other. Collins (1990), Crenshaw (1991), McCall (2005), and Yuval-Davis (2006) stress the importance of differences among women and their multiple shifting identities which intersect, interrelate, and shape power relations. Inequalities, such as racism, sexism, and Islamophobia vary across cultures realities and "time and space" (Collins, 2015, p. 14). It is precisely the reason intersectionality aided me in interweaving, connecting, and mediating the meaning behind Muslim sportswomen's digital practices. Each of the participant's experiences offered nuanced understandings of their lives, as a Muslim woman within local, national, and international context along with culture, religion, and gender.

Social media is a broad and diverse term used to encapsulate many different interactive digital environments. It is important to note that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat are controlled by large corporations which are mostly based in the Western world. The structures themselves need to be challenged and potentially changed because they contribute to inequalities through codes and algorithms (Benjamin, 2019a; 2019b; Noble, 2018; Slaker, 2017). Despite the problematic power structures present in digital spaces, there are also opportunities for the marginalised to alter situations by articulating their views on social media such as the Muslim sportswomen in this research, because mainstream media skews or stereotypes representations of marginalised groups (Hammer & Kellner, 2009).

Feminist digital ethnography was valuable to this project, specifically, the use of digital observations along with semi-structured interviews. The digital observations and contextual analysis permitted for broader themes to emerge. The interviews enabled Muslim sportswomen to discuss a range of issues, including surveillance, self-branding, and the politics of representation. This was an important contribution to feminist digital ethnography because very few sport media scholars have

interviewed participants about their social media practices. The combination of these methods allowed me to capture text (e.g., comments, emojis, hashtags), pictures, words, and stories to understand the meaning behind what the women were sharing. This allowed me to deconstruct and comprehend the various socio-cultural contexts embedded in each participant's life, which impacted their social media practices and helped reveal a range of rich and nuanced themes.

In my observations and interviews with the 26 Muslim sportswomen, I found that they use different digital platforms in multiple ways, which reveals the complexity of their everyday encounters in relation to sport, culture, religion, and social media usage. The interviews after an eight month period of observation of over 50 social media profiles, were essential, because they allowed for the motives and/or reasoning behind the image(s) they were posting to be articulated, that they could *speak* to their unique experiences and identities. The interviews also revealed other aspects of their lives that were not apparent on their social media. For example, in my observation, I rarely saw negative comments but the interviews revealed that some of the participants deleted comments or blocked trolls. However, some choose not to block them because “one day they may change their mind or change their perceptions” (Haya), about either the sport or Muslim women.

For some of the sportswomen social media provides visibility and exposure. Therefore, I took a productive and collaborative approach always in conversation with the participants not only on their preference of pseudonyms but also providing options to use their real name (first name only) with the images. This is of importance, because discussions around and about programs, policies and other activities related to and about Muslim sportswomen often void any form of meaningful conversation or consultation with Muslim women. Therefore, there is value in incorporating interviews in digital ethnography, especially since there is a long history of debate within media and sport studies around interviews with participants (Wheaton & Beal, 2003; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018a; 2018b).

The observations, along with listening to the stories of the Muslim women in this research, revealed how political, social, economic, racial, and gender issues complicate the lives of Muslim women in similar and different ways. It also allowed me to reflect on my own experience as a Muslim woman. In addition it is important to draw attention to the ways my positionality changed throughout the research until completion. As Wheaton (2002) states: “despite reflection on the ‘self’ as cultural insider, researchers have often failed to investigate the ‘self’ as gendered or racialised subjects” (p. 240). In both the introduction and here, I offer some insights into my positionality. Being an activist, sports enthusiast, South Asian, woman of colour, American, Muslim - all influenced my ‘insider’ role in different ways especially with ongoing social and political events impacting the lives of Muslims globally. The extent of systematic violence, persecution, and ethnic cleansing happening around the world, I questioned the importance of this project with the ongoing atrocities, and other times I saw it play a significant part in countering the dominant narratives which causes distress for the Muslim ummah.

