The Body Triad, Whiteness and Agency: The Not-So-Sporty Experiences of Punjabi-Canadian Women

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Science
Department of Exercise Sciences
University of Toronto

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Abstract
This thesis explored the physical activity (PA) experiences of 18 Punjabi-Canadian women living in the Greater Toronto Area. It argues that the choice not to participate in PA is an act of agency reflective of the pressures placed on the women. The theoretical frameworks used were the centrality of women’s bodies in social and cultural reproduction, whiteness and critical race theory. The methods used were focus groups coined “chai and chats.” Results revealed that the “Body Triad,” a term I coin, consisting of the “Fat Body,” “Skinny Body” and “Muscular Body” and the dominance of whiteness in Canada impacted the women’s decision to not participate in PA. As a result, the women negotiated these pressures by talking back, “feeling blessed” and challenging existing gendered and racial assumptions about their bodies. This study showed the relationship between gender, immigration and whiteness where Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies were central to the discussion.
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This thesis explores the physical activity (PA) experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). As Canada has become home to immigrants from across the world, access to sport and/or narratives of sport participation often reflect the ways people understand the organization or common values in society (Joseph, Darnell and Nakamura, 2012). An entry point into focusing on this particular group of Punjabi women, commonly categorized under the term “South Asian,” was the overall low PA participation rates for this demographic (Babakus and Thompson, 2012). Given that narratives of sport participation (or lack thereof) have social implications and South Asian women report low participation, this study reflected on the PA experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women living in the GTA.

The main argument of the thesis is that the experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women living in the GTA illustrated the various social barriers that limited their participation in PA. The data shows that gendered and patriarchal understandings and regulations of the body, as well as the operation of whiteness and racism in Canadian society, came together to limit the choices and motivations of Punjabi-Canadian women from participating in PA. In turn, the choice on the part of the women not to participate in PA must be understood in a way that centres Punjabi-

1 I use the term “Punjabi-Canadian” to name the women in the study because “Punjabi” was the central marker for identity that brought the women together to share their experiences growing up in Canada. I recognize and acknowledge the other ways the women self-identified based on their respective ethno/racial/religious/cultural histories and communities (i.e. Indian, Sikh, Pakistani, South Asian, brown etc.).
2 In this text, “white/whiteness” is not capitalized as this was the general format for most texts that were influential to this thesis (Bannerji, 2000, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993).
Canadian women’s negotiation of these circumstances rather than a simplistic reflection of their oppression or lack of education.

Many of the major themes of the study are captured in the following anecdote. It occurred while I was having conversations during one of my focus groups. One late evening in May I invited a couple of the women participating in the study back for another discussion to help think through some of the emerging themes from my conversations. As with all my previous sessions, I set the table, rolled out a tablecloth and prepared chai and snacks for the women. After a brief set of introductions, we jumped right into discussion. I presented some of the emerging themes which included: the role of the family, gendered expectations and societal barriers to accessing sport. We contextualized each theme and I scribbled illustrations of each theme on a piece of paper behind me as I was mapping the trajectory of our thoughts.

About midway into our discussion we all realized the same thing at once, as a lightbulb coming on in our collective minds. That was, as I crudely summarized at that point in the discussion, “you get shit on at home, you get shit on outside of home so, why the hell would you put yourself out there? If you’ve never been supported, then why would you?” This was in referral to the consensus that the choice not to play sports or be involved in PA was one that was severally impacted by the social and material conditions informed by familial and societal relationships. As a result of such circumstances, Punjabi/South Asian women are often left with little room to challenge, contest and/or resist such dynamics, especially given the lack of support systems. The women agreed with this and the remainder of the focus group was spent further clarifying this insight by connecting experiences to this hypothesis. This resulted in later constructing a framework to map out the shared struggles and experiences of the women in the study.
I share this anecdote for several reasons. First, that light bulb that clicked for the four of us in the room reflected the importance of understanding both intra-and-inter community dynamics that shaped the women’s experiences. That is, the role of the family and societal factors must be contended with in order to map out the reality lived by the women. Secondly, it captured the means in which this thesis was put together. This means the two results chapters reflect the themes that the women themselves felt had impacted their decisions the most, namely how their bodies are/were regulated at home and how this was compounded by the underlying dominance of whiteness in Canada. Lastly, this anecdote captures the shared realization that exists for women in the (intra) community. These are, the shared lack of women’s participation in PA, the silencing of and unimportance to the issue and lastly, feelings of isolation and alienation that exist as a result of the dissatisfaction, shame and exclusion experienced. Related to this is an understanding of how to make sense of such circumstances as well as potentially how to move forward.

Therefore, in many ways I write this thesis in order to describe that moment in detail, to share a powerful and moving experience. I recognize the diversity of experiences shared by the 18 women during the course of research, which made it challenging to locate particular experiences. However, I do believe that the major themes presented reflect salient aspects of the women’s lives that impacted their decisions. Furthermore, the thesis is an attempt to document unpopular narratives and to challenge “common sense” understandings around Punjabi/South Asian women’s lack of sport participation. In the very least, I hope it makes the reader think more deeply about social and societal dynamics that influenced these women’s decisions.
1.1 Structure of thesis

The thesis is organized into six chapters. After this introductory chapter, I describe the Research Problem and Questions. This is followed by the Theoretical and Methodological Framework. The next two chapters describe the main findings of the thesis, focused first on intra-community and intra-familial understandings of and experiences with gendered and patriarchal notions of the body, and followed by inter-community experiences with whiteness in Canadian society. In Chapter Six I consider the implications of the results by locating the tensions articulated on/though the women’s bodies. This is followed by a short conclusion including suggestions for future research in this area. I end with a brief Epilogue.

Chapter Two frames the research question of this study. I summarize the literature that describes the lack of sport participation (and related health risks) for South Asians. I then narrow this to highlight societal and cultural factors that impact South Asian women. In Chapter Three, I describe three major studies that shaped the construction of this thesis. Then, I describe how theories of gender, whiteness and Critical Race Theory (CRT) shaped my understanding of the data. After this, I describe the methods carried out as part of this research, highlighting my use of culturally specific focus groups that I term “chai and chats.”