At times, it was difficult for me not to want to tell a positive story about Muslims or Muslim women. I navigated this in dialogue with feminist theories, critical media and digital studies, discussion with my supervisors, family, friends and participants. I also expressed my concerns, ideas, and shared research with the public and broader community through various ways. For example, I used blogs and/or radio interviews to raise awareness and challenge problematic narratives about Muslim sportswomen. These forms of engagement speak to what Keller (2016) states as “being a feminist publicly” (p. 271), and my actions as a form of activism for the Muslim ummah. Through engagement with various literature around representation and strong reflexivity, I kept in mind, Abu-Lughod’s (2002) and Said’s (1979) conversations around ‘saving’ and/or ‘exoticising’ the Other. Furthermore, the intersectional nature of my own shifting identities helped me to recognise the points of differences and acknowledge my own privileges which can either “uphold or contest the status quo” (Collins, 2015, p. 14) of social inequalities.

I also reflected on what it means to be a Brown, Muslim woman navigating academic institutions which often privilege ‘somatic norms’ (Puwar, 2004) and how having Caucasian women as my supervisors impacted me and/or the research. According to Wheaton (2013), “we (researchers) often fail to ‘see’ the parts of our ‘selves’ the most personal and most obvious” (p. 15). Being a Muslim woman is very much part of my life, it was through our conversations and my engagement with various strands of feminist theories allowed me to unpack hidden markers of being Muslim. For example, what does community mean to Muslims, the importance of the ummah, and even how heterosexuality is understood within the Muslim community, which is either in the form of marriage or family. These engagements allowed me to unpack some of my own assumptions and deep knowledge, and analyse the data in depth and reveal a range of themes. Below I offer a brief overview of the key research findings of this thesis.

Key research findings

In Chapter Four, “Muslim sportswomen’s encounters with different digital space,” I explored the numerous ways these women are using social media platforms. I did not limit the research to a specific platform. Instead, I opted to expand the literature around social media by examining four platforms; Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. By including a range of social media platforms, I explored how the Muslim sportswomen make meaning of the multitude of overlapping platforms. In the second part of this chapter, I drew upon a feminist intersectional engagement with Foucault’s theory of power (1998) and panopticism (1977) to reveal how online and offline power relations across different platforms enabled and constrained the possibilities of self-representation of the participants according to their differences. For some of the participants, the offline and online surveillance by family, local, and online communities and government, along with fear of online abuse, impacted their digital practices. However, some of the Muslim sportswomen exerted agency by taking control of their self-representation and privacy through ‘block’ functions on their platforms, simply ignoring comments and moving across multiple platforms. I argue that choosing to ‘ignore’ or not to engage with trolls is a subtle form of resistance and power. Another form of control is engaging with ephemeral features of platforms, like Snapchat, for privacy and to avoid

surveillance from family and local and online communities. The participants are well aware of the risks and possible consequences according to different intersections of their gender, culture, class, religion, and society, and strategically navigate to selectively share aspects of their everyday lives.

In Chapter Five, “Digital self-branding of Muslim sportswomen”, I drew upon critical postfeminism to address the self-branding practices of Muslim sportswomen. I also extended Toffoletti and Thorpe’s (2018b) concept of ‘athletic labour of femininity’ based on sporting celebrities of different ethnicities to discuss everyday sportswomen’s practices as ‘athletic labour of Muslim femininity’. For the Muslim sportswomen, their self-branding practices were at the intersections of Western postfeminism ideals and their culture, religion, gender, and sporting identities. Their authenticity appeared in the form of vulnerability, relatability (e.g., sporting their scars), talking about struggling of training during the month of Ramadan, and/or proudly sharing their religious, cultural and ethnic identities. I revealed how the participants applied numerous offline and online digital labouring methods to articulate aspects of their sporting, social, and cultural lives. Some of the Muslim sportswomen embodied aspects of the ‘postfeminist sensibility’ (Gill, 2007; Toffoletti, 2016) to achieve self-branding while navigating across culture, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Additionally, Muslim sportswomen were employing creative gendered digital labour practices through tailoring text and images, spending time, and emotional effort in utilising hashtags, taking offline social media courses to motivate and engage with their audience.