In Chapters Four and Five, the results of this study are presented. Chapter Four contends with intra-community dynamics which manifested in the gendered and patriarchal regulations imposed on the women through what I term the “Body Triad.” Here I describe the aspects of the

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3 Although the results chapters are organized as such, this is not to suggest that patriarchal/gendered notions of the body and whiteness/racism are isolated to either intra or inter community spaces only. These systems of power dynamically inform each other and reproduced themselves at all aspects. The organization of the results chapters in this thesis are meant to describe how these systems of dominance impacted particular aspects of the women’s lives. There is room to further elaborate on the dynamic and fluid ways these systems interacted and informed each other both inside and outside the home.
Body Triad: the Fat Body, Skinny Body and the Muscular Body. I conclude with the ways the women in the study negotiated these intra-community dynamics. Chapter Five contends with the inter-community dynamics as they relate to aspects of race and class. Here I describe the dynamic Punjabi identity and contrast it to the ways whiteness uses racial/cultural markers to impose its dominance in society. Then I describe class-based barriers as they relate to issues of immigration and access to sport. Similar to Chapter Four, I conclude this chapter by explaining the ways the women in the study negotiated these inter-community dynamics to make choices given the circumstances.

In Chapter Six, I relate my research to the literature and theory to summarize the significance of this study. In particular, I highlight how my data relates and adds to our current understanding of the experiences of this demographic. Then I explain how Punjabi-Canadian women had nowhere to hide given intra and inter community pressures they faced. Lastly, I conclude by emphasizing that the choice not to participate is an act of agency considering the patriarchal, gendered, racial and classed factors that impacted the women’s lives. The conclusion recalls the main findings of the study and identifies its limitations and future research possibilities.

Before moving forward, it should be noted that I use the term Punjabi and/or South Asian interchangeably. I do this given the current state of literature that focuses on “South Asians” (rather than specific subgroups) but also because this was the nature in which Punjabi-Canadian women oftentimes described theirs/others experiences. That said, I try to use the term Punjabi to refer to specific experiences captured through my conversations about the “Punjabi” identity. Similarly, PA and sport are somewhat used interchangeably though differently. Physical activity is used to refer to the broad ways the women understood and participated in physical cultures.
Sport is used to refer to the particular ways the women were exposed to or engaged in organized PA spaces.
Chapter 2
Research Problem and Questions

2.0 Research Problem and Questions

This chapter sets out the importance of this thesis. I argue that low PA participation levels amongst South Asian women in Canada point to the need to understand their experiences better and be able to account for how and why they may choose to participate or not. The first section provides a brief overview of the low levels of PA amongst this population, then I highlight social aspects that affect low levels of PA and explain why I focused on Punjabi-Canadian women.

2.1 Low levels of physical activity participation among South Asians

According to the existing scholarship, general trends revealed that South Asians consistently report the lowest levels of PA in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom (Bannerjee, Landry, Zawi, Childerhose, Stephens, Shafique and Price, 2017; Babakus and Thompson, 2012; Fischbacher, Hung and Alexander, 2004). In Ontario, Canada, Chiu (2012) found that “South Asians were not as active as white patients...and (had) limited access to local physical activity facilities” (p. 23-24). In the United Kingdom, Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi communities reported lower levels of PA, as compared to the general population (Jepson, Harris, Bowes, Robertson, Avan, Sheikh, 2012; Fischbacher et al., 2004). Similarly, in the United States, regardless of the measures used to track PA, South Asian Indians reported similar trends (Daniel and Wilbur, 2011). Parallel to these findings, a lack of PA and related decisions/opportunities/access towards optimal health were accompanied with the highest risks of cardio-vascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and mental health in South Asian communities (Islam, Khanlou, Tamim, 2014; Misra, Ramchandran, Shrivastava, Jayawardena
and Snehalatha, 2014; Ranasinghe, Ranasinghe, Jayawardena and Misra, 2013; Babakus and Thompson, 2012; Patel, Phillips-Caesar and Boutin-Foster, 2012; Hayes, White, Unwin, Bhopal, Fischbacher, Harland and Alberti, 2002). This highlights the general trend amongst South Asians to consistently report the lowest levels of PA in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom and sparked my interest in the issue.

2.2 Social factors affecting low levels of physical activity

Departing from popular inferences or suggestions that low levels of PA among South Asian women are due to a lack of education, motivation or inherent cultural norms, I argue that the literature shows that a number of social issues are also at play. The following section describes the familial obligations and gendered social and cultural factors influencing participation.

Overall, gendered trends revealed that within the South Asian population, women and elderly members were cited as being least physically active (Higgins and Dale, 2013; Babakus and Thompson, 2012; Ramanathan, 2012; Fischbacher et al., 2004). Some of the factors for this included the impact of family members and gendered intra-community cultural roles (Abbasi, 2014; Babakus and Thompson, 2012; Ranasinghe et al., 2012; Ramanathan, 2012 and Ramanathan and Crocker, 2009; George and Rail, 2005; Kumar, 2004). For example, Patel et al., (2012) identified how family members played a role in influencing women’s participation. Gender roles associated with familial responsibilities were prioritized over recreation. Furthermore, there were mixed assessments about the role of men/brothers/fathers in support of South Asian women’s participation. For example, Thangaraj’s research on Indo-Pak basketball tournaments shows that South Asian masculinity excluded women from the court (Thangaraj, 2015; 2010). Thangaraj (2010) writes:
Indo-Pak players stressed the importance of getting young men into basketball while their daughters, sisters, wives stayed off the courts... Women’s bodies, therefore, represent hyper-heterosexual spectacles located outside the performative spaces of basketball. (p. 385)

Here women viewed the Indo-Pak tournament from the sidelines or attended the tournament socials but were excluded from the tournament itself. In contrast Ramanathan and Crocker (2009) revealed that young Indian women living in Canada emphasized that fathers and brothers were the most influential figures that encouraged their participation. Fathers and brothers were “viewed as key sources of athletic domains... [The young women] were verbally encouraged by these male figures” (p. 500). This conflicts with Thangaraj’s (2010) findings where South Asian American men viewed women’s bodies as belonging off the court as anxieties arose when women appeared on the court with them. The conflicting results between these studies may reflect the scope of the respective studies where Ramanathan and Crocker (2009) directed their analysis of women’s participation towards young Indian women’s themselves, whereas Thangaraj (2010) spatially mapped out the terrain of women’s bodies in relation to PA. However this provides an interesting tension, and one I explore in my study particularly in relation to intra-community dynamics that informed Punjabi-Canadian women’s experiences.

The impact of cultural norms are also identified in the literature (Bannerjee et al., 2017; Rice, 2016, 2002; Patel et al., 2012; Ramanathan and Crocker, 2009; Sabrina Razack, 2009; George and Rail, 2005; Kumar, 2004; Rice, 2002). For instance, in their study, Ramanathan and Crocker (2009) found that young Indian women living in Canada were keen to be physically active. These young women understood the importance of PA, while cultural and familial factors
influenced their participation the most. As “Indian cultures are family-centered” (p.499), elders emphasized spirituality and prayer, and these were positive influencers for being active. Therefore, many of the young women in the study felt PA in the form of prayer was an important part of their Indian identities. Similarly, in her research on Hindu middle-class adolescent women, Kumar (2004) contextualized how Hindu-Indian middle-class adolescent women were socialized by their parents to become obedient women. This was especially pronounced after puberty, which became the transitionary point into adulthood. Complicating these cultural narratives, George and Rail (2005) described how dominant Canadian “healthist culture” (p.48) impacted second generation South Asian women. In their study, dominant (white) discourses of health consumed by South Asian women manifested in pressures to “look good” (p. 53) thus reproducing oppressive societal forces as looking good was associated with individual responsibility at the nexus of racial, classed and patriarchal factors. While these studies identify the importance of cultural factors towards participation, there is further room to investigate the “norms” of both familial and societal cultures which impact women’s decisions towards PA—especially the choice not to play. This means locating how these dominant cultures impact and inform each other, the tensions that results and the centrality of women’s bodies in the (re)production of such spaces.

In summary, the literature shows that South Asian populations continue to have low rates of PA participation. Amongst this group, South Asian women are most likely to report. Some of the reasons for this include familial and societal barriers to participation. Overall, then, there is a need for theory-based research to frame the experiences of this group. I use these insights as a launch pad to frame my research because, as Babakus and Thompson (2012) argue, there is a need for “theory-based research to better understand the social, structural, economic and cultural
factors” (Babakus and Thompson, 2012, p. 16) that influence participation in PA amongst South Asians. They argue that we need to be able to comprehend the complex dynamics that inform the PA experiences of South Asians. Based on this, I move to a discussion of how I framed the focus of my research study.

2.3 Focus on Punjabi-Canadian Women

For this study, I chose to focus on the experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women living in the GTA. I decided on this population because, as mentioned above, South Asian women consistently report the lowest levels of PA. Related to this was the importance of documenting the multidimensional\(^4\) factors that inform the experiences of women of colour (WOC).\(^5\) Based on this, first, I describe the history, background and diversity of South Asian and Punjabi people in Canada. Then I describe the history and diversity of the Punjabi community as a group. Based on this, I show that because South Asians are not a homogenous group, I chose to focus on Punjabi-Canadian women. I conclude with my research questions for the study.

The term “South Asian” is an umbrella grouping of different populations, religions and cultures associated with the region of South Asia (Statistics Canada, 2007). Immigration of South Asians to Canada date back to the 1900s (Nayar, 2012). Today, South Asians are one of the largest immigrant groups in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016) and according to the 2016 Statistics Canada survey, Punjabi is one of the most frequently spoken immigrant languages

\(^4\) The term “multidimensional,” rather than “intersectional” is used throughout this thesis. This is in line with Yuval-Davis (1996, p. 23) who uses the term to emphasize the complexities of roles and power dimensions that impact women’s lives and the spaces they occupy. In the context of this thesis, the term is used to capture the ways national, religious, geographical, linguistic and/or historical, as well as, raced, classed and gendered markers impacted and informed the women’s identities and experiences.

\(^5\) “WOC” and “non-white” women are sometimes used interchangeably in this thesis. Women of colour is used to name the particular experiences of Punjabi-Canadian/immigrant/Muslim/non-white women and “non-white” women is used to reiterate the unnamed/unmarked dominance of whiteness in society and its impact on “Others” (Bannerji, 2000).
(Statistics Canada, 2017). As Punjabi can be both a geographical and linguistic marker of identity, the Canadian census reveals that the Punjabi community is easily largest sub-group under the umbrella grouping.

The arrival of Punjabi migrants in Canada dates back to the historic incident of the Komagata Maru in 1914, which marks a pivotal moment for this community (Nayar, 2012; Bhatti, 2007; Judge, 1993). The Komagata Maru was a steamship that carried men from British India to the Western coasts of Canada’s Vancouver Island. The ship sailed to Canada expecting a warm arrival as Canada was also a British colony. However, the ship was denied entry into Canada (Nayar, 2012; Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995; Judge, 1993). Sanctions carried out by the Canadian government narrowed the admittance of immigrants to Canada and in the case of the Komagata Maru, the men were denied entry as they “had not come by a direct route” (Judge, 1993, p. 2). It is important to recognize that a direct route from India to Canada was near impossible given the distance and technology available at the time thus signalling the unjust caveats in existing immigration law. As a result, 376 men were forced to go back to British India without food, security and medical support and many lost their lives on the long journey home (Bhatti, 2007). This event signalled the inability and unwillingness of Canadian society, law and culture to make space for non-white immigrants.

More recently, the 1960s and 1970s saw an influx of Punjabi families, including women, immigrating to British Columbia to work in industry and businesses in Canada. Women arrived through family reunification plans or as independents or refugees (Nayar, 2012, p. 87). Men had been sent by their families earlier, and they often worked to save enough money to eventually sponsor their wives/partners. When Punjabi women moved to Canada, like many other immigrant non-white women, their need for economic survival forced them into the workforce in
sectors they were often unfamiliar with, such as the fisheries in Vancouver (Nayar, 2012). As secondary breadwinners for their families, women also held the responsibility of tending to domestic and childcare needs. As a result, in Canada the “female children of Punjabi immigrants most frequently experienced double standards in relation to their social life” (Nayar, 2012, p. 203-4). This meant that in Punjabi-Canadian families, “girls were more restricted than boys… (a Punjabi girls) social life was mostly with family and family friends” (p. 203). This tension between Punjabi-Canadian women’s prescribed roles inside the home, in dialogue with her expectations outside the home, is a theme explored in this thesis.

As the forestry and fishery industries declined in the 1990s, particularly in the Skeena region in British Columbia, Punjabi families moved to larger Canadian cities (Nayar, 2012). Years of working provided upward social mobility to some families and they bought their own mills or started their own small businesses, while newer immigrant families struggled to find other sources of income with the decline of these industries. Children were born, raised and educated in Canadian schools while Punjabi became the most commonly spoken immigrant language in major Canadian cities (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Based on the diversity and presence of South Asians in Canada, I decided to focus on one sub-group under the South Asian umbrella- the Punjabi community. In line with this, I argue that South Asians are not a homogenous entity. The homogenization of South Asians as a uniform group is problematic as it blurs the rich cultural, linguistic, religious and/or regional differences that exist within this population. For instance, in a recently published literature review analyzing lifestyle and behaviour influencers of exercise, authors continually refer to “South Asians,” and “South Asian culture” (Patel et al., 2012). Statements such as: “South Asians have not been brought up to exercise or participate in organized sports” (p. 780) are made. These are highly
problematic as they generalize and make assumptions about people and populations that have dynamic histories impacted by many social factors. Furthermore, these ambiguous claims lend themselves to one-size-fits all interventions, or policies without scrutiny or critique.