In Chapter Six, “Muslim Sportswomen as digital space invaders: Hashtag politics and everyday visibilities”, I drew upon Puwar’s (2004) concept of space invaders to explain how Muslim sportswomen are navigating their social, cultural and religious identities and ‘invading’ digital spaces for self-representation. In so doing, they are challenging the framework of Muslim women in need of ‘saving’ (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The rise of digital technologies, in particular social media, has ushered in new forms of feminist politics (Cochrane, 2013; Fullagar et al., 2018; Love, 2019; Munro, 2013; Parry et al., 2018; Ray, 2018). Herein I offer an analysis

of how Muslim sportswomen imagine these digital spaces, hashtags and images that are instrumental to how they ultimately negotiate their identities within such spaces while keeping their social, cultural, and religious norms in mind. For the Muslim sportswomen, the digital platforms afforded them the opportunity to reject the stereotypical imagery of the oppressed Other. Instead, they foregrounded various aspects of their lives concerning culture, race, religion, and ethnicity on their social media posts. This type of activity is what Hall (1996a) describes as a “conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (p. 235). Importantly, it is also an act of navigating the multiple interstitial spaces, that helps create and foster new ways of thinking and this offers a counter-narrative to dominant portrays of Muslim women.

In sum, intersectionality was important to understand how Muslim sportswomen used digital technologies to connect, challenge, and disrupt social, cultural, and political issues. Not bound to one particular platform, many moved in between and at times simultaneously across the multiple platforms of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat to avoid surveillance and online abuse. Some of the participants embraced postfeminist self-branding possibilities of social media according to their culture and religion to successfully build their businesses, and motivate their online audience by employing various digital labour practices. Furthermore, social media afforded opportunities for some of the participants to disrupt online public spaces through visibility and hashtags allowing them to share and *speak to their lived experience* thus reclaiming their narratives by becoming *digital sport invaders*.

Limitations

This study provided an in-depth understanding of Muslim sportswomen’s engagement with social media in relation to their everyday sporting and cultural lives. However, it is essential to recognise the limitations of the research in this thesis. As addressed in the methods sections, the participants were diverse regarding their sporting practices, social media usage, culture, ethnicity, and countries of origin and residence. However, the sample size was 26, and there is a likelihood

that other voices and experiences were absent from this research, such as conducting interviews in another language. In Chapter Three, I addressed potential language barriers. The call for participants offered the option for the interview to be conducted in another language. It is important to consider the importance of language which is part of an individual's culture and identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). As Fanon (1967) states "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (p. 25), in which language was used (and still is) as a form of cultural domination. The meaning of words/experiences may differ from that of the language of a coloniser. With additional funding and resources, I would have encouraged non-English speakers or individuals who preferred to converse in their native language to take part in this study by indicating I would be working with translators to conduct interviews and translate documents for recruitment. Due to financial limitations of a doctoral thesis, I conducted all the interviews in English. Nonetheless, my understanding of the range of social nuances and Islamic proverbs, meant that I was in an excellent position to navigate cultural issues in the interviews. Additionally, this is the first-time research on how Muslim sportswomen engage with social media has been carried out, which addresses a significant gap in the literature of sports and social media.

Another limitation of this research was not being able to explore sexuality in my intersectional approach. As mentioned previously, inquiring about sexuality can be a taboo in certain cultures and creates significant risks of physical violence and isolation (El-Khatib, 2011; Yip, 2004). Moreover, I knew in a very tacit way that it was not appropriate to ask questions about sexuality which would have likely deterred or offended many of my participant. It was not until later in this project that I realised I made that choice. Furthermore, Massad (2002) argues, scholars and organisations often draw upon sexual categorisation which work within a Western framework often reiterating differences between Western and Eastern cultures and failing to recognize how sexuality maybe interpreted/categorized within different cultures and/or religions. It is vital to continue to be sensitive to how culture and religion are embedded in identity around issues such as sexuality and in the future do better in creating safe spaces for more diverse groups in sport, social media, and research to be heard.