The Punjabi community is easily the largest sub-group under the South Asian umbrella because of its multidimensional origins. A community member may speak one of the six dialects of “Punjabi” (Nayar, 2012) and/or have ancestral/familial connections with the province of Punjab in Pakistan and/or India. Furthermore, major religious affiliations include Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. By focusing on the Punjabi-Canadian community for this study I aim to contribute to the literature by adding depth to our understanding of experiences lived by members of the South Asian community and by complicating how these experiences are often homogenized.

In addition, narrowing the research focus to that of Punjabi-Canadian women was just as important. I chose to centre the voices of Punjabi women in my study because too often WOC are excluded or marginalized in society (Bannerji, 2000). My lived experience alone has pushed me to question existing structures and hierarchies, to find my voice and to understand the structural, social and political factors that lead to (ongoing) exclusion, isolation and societal inequity. As mentioned previously, South Asian women consistently reported the lowest levels of PA and research reveals that cultural, structural and psychological factors are the most pressing factors for their participation (Jepson et al., 2012; Ramanathan, 2012; Ramanathan and Crocker, 2009). Based on this, I aimed to understand how social dynamics, including both intra-community and inter-community, impacted the women’s experiences of, and with, PA. Therefore, the research questions that framed the study were:
• **What are the PA experiences of second generation Punjabi women in the GTA? Why do they participate, or not?**

• **How are these PA experiences influenced by intra-community dynamics (e.g., support, or lack thereof, from family members, relatives, peers etc.)?**

• **How are these experiences influenced by social and/or inter-community dynamics and relations of power and dominance (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability)? How are barriers and/or opportunities for engaging in PA affected by such social structures?**

Structuring the study this way allowed the women in the study to take up aspects of the questions that impacted them the most and share their thoughts. In the next section, I outline influential literature that guided the study, as well as the theoretical and methodological frameworks used in this study.
3.0 Previous Literature, Theory and Methods

This chapter discusses and summarizes the literature that directly informed my research, the theoretical frameworks that guided the data collection and analysis, and the methodology used as part of the research process. In the first section, I highlight three research studies that informed my theoretical and research direction, then I outline my use of gender, whiteness and CRT, connecting it back to the previous literature. Lastly, I describe the methodology used and how I connected theory and methods to inform my research findings.

3.1 Previous literature

There are three fields or pieces of literature that were particularly influential in informing my thesis. These are, an analysis of women’s bodies and culture by Carla Rice (2002), the study of South Asian American masculinities conducted by Stanley Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010), and the exploration of PA experiences of middle-class Hindu Indian women living in Canada (Kumar, 2004). I highlight these studies because they capture the importance of understanding the multidimensional ways people of colour make sense of their experiences, particularly in regards to gender, race, nation and class, and given these conditions how they make choices about PA.

I start with the research conducted by Rice (2002) that highlights the connection between women’s bodies and culture. In her work titled “Between body and culture: beauty, ability, and growing up female,” Rice investigated the relationship between women and their bodies by doing interviews with a diverse group of women from different social classes between the ages
of 18 and 45. She concluded that women came to understand the value of their bodies based on what others said about their bodies as well as the value their bodies held generally in society. For example, Rice describes how young men and women often made “evaluative comments” (p. 152) about her participants’ weight, body size, physical appearances and actions. The effect of these comments was the cultural normalization of how young women “should” practice normative femininity. Furthermore, WOC in her study emphasized that their skin colour and cultural backgrounds made them targets for violence which included bullying (p. 153) and harassment (p. 158). Here Rice draws attention to how Western/white norms of the body advantage some over others; WOC feel pressure to conform their appearances in order to fit in as a result of “racial discrimination, racial harassment, and economic marginalization” (p. 170-171). She concludes by highlighting the ways women resisted these unrealistic expectations, including finding support networks (p.177) and speaking against this form of marginalization (p. 178).

Even though Rice (2002) does not talk about PA per say, her analysis is important to this study for several reasons. Rice confirms the role that others (particularly other women and young men) play in defining the boundaries of acceptable (hetero) femininity for women (e.g. external pressures to manage weight, remove excess body hair, control sexuality and present oneself as visually appealing for the male gaze). She also captures the tension between “Western” norms and the reality of experiences for WOC. This is summarized as the dominance of whiteness in Canada that teaches WOC how they need to assimilate into white standards of beauty (i.e. fair skin, blue eyes, long hair etc.) in order to fit in (p. 170). Lastly, she shows that WOC resist limitations placed on them and their bodies and in a subsequent text (Rice, 2016), writes about a “body-becoming” perspective that (p. 420) reimagines fat bodies in society to capture narratives
of cultural pressures imposed on fat women. Overall, embedded in this analysis is a multidimensional understanding of the ways non-white women understand their bodies in relation to Western/white standards of beauty. Rice (2002) locates dominant cultures of Western beauty and how they impact non-white women but leaves room to explore specific intra-community factors that impact standards of beauty imposed on women adding to the pressures they face about their bodies.

Moving forward, Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010) studied South Asian American masculinity, PA and identity. In his research, Thangaraj describes how South Asian American heterosexual masculinity is constructed in relation to women and queer identities where exclusion of both, women and queer men, reconfirms South Asian American masculinity. For example, Thangaraj (2015) documents how “young men and community elders maintain the morality and purity of South Asian American women… (While) they (young men) contradictorily partake in sexual escapades…to accentuate normative masculinity” (p. 157). Here Thangaraj highlights how young men actively police young women to emphasize their own aggressive, dominating and sexually pervasive “normative masculinity.” Furthermore, Thangaraj describes how women are categorized by men as passive subjects located on the sidelines off the basketball court (Thangaraj, 2010, p.385), in the shadows of the Indo-Pak basketball tournament (p. Thangaraj, 2015, p. 199) and/or for the sexual consumption of men (Thangaraj, 2015, p. 150). This reveals how sport becomes masculinized for the occupation and participation of men only.

Thangaraj’s work is important because a discussion of South Asian (American) masculinity opened the door for an analysis of the experiences of women within the hetero-

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6 For the purpose of this thesis I centralize the findings by Rice in her (2002) study because she locates racialized women’s bodies in relation to dominant racial and cultural norms in Canada, whereas in her subsequent work (2016), she focuses primarily on the construction of the fat body in relation to bodily norms for all women.
gendered social/cultural spaces that informed the masculinities of South Asian American men. Thangaraj shows how women are informative in this identity construction and provides a critical link between South Asian identities and their interactions with PA/sport. That is, he shows how sport events like the Indo-Pak tournament are key sites of racial and gender identity formation/conformation. He frames this within the larger context of North American society that makes racialized minorities feel included or excluded based on racial, classed and cultural markers. Building on Thangaraj’s work, I focused on how intra-and inter-community factors were influential in shaping the ways Punjabi-Canadian women came to understand themselves as women in and through PA.