Implications and future research

Despite having reached the end of this project, it is important to realise the potential for future research. This thesis has numerous valuable implications for scholarly literature, along with policy, and practical approaches concerning the sport and Muslim ummah. It advances the discourse on Muslim sportswomen and social media by giving prominence to their voices which is crucial to how Muslim sportswomen navigate both the offline and the digital world. It also expands the sport and media literature by incorporating a range of platforms to (re)conceptualise social media practices. Additionally, I ask individuals working within mainstream media to expand their knowledge of representations of Muslim sportswomen and create spaces for a range of voices to be heard and bodies to be seen.

Through this research, I extended the conversations in the field of sport studies especially around Muslim sportswomen. Additionally, some studies have focused on Muslim women and sport, highlighting their low participation in sports in Western societies, specifically within the North American and European context. This research incorporates not only diverse regions but also extends Muslim sportswomen's participants in the MENA region (in which research has also been limited). This research opens up new avenues of thinking about how Muslim women and girls are engaging in other societies and/or countries which Ratna (2018) and Samie (2017) encouraged researchers to do. For example, this thesis extends how Muslim sportswomen occupy a range of sports, including action sports spaces (e.g., surfing, climbing, mountaineering), combat sports (e.g., boxing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu), team sports (e.g., basketball, soccer), and fitness trends (e.g., CrossFit, powerlifting), which have traditionally privileged White male bodies. The research shows that Muslim women in different religious and geographic contexts are taking part in a range of sports and leisure activities, and more work is needed to understand their embodied experiences in a wider array of sports (Ratna, 2018).

This research creates new conversations on the perceptions of Muslim sportswomen by privileging their voices and self-representation through the use of social media.

According to Meikle and Young (2011), “we now have the tools to voluntarily make ourselves visible for reasons of social or commercial gain” (p. 147) which is what social media did for the sportswomen in this research. Sport studies scholars have found that the male gaze has contributed to mainstream media’s stereotypical portrayals of sportswomen as trivialised and sexualised objects (Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). For Muslim sportswomen, they have been homogenised into the mainstream media’s perspective of the Muslim woman who needs saving (Abu-Lughod, 2002) or the hijabi saviour (Samie & Toffoletti, 2018). Social media creates the opportunity for some control of visibility which is significant to those who have been relegated to the margins of society and sport. This research is contributing to a growing body of literature on sportswomen’s self-representation on social media, by adding a unique contribution with Muslim women’s voices, and how Muslim sportswomen are using social media in both similar ways as other sportswomen, such as embodying Western ideals of femininity in their self-branding practices, and in different ways, such as navigating their culture, religion, and gender through their digital sporting lives.

In the current political climate, Muslim communities and individuals face a series of social constraints and prejudices. Social media technologies such as Instagram and Facebook are providing opportunities to develop and discover online support structures, connections and build relationships. This opens up potential research avenues to explore other ethnic groups. Future research can explore the multiple and diverse ways that Muslim men, or Muslims who are different ages, are using social technologies to connect and give support, at the local and global scale. The future research outcomes could contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversations not only in the fields of sports, but potentially offer a cross-cultural adoption of digital media, and towards new understandings of how online social media practices shape the offline world (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; 2013; Kennedy & Hills, 2015). Additionally, future research can be potentially applied to integrating intersectional perspectives of sports, fitness, health, and technologically driven policies which contribute to the wellbeing of diverse communities in both the online and digital realm. Mostly, I hope the research presented here offers a starting point for future

research on the different sports, fitness, and social media practices of Muslim women.

Sport is an increasingly important area for online activism. Research around online sports activism is still at its infancy, however, some scholars have called for more research on the use of social media for sports activism (Butterworth, 2014; Billings, 2014; Galily, 2019; Sanderson, Frederick, & Stocz, 2016) because of social media's role for advocacy within the sports sphere (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Sanderson, 2014; Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). I agree with the need for sports scholars to further examine the role of sports activism on social media, encourage researchers to not just limit this to Twitter but examine across platforms and to consider the micro-politics of visibility as discussed in Chapter Six.

Final thoughts

Social media is 'trending' across mass popular culture and an array of academic disciplines (e.g., education, policy, sociology, sports). There is particular interest in how social media is used (and abused) and its impact on individuals and societies. Digital platforms offer a space for self-expression, resistance, and representation of diverse identities, where active users are sharing 'their big life moments' and everyday lives with their followers. For some, social media technologies provide a space to navigate, construct and negotiate complex aspects of social and cultural realities. This research encourages new ways of thinking about Muslim sportswomen away from stereotypes that homogenise them as a group who need 'saving' from their oppressive cultures. I encourage researchers to continue to ask different questions about the experiences of Muslim women around sports and technology, and how they navigate different aspects of their everyday life in a globally connected world.

I also encourage researchers to continue to ask new questions and explore creative approaches by giving voice to Muslim women. As the poet waheed (2013) states: "you do not have to be a fire for every mountain blocking you. you could be a water and soft river your way to freedom too" (p. 119). My research has shown the

benefits of venturing out into the borderlands engaging with the interstitial spaces of sport, culture, and theory. In so doing, we might strive to navigate these spaces like a 'river,' to allow for broader understandings of the complexities, realities, and experiences of Muslim sportswomen. This research is of social and cultural importance because it not only sought to bridge the gap between sociological and digital humanities, but offered critical feminist perspectives on understanding the richly layered, complex, and nuanced digital practices of Muslim sportswomen.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Initial recruitment through social media

Hi [name of participant/screen name], my name is Nida Ahmad and I am contacting you because I am hoping you might be interested in participating in my PhD research on Muslim sportswomen's (18-35 years old) use of social media. If you would like to know more about this project, please share your email address and I can then send you additional information. If you do not feel comfortable sharing your email address on this site, then please feel free to contact me at my email address: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz. Thank you! – Nida Ahmad (PhD Candidate, University of Waikato)

Appendix B:

Sample interview questions

Note: Semi-structured interviews can diverge from the script. These questions are a starting point for an in-depth interview. It is impossible to know precisely which questions will be asked / not asked as the conversation emerges. Below are samples of possible interview questions:

Questions relating specifically to being Muslim sportswomen

- a. Tell me a bit about the type of activities or sports you have been involved in growing up?
- b. As a Muslim woman did you feel limited to the type of sports/activities you can participate in?
- c. Does your family prohibit you from playing sports? If so why? If they allow you to participate in sports are there any sports which are off limits?
- d. Are there any issues you face by the community when you participate in sports?
- e. Do you face any challenges in accessing spaces for training and competition (e.g., facilities, gyms, outside)?
- f. As an active sportswoman, have you ever felt threatened for participating in sports? (e.g., family, community)
- g. What kind of constraints do you face as a sportswoman?
- h. How do you balance your religion and sport?
- i. How does the national and international media typically represent your sporting achievements? Do you have any frustrations/concerns about how you are typically represented?

Social media usage

- j. How long have you been using social media? What social media platforms have you used in the past? What social media platforms do you currently use? Why do you prefer these social media platforms?
- k. Are there some social media platforms that you use more for personal purposes, and others you use more in relation to your sport? If so, please explain.

- l. Tell me a little bit about your first impressions of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Snapchat and have these changed over time? If so, how/why?
- m. Is there a specific social media platform that you use more so than others? If so can you tell me why you use (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) over other sites?
- n. What are the primary reasons you use Facebook? What are the primary reasons you use Instagram? What are the primary reasons you use Twitter?

Experiences of using social media

- o. Are there elements of using any of these social media that you find particularly fun/enjoyable?
- p. Are there elements of using any of these social media platforms that are frustrating?
- q. Are there any concerns that you have experienced using any of these social media platforms? Prompts: Are your family happy with how you use social media? How have/does your local community respond to your use of social media? How do people you don't know respond to your use of social media?
- r. Have you had anything unpleasant/worrying happen during your use of social media? Prompt: Have you had anyone post unkind comments? If so, how do you respond to these?

Issues related to being a Muslim sportswoman and use of social media

- s. As a Muslim woman, are there any particular considerations you have in how you use social media? For example, how you show your face/hair? How you show your body?
- t. What are some of the key lessons you have learned over the years of your use of social media? What types of photos/comments get the most positive responses? What types of photos/comments evoke negative responses?
- u. Are you part of any online communities where other women play/participate in this sport? How are these online communities different in terms of how sportswomen are represented? How do you feel about being active in these spaces?