As Rice (2002) focused on the social factors that shape how women view their bodies in Canada and Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010) broadly talked about South Asian male sporting experiences in the United States, I used the work of Kumar (2004) to make further connections between South Asian sport participation, expectations/pressures placed on women’s bodies and feelings of inclusion/exclusion within larger society. In her work, Kumar (2004) documents the experiences of eight Hindu-Indian middle-class adolescent women living in Canada. Through semi-structured interview conversations, Kumar describes how “fitting in” became a central theme for the women. The trend towards “fitting in” is described as straddling between Indian and Western cultures (p. 13) and coming to terms with increasing pressures placed on them as young Hindu-Indian girls. The result of which was increased body dissatisfaction during adolescence and associated decisions around PA participation. The theme of “fitting in” is important because its reveals the tension between intra-and-inter community dynamics and the associated pressures towards conformity that women face and need to negotiate.
Kumar documented how the pressure towards “fitting in” increased during puberty, was enforced by family members and peers, and impacted women’s participation in sport. Consistent with Thangaraj (2015) and Rice (2002), young men and elderly female family members often defined and policed the normative femininity ascribed on the young women’s bodies after puberty. Puberty was marked as the point where the adolescent girls became women (p. 149). For example, Kumar (2004) described how elderly women often controlled behavioural expectations in the home which included demonstrating “obedience” (p.136) to their parents and their parents’ wishes (i.e. achieving academic excellence and being “good Indian girls”). This was paralleled by young men and school peers, who placed restraints on the young women’s bodies and access to sport. For instance, judgement about their physical body size, shape and the visibility of body hair were all policed/monitored. Likewise, young women were described as often playing down their physical capabilities or not playing at all (p. 164) to accentuate their femininity in order fit in (p. 167) amongst peers. In turn, the inability to fit in resulted in bullying and social exclusion.

Kumar’s (2004) research was influential in shaping this thesis for two major reasons. The first was that it hinted at the intensification of scrutiny placed on young women’s bodies during puberty. This provided a basis from which to conceptualize the scrutiny placed on women’s bodies at a young age and how this changes as women get older. Second, it encouraged further interrogation of the notion of “fitting in.” Specifically, it encouraged an exploration of how the pressures to behave at home are connected to family immigration history and social class. Furthermore, I explored how the tension of “fit(ting) into the dominant culture” (p. 125) reflects the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of the dominant culture, particularly within the history
of Canada and its treatment of immigrants. To conceptualize some of these questions, I used three connected theoretical frameworks discussed next.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This section outlines the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study: women’s bodies as sites of social-cultural patriarchal (re)production, whiteness as the dominant culture in Canadian society, and Hylton’s tenets of CRT in sport. These frameworks were used in order to locate the dynamic ways that power informed the experiences of Punjabi women, inside the home and/or community as well as within Canadian society. All three theoretical frameworks inform each other because they describe intra-and-inter community dynamics that placed pressure on Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies and the impact of such pressures in negotiating circumstances to make decisions surrounding PA participation.

3.2.1 Gender, body and patriarchy

In order to describe the dynamic ways that gender is considered in this thesis, I use the work of King (2004) and Yuval-Davis (1997, 1996, 1993). Gender is understood here as a social construction influenced by social, cultural and political factors. When considering these three factors, the dominant portrayals of gender expressed by the research participants were heteronormative and based in a binary. This means men and women were viewed as the dominant (and only) genders, portrayed in oppositional ways, with men as the dominant ones in the relationship (King, 2004). This is described by King (2004) as: “Man is (viewed as)… rational, unified, thinking subject; (whereas) woman is … irrational, emotional and driven by

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7 Gender is contextualized this way to reflect the dominant portrayal of gender as expressed by the participants. It was also done this way to capture the pressures, limitations and tensions expressed by the women who faced consequences as a result of a belief in the gender binary.
instinct and physical need” (p. 31). Here King explains the relationship between men and women in this binary. Men are viewed as rational, decision-making subjects who are able to overcome any “illogical” tendencies, whereas women are viewed as passive subjects driven by emotional needs. When gender is viewed as an oppositional binary between man and woman, the relationship is often therefore patriarchal because men become the dominant, decision making subjects who need to “protect” women from their “inherent” inability to make rational decisions (King, 2004). The effect of this is that the agency of women to make decisions is often compromised and/or ignored (King, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1996, 1993).

Given this dualistic construction, material expressions of gender are closely regulated. Physically, women’s bodies are subjected to scrutiny for their body shape, size, texture and/or aesthetic appeal (King, 2004; Kumar, 2004; Rice, 2002). For example, King (2004, p. 34-35) highlights the extensive beauty regimens (i.e. face creams, make up, hair removal products) that women are socialized to undergo to sustain and reinforce their beauty. Likewise, behaviours and/or actions are often similarly scrutinized to produce a femininity that is passive, submissive and obedient. As mentioned previously, Rice (2002) and Kumar (2004) documented the comments and judgements passed by peers, parents, boys/men that reinforced these acceptable behaviours and actions for women and WOC in particular. The dualistic construction of gender puts constraints on the complexity that actually exists within the experiences of women.

Beyond material expressions of gender, women’s bodies also become central to ideological struggles surrounding communities and nation. Yuval-Davis (1997, 1996, 1993) argues that in order to understand the experiences of women, we must be able to contextualize their experiences in the ways they interact with their familial, cultural, and/or religious communities as well as their interactions with larger societal/national communities. In the
dynamic ways that these intersect with each other, women/women’s bodies often become sites of securing cultural identity and kinship throughout generations. This is secured, for example, through the defining of cultural boundaries and terms surrounding marriage. Yuval-Davis (1993) says:

Women often come to symbolize national collectivity... and collective ‘honor’... (they) are often the ones who are given the social role of intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine...

A central link between the place of women as national producers and women’s subjection can be found in the different regulations...that determine the family units within the boundaries of the collectivity, and the ways they come into existence (marriage)...(p.627-628)

Here Yuval-Davis highlights how honour, culture and generational lineage are deeply connected to women’s bodies and their roles in their communities. Women are also allotted the “social role” of securing such traditions such as passing on such knowledge to future generations. These roles are important because they shape the ways women are treated and viewed in communities (as social/cultural reproducers) and the ways women interact with other women under such circumstance (i.e. elder women’s relationship with younger women in the community).

The issue of marriage as a site of regulation is also critical to the discussion. To expand on this, in a subsequent text Yuval-Davis (1996) argues that controlling the physical reproduction of women is closely related to securing and reinforcing ideas about communities and nations. She writes:
Despite the fact that usually, if not always, in the sex/gender systems in their societies men are dominant, women are not just passive victims, or even objects, of the ideologies and policies aimed at controlling their reproduction. On the contrary, very often it is women, especially, older women, who are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of the nation and are empowered to exert control over other women who may be constructed as “deviants.” As very often this is the main source of social power allowed to women… (p. 22-23)

This passage links the relationship between men’s and elderly women’s roles in controlling social reproduction of young women under patriarchal circumstances. That is, due to the construction of gender as a binary sustained in oppositional ways, men are exempt from extensive scrutiny of social reproduction (for community and nation) that is imposed on women. In turn, the only power that is allotted to women is in the disciplining of other women. In this case, “older women” exercise control over younger women who are seen as potential “deviants.” Of course, not all women recreate such power dynamics; however these power dynamics are important for understanding the complexities surrounding decision making of practices like PA. Furthermore, in light of inter-community pressures (i.e. assimilation into the dominant culture of whiteness in Canada) Yuval-Davis’s theoretical underpinnings highlight how, in the face of such demands, women’s bodies are central in social and cultural intra-community reproduction. That is, how “Punjabiness” and other ethno/national/religious values manifest in pressures placed on women’s bodies (via marriage and reproduction) in light of external pressures of assimilation into whiteness. Hence, these pressures (for control) manifest as tensions lived by and through women/ women’s bodies.
To further contextualize the dominant landscape of community and nation in which these experiences are played out, the next two sections locate whiteness as the dominant culture in Canada and discuss CRT as a way to interrogate the material reality of racial divisions.

3.2.2 Whiteness

When looking at racial inequity in Canada, there are two frameworks that are commonly used. The first is multiculturalism and the second is whiteness/critical race studies (Joseph et al., 2012). For this study, I choose to centralize the “whiteness” framework. Before contextualizing how I use whiteness as a framework to describe the dominant culture in Canadian society, I briefly articulate the limits of using multiculturalism as a framework given Canada’s roots as a settler state with a history of colonialism (Baker, Rollo, and Lowman, 2017; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). For the rest of the section, I explain how whiteness was used in the thesis and the importance of this.

Canada can be considered a settler state because of its history with colonialism (Baker, Rollo, and Lowman, 2017; Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995) and its strategic organization of immigrants under a national ideology (Baker, Rollo, and Lowman, 2017; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). The history of Canada saw the advancement of British and French colonialism in the early 20th century resulting in the occupation of land and genocide of Indigenous communities to create what we now know as Canada today (Baker, Rollo, and Lowman, 2017; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). With the forceful removal of Native peoples from the land, colonizers or settlers strategically orchestrated social and political processes to legitimize the newly created nation.\(^8\) Central to this was the implementation of multiculturalism policies in the early 1970s by the

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\(^8\) Hockey played (and continues to be) a central social, cultural and political aspect in the legitimation of the Canadian nation (Krebs, 2012; Valentine, 2012).
Trudeau government that helped to organize the influx of immigrants needed to work on the land and in industry (Baker, Rollo, and Lowman, 2017; Nayar, 2012; Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995). For example, the influx of the Punjabi community in the 1960s and 1970s played an instrumental role in the forestry and fish industries in British Columbia (Nayar, 2012).

Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995, p. 5-7) explain how the strategic organization of immigrants is a common practice used between settler states such as Australia, the United States and Canada. In the case of Canada, multiculturalism serves the purpose of maintaining unity amongst immigrants but under the dominant settler vision of a nation (i.e. a unified nation or “Canada”) and conceals the ways privilege and inequities are carried out. For example, structural inequities are carried out through unfair access to employment, an emphasis on Canadian experiences/education, and restrictive immigration policies (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995, p. 12-15). These structural inequities are needed because they race and class internal populations therein by, socially and materially privileging white and affluent bodies. Multiculturalism as a framework for settler states is needed as it conceals internal stratifications under a façade of “inclusion and diversity” (Bannerji, 2000).

For this reason, and in response to the critical limits of multiculturalism, I situate my findings in a theoretical framework of whiteness. I argue that in order to understand the inter-community experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women, their narratives must be understood in relation the dominant culture of whiteness in Canada. That is, to understand the cultural landscape on which non-white bodies exist and the associated impact and effects of this. By doing so, I believe we can capture the tension that exists and informs intra-and-inter community dynamics to understand how these tensions play out for/on Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies and their decisions surrounding PA. To contextualize this, the dominance of whiteness can be
understood as rooted in colonial histories where social and political processes privileged white bodies over others in society (Frankenberg, 1993). This privileging resulted, in part, from the ways in which white bodies viewed themselves in comparison to others (Frankenberg, 1993; Stasiulis and Jhappan, 1995). For example, differences marking the “Other” from whiteness were targeted through language, culture, religion and skin colour (Sherene Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007; Bannerji, 2000; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). In naming those they viewed as “different” to them, such as Native populations and non-white groups, settlers centralized and secured their dominance in society (Frankenberg, 1993). For example, the incident of the Komagata Maru and the denial of Punjabi men into Canada articulates the unspoken dominance of whiteness, the ways whiteness views and dominates non-white bodies and how it silently establishes its control by the inclusion/exclusion of non-white Others. Therefore “Naming “whiteness” displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed, status that is itself the effect of its dominance... To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6). It is precisely the “unmarked” and “unnamed” nature of its dominance that allows whiteness to penetrate all aspects of society. In doing so, it forces others to assimilate to its values. Pressures to assimilate include learning its dominant language(s), participating in its dominant cultures and celebrating its history (Sherene Razack, 2008; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993).

Furthermore, as indicated in the quotation above, Frankenberg’s (1993) aim is to locate everyone’s role in addressing issues of racism and inequality. This is similar to the ways Yuval-Davis (1993) narrates women’s bodies as social and cultural reproduces of community. The key takeaway I draw on and highlight from Frankenberg is the limitation of a gender-only analysis. In her text, Frankenberg emphasizes a gender and race analysis to locate the privilege white
women have over non-white women because of their race. The conclusions drawn in context of her thesis are the limitations of a gender-only analysis that fails to capture the multi-dimensional ways that patriarchy, gender, race, class, immigration and whiteness all impact the lives of WOC. Therefore, to conceptualize the impacts of race relations further, I use CRT.