- v. On your social media accounts do you have friends and family that follow you? If so, do you feel you have to modify your posts with them as potential viewers? If so, how/why do you do this?

Questions relating specifically to their social media accounts

- w. [Participant Specific] Can you tell about this particular location (if this location appears often in pictures)?
- x. [Participant Specific] I noticed on your social media accounts you most a lot of pics/tweet a lot about topic]? Can you tell me a little about that?
- y. Are there questions that you think I should be asking you that I'm not?

Appendix C:

Participant information sheet

Brief Outline of the Research Project:

In this project I am seeking to understand how Muslim sportswomen use social media for a wide array of purposes, which may include communicating with your sporting fans and peers, families, local communities, self-promotion and marketing, and/or political purposes. As a doctoral student at the University of Waikato, and a Muslim sportswoman who is active in social media, I am particularly interested to hear your experiences of how and why you use social media, and some of the issues you take into consideration in doing so.

Your involvement:

To understand the diversity of Muslim sportswomen's uses of social network sites (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook), I am inviting Muslim sportswomen across an array of different sports and from different countries. I would like to invite you to participate in this study in two key ways: 1) allow me to follow your social media accounts for the purposes of this project, and 2) an interview in which we will discuss how/why you use social media, and a short activity before our interview in which you draw/illustrate/map out your use of social media. The interview would be at a time and in a setting (e.g., Skype, Google Hangouts, phone, or in person) of your choosing (expect where I am unable to travel to you, we will be limited to a digital or phone interview). If possible, it would be preferable if we conduct the interview in English, but if you prefer another language we can discuss our options further. The interview is expected to last no more than an hour and half, but may take more (or less) time depending on the willingness of each participant. Questions will focus on your experiences of how you use social network sites. You may be asked to answer some follow-up questions post-interview, these can be asked and answered via email or phone. I know that for many women the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge on Muslim women's experiences with sports and your use of social network sites is exciting, so I invite you to pass my information and contact details onto friends/family/colleagues for potential interviewing.

Confidentiality:

As a participant, you will remain anonymous via the use of a pseudonym (a fake name). However, please let me know if you are happy to be partially identified (e.g., age, ethnicity/nationality, occupation, marital status, or level of sporting participation). This information is helpful to allow me to contextualize the insights you provide during the interviews. The data collected from this study will be used

to write a research report for the fulfilment of my doctoral research and will mainly be read by university students, researchers and academics. It is likely that this information will also be used within journal publications and conference presentations.

Participants' Rights:

If you take part in this research project, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer whole or part of any particular question asked of you during the interview process
- Seek additional information about the study or voice any concerns you may have during the course of your participation to either myself, or my chief supervisor.
- Be given access to your individual transcript and to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.
- Withdraw from the study up until your transcripts are returned (before September 30, 2017).

If you agree to participate, you will be given a copy of your interview transcript via email. You are encouraged to read over the transcript and amend, delete or add any comments you see fit.

Records

All records from the digital observations and interviews will be kept under the strictest of confidence. They will be archived at least five years according to University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations. The audio recordings of the interviews will be kept in a secure location for the duration of the research process. Any other use of these recordings will not occur without your consent.

Contacting the Researcher

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either myself the researcher, or my chief supervisor, Dr. Holly Thorpe for clarification.

Researcher: Nida Ahmad
University of Waikato Doctoral Candidate
Email: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz

Chief Supervisor: Dr. Holly Thorpe
Sports and Leisure Studies
Te Oranga, School of Human Development and Movement Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Waikato
Email: hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix D:

Informed consent form

Examining the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen

Researcher: Nida Ahmad

I agree to participate in a research project led by PhD candidate Nida Ahmad from the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the project through being interviewed.

1. I have been given sufficient information about the research and discussed the project with Nida Ahmad who is conducting this research as part of her PhD degree supervised by Dr. Holly Thorpe in the Faculty of Education Department at the University of Waikato.