Before connecting whiteness to CRT, in the sporting context, Joseph et al. (2012) add that whiteness can generally be understood as “the myriad of social and political processes by which hierarchies and privileges are codified and normalized along lines of race” (p. 7). In their text, they write about the ways that sport and PA cultures and spaces become central in reproducing and reinforcing dominant racial/gendered/classed narratives. For example, organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) attempted to “Canadianize immigrants” (p.34) via recreation/leisure assimilationist practices, (Field, 2012), ethno-specific tournaments such as the North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament (NACIVT) were created in responses to racist exclusions faced by Asian communities in accessing sport (Nakamura, 2012) and games like capoeira became sites to challenge the homogenization of black masculinities in Canada (Joseph, 2012). These examples highlight the role of sport in actively (re)creating dominant narratives/cultures of inclusion/exclusion in society. In the ways that Yuval-Davis (1993) narrates the roles of women’s bodies in the reproduction of nation, sport reproduces dominant cultures of whiteness in Canada wherein, white male bodies dominate such spaces and access is stratified along racial and classed hierarchies (Joseph et al., 2012).

3.2.3 Critical race theory

In line with the multidimensional ways women’s lives are experienced, CRT is the third theory that guided my interpretation of the women’s experiences. Critical race theory and subsequently anti-racist theory, are used in the thesis to contextualize the ways race becomes the
dominant marker and constructs the Other. To contextualize this, I outline Hylton’s (2009) tenets of CRT, connect this to racial markers of the “model minority” and then use the notion of the “imperilled Muslim woman” (Sherene Razack, 2008, p. 5) to explain how CRT, whiteness and gender theory inform each other. This provides the entry point into my understanding of anti-racist theory and how it informed my methods.

To organize race, racism and racialization into a theoretical lens, Hylton (2009) outlines five key tenets of CRT. I have chosen to highlight these tenets as they offer a foundation of anti-racist theory, and are rooted in social justice. The tenets of CRT are: centralizing race and its connection to other forms of oppression, challenging dominant ideologies, maintaining a commitment to social justice, centralizing the marginalized voice and approaching CRT from a trans-disciplinary perspective (p. 30-34). Here I define each tenet and relate it to my research.

The first tenet is centralizing race (Hylton, 2009, p. 30). To centralize race is to understand how race, racism and racialization inform the experiences of particular groups, like Punjabi women in the GTA. The history of the Punjabi community (and Asian immigrants at large) in Canada and the United States is marked by racist exclusion and current-day racialization manifested through notions like the “model minority” (Nakamura, 2012; Thangaraj, 2012; James, 2005). As mentioned above, in his study of North American Indo-Pak basketball leagues, Thangaraj (2012) explored and complicated South Asian American masculinity. He stated:

[Racializing] discourses produce South Asian Americans as all ‘brain’ while African Americans are all ‘brawn’; concurrently a white normative masculinity contains a balance of brain and brawn. (p.376)
This means that South Asian American men are often and regularly racially marked as “model minorities” (p. 375) who are viewed as un-athletic and only concerned with academic pursuits (i.e. all ‘brain’). Black men in contrast are often constructed as naturally athletic and strong (i.e. all ‘brawn’) and white masculinity emerges as a combination of both brain and brawn. Racializing discourses of black males’ superior athleticism and white multifaceted masculinity are consistently acknowledged in other studies as well (Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009; James, 2005). Centralizing race in these instances are important because they contextualize how racial markers operate beyond dominant understandings of race as black and white only (Thangaraj, 2015).

The second tenet of CRT aims to challenge dominant ideologies. A relevant example here is the ideology that sport is a fair, meritocratic and colour-blind playing field (Hylton, 2009, p. 31). For example, in “Race and play: Understanding the socio-cultural worlds of student athletes,” (2005) James examines the athletic experiences of young racialized people in Toronto’s education system. He is critical of Canada’s dominant discourse of multiculturalism because “individuals are identified by ethnicity and race, and this in part determines their opportunities, as well as their educational and occupational outcomes” (p. 9). Here he is referring to the funneling of students/student athletes, based on race, into academic or sport streams irrespective of their interests or desires.

The three final tenets of CRT are committing to a social justice lens, centralizing the voice of the participants, and approaching the research from an inter-disciplinary perspective. These tenets are all interrelated and have persuaded me the most to use CRT/anti-racist theory in my research. Hylton (2010) says, “CRT is a flexible framework that embraces pragmatic trans-disciplinary tenets whose point of departure is not the question ‘do we live in a racist society,’
but rather the realization that ‘we do live in a racist society’” (p. 349). Starting from this perspective provides an acknowledgment and commitment towards a praxis of addressing societal inequities.

Based on this, CRT adds another theoretical dimension to frame my research questions. It provides the vocabulary to communicate how inter-community race/race-relations operate in society and confronts race/racial privilege and inequity head on. Complimentary to whiteness in many ways, CRT locates and names markers of exclusion ascribed to non-white bodies (i.e. model minority). Likewise, it stems from a commitment to social justice that, as Hylton (2010) suggests, starts from the position of “we do live in a racist society” (p. 349) and aims to documents the ways privilege is hierarchically organized. Social, cultural and material implications of race relations impact intra-community spaces and vice-versa. That is, issues of race are closely linked to issues of class (via immigration), which in turn inform responses to such circumstances given the conditions especially as they relate to access, opportunity and narratives about PA.

Before summarizing how these frameworks impact and inform each other, I briefly outline the role of Muslim women within such discourses. Sherene Razack (2008) has written extensively about the racialization of Muslim women in Western society. Post 9/11 saw an intensification of policing against Muslim bodies and Razack outlines how racial violence against Muslim bodies can be viewed as a “transcendence” of race beyond bodies towards racist assumptions about people based on their culture and religion. She explains this in relation to the racial marker termed “the imperilled Muslim woman” (p. 5). This is a racist marker for several reasons. First, it relates to racist ideas about a religion. These include the idea that Islam is incompatible with modernity, where modernity is associated with the West. Second, it constructs
racist and patriarchal ideas about Muslim women where all brown men are considered terrorists and therefore their women must be saved (Sherene Razack, 2008). Saving Muslim women in many cases manifests in racist fantasies about targeting, removing and banning the hijab as it is a visible symbol of the religion on women (Sherene Razack, 2008).

Furthermore, in conversation with Yuval-Davis’s (1993) understanding of women’s bodies as central to community and nation building, the obsession in the West with the veil/hijab reveals the dominating ways whiteness operates. For example, this is articulated in relation to sport when Rayane Benatti, a young Muslim girl in Quebec, was banned from playing soccer because of her hijab (Nine-year old girl, 2012). Her hijab was wrongly conflated to a “piece of equipment” and she was told to remove it in order to play. The racist obsession to “unveil” Muslim women (or “Muslim looking” women) exposes racialized acts of violence that attempt to assimilate the Other into whiteness. The physical and verbal acts of violence carried out against Muslim women expose how whiteness and white supremacy\(^9\) attempt to mark their dominance and how sport is part of this reproduction.