2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate. I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research and have the opportunity to ask Nida Ahmad any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

3. Participation involves 1) my social media account(s) being observed for research purposes, and 2) being interviewed by Nida Ahmad. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. I allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview. I also may allow the recording (by audio/video tape) of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be taped, I am at any point of time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.

4. I have the right not to answer any of the questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to temporarily stop the interview or withdraw from the interview.

5. I have been given the explicit guarantees that the researcher will not identify me by name in any publications or presentations resulting from this research, and she will do her best to always ensure my confidentiality as a participant in this study.

6. I have been given the guarantee that this research project has been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Ethics Committee. For research problems or any other question regarding the research

project, Dr. Holly Thorpe, the chief supervisor of Nida Ahmad can be contacted through: hthorpe@waikato.ac.nz and office telephone number: +64 21 311143.

7. I will be given an opportunity to review my interview transcript and understand that I can edit/change/delete any content from this transcript. I understand that this transcript must be returned within 10 days of receiving it, but if this is difficult I can contact the researcher to arrange a longer time period. I understand that it is not compulsory to return my transcript, but if I do not return my transcript I understand that the researcher will interpret this as my willingness for it to be used in her research.

8. I understand that I can withdraw from this project up until the return of my transcript or September 30, 2017, when data analysis will commence.

9. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

10. I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

11. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for academic purposes (e.g. thesis, journal publication, etc.), and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Participant's Signature

Age

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

For further information, please contact: Nida Ahmad e-mail: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz or cell: (+1) 720-635-1329

Please check one:

- Full anonymity (pseudonym with no other information)

or

- Partial disclosure (pseudonym with some additional information, such as the sport or country)
-

Please check one:

- Observe your use of social media solely to inform overall themes for my project
- Observe your use of social media to inform overall themes, with the possibility of including anonymized quotations from you only
- Observe your use of social media to inform overall themes, with the possibility of including anonymized quotations from you and your followers

Please note: If I feel a photo from any of your social media accounts would be particularly useful to include in my research, I will contact you to discuss 1) if you are happy for the image to be included, and 2) if you would prefer that your face is blurred or not.

Please check one:

- Observe any of my social media accounts

or

- Observe only the following social media accounts:

Appendix E:

Examining the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen study

Social Network Post (Snowball Sampling)

Long version

PLEASE SHARE: Are you a Muslim sportswoman (18-35 years old) active on social media? Do you know anybody who is? A doctoral researcher from the University of Waikato in New Zealand is seeking volunteers for a research project about Muslim sportswomen who are active on social media. If you are interested, please email: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz

Short version

PLEASE SHARE: A PhD researcher at University of Waikato in New Zealand is conducting a study about Muslim sportswomen who are active on social media. If you are interested, please email: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz

Email Message (Snowball Sampling from Participants)

Email from Nida to participant

Hello [PARTICIPANT],

Thank you for your interest in [NAME OF STUDY]. I am writing to ask whether you would also be willing to pass along the enclosed information to friends and/or family members who may also be interested in participating in this research study. You are under no obligation to share this information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Attachments: email text to send to friend

Email from participant to his or her contacts

Hello [NAME OF CONTACT]

I am contacting you because I think you might be interested in participating in a research project about Muslim sportswomen's (18-35 years old) use of social media. This research

is being conducted by Nida Ahmad who is a Muslim American woman currently completing her PhD at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Nida is seeking to observe social network sites and interview individuals who either currently active on two or more social media sites, are Muslim and women, AND actively participate in sports. Interviews last roughly 90 minutes and can take place online or by phone. If you are interested, please email: na105@students.waikato.ac.nz.

Please feel free to share this email with anyone else you know who might be interested.

Sincerely,

Appendix F:

Check list

Examining the digital lives of Muslim sportswomen checklist					
Participant Pseudonyms	Consent form received (Date)	Online observation: What approved SNS platform(s) I can observe - Facebook (FB), Twitter, (T), Instagram (I), and Snapchat (S)	Interview (Date)	Transcript received and also any clarifications (Yes/No) (Date)	Image approval (Yes/No)
<i>e.g., Rana</i>	<i>10/28/2016</i>	I, T, S, FB	02/14/2017	Yes	