In summary, the theoretical frameworks described above frame my research questions which can be summed as: what are the intra-and-inter community factors that inform Punjabi-Canadian women’s experiences of PA. Yuval-Davis (1997, 1996, 1993) provides a framework to understand the centrality of women’s bodies in both intra-and- inter community spaces. That is, how women are allocated power by disciplining other women under patriarchal circumstances and how women’s bodies are central in social and cultural reproduction of community and nation. A framework of whiteness helps to locate and conceptualize non-white women’s experiences in Canada. As the inter-community space is dominated by the culture of whiteness,

\(^9\) White supremacy is used here to refer to targeted acts of racial violence carried out against the Other.
framing the experiences based on this premise helps to elaborate on the tensions described between intra-and-inter community dynamics and how these tensions inform each other in the decisions made by the women. Complimentary to this, CRT helps contextualize the role of sport and the particular ways race and race relations mark non-white women’s bodies as Other. That is, CRT provides concrete markers for naming the ways whiteness sustains its dominance through social, cultural and material means. Furthermore, in articulating the theoretical frameworks described above, we can also articulate broader tensions surrounding gender, nation, multiculturalism and race and how these tensions are lived and experienced through and by the women who made active choices as a result. Notwithstanding, the importance in all of this is the centrality of Punjabi-Canadian women and their experiences. Given this, I used anti-racist theory to apply my understanding of how all these frameworks inform each other in a practical setting.

3.3 Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used in this study. It discusses the methodology of focus groups, the benefits and limitations of this method and contextualizes the use of “chai and chat” style focus groups. Then it delves into the particulars of this study. It outlines how participants were recruited to the study, the structure and content of the focus groups, provides an overview of the participants and then highlights how data was analysed to find the dominant themes of this research.

3.3.1 Focus groups

In this section, I outline what focus groups are, why they were beneficial for my research and also how they limited some aspects of investigation. Then I outline the use of “chai and
chat” focus groups and connect this to anti-racist theory through a discussion on theory and methods in praxis.

Focus groups were used as the primary method for this study because of the underlying goal of collective group discussion around a central theme. Generally, focus groups are described as a methodological tool that bring people together to discuss a singular issue or topic (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007). The purpose of having several participants in a collective discussion limits individual influence and promotes group consensus on the central theme. They are facilitated by a group moderator whose responsibility is to manage group dynamics (i.e. prevent one person from overpowering the discussion etc.) and promote discussion based on a series of predetermined guiding questions for the group. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) summarize the success of focus groups to be their ability to promote simulating discussions in line with the research purpose and goals.

Focus groups were beneficial for this research for several reasons. In line with antiracism, which is the underlying praxis of CRT (Hylton, 2010, p. 336), focus groups helped to: mitigate my influence as a researcher in the discussions, promote group discussion on the central topic and bring forth some of the dominant themes that emerged from discussion. The structure of my focus groups as “chai and chats,” which I will explain shortly, also helped me locate myself as a researcher by allowing participants to ask me questions about my interest in the research topic and my own experience as a Pakistani-Canadian Punjabi Muslim woman. Secondly, as Punjabi was/is a broad marker for identity, the focus grouped allowed for a discussion on the dynamic ways women identified/or did not identify as Punjabi. This was particularly useful in understanding the spectrum on which the women related to their Punjabiness. For example, Punjabiness was a more centralized identity for Sikh Indian women in
comparison to Pakistani Muslim women. Lastly, the focus groups discussions helped to develop consensus around the dominant themes that impacted the women. This was particularly relevant in drawing out the experiences of the Body Triad and racism in Canadian society.

Paired with the success of the focus groups, there were some limitations to the method as well. This was most evident in the limited ability to go deeper into some of the discussions that emerged. For example, the broad marker of Punjabianness was able to bring together a dynamic group of women who self-identified as Punjabi. However, it limited my capacity to dig deeper into some of the similarities, differences, markers of identification and particular experiences of subgroups under this umbrella. This can be due to the fact that individual anonymity in a focus group setting is lost as individual answers become accountable to others. In this sense, focus group methodology created some group identity which mitigated individual expression however, it may also have limited further elaboration on particular issues. Discussions of diversity could have helped to better understand the extent to which Punjabianness was a central identity for some women over others. Therefore, complementing the focus groups with one-on-one interviews could also have helped to account for this limitation, suggesting a stepping stone for future research.

3.3.1.1 Focus groups: Chai and chats

Before delving into the details of the study and its participants, I briefly outline the culturally specific method of focus groups I used, which I call “chai and chats,” and connect them to Hylton’s (2010) practice of anti-racism. “Chai and chats” are culturally specific focus groups that I adopted for the research based on my own experiences as a member of the
The term “chai” is the word for “tea” in several South Asian languages including Punjabi. Traditionally, in many South Asian countries/communities, discussions are had over a cup of tea as serving chai is a symbolic gesture of hospitality. I adopted this style of focus group for the research to replicate the hospitality this symbolizes. Growing up, my parents always offered chai to their guests as they would sit and engage in discussion for hours and therefore I offered chai as a gesture of kindness to my participants for their willingness to share their experiences with each other and myself.

Paired with this hospitality, the guiding principles I adopted for the chai and chat style focus group were closely connected to the practice of anti-racism as described by Hylton (2010). As Hylton (2010, p. 336) says, “a CRT framework presents a vocabulary and narrative that facilitates a critical approach to anti-racism… it is intrigued but suspicious of parts of any society that claim to be accessible and fair across racial and ethnic divides.” I adopted this method in three ways. First, I acknowledged my own institutional privilege as a researcher, second, I made clear the aims of the research, and third I asked the women to explain their experiences in their own words and askedprompting questions where I could.

At the beginning of each focus group I went over the consent forms and provided an overview of the research which included my own interests in the topic. I also, very briefly, provided an overview of what existed on South Asian women’s (lack of) participation in PA. In line with this, I stated very clearly in the beginning or during the discussions that I was not suggesting that participation in PA was a good or bad thing, but rather seeking to understand what other Punjabi women thought about the topic based on their own lived experiences, understandings, and history. Closer to the end of my data collection, I realized how important

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10 “Chai and chats” or discussions over a cup of tea are common traditional practice for several South Asian and non-South Asian communities.
this was for the discussions, because many of the women had stopped or did not participate in PA anymore and had never really been asked why this was. It was through our discussion that many of the participants started to piece together the dimensions involved in these decisions.

As the moderator, I facilitated the discussion with the tenets of CRT/anti-racism in mind. In practice this meant asking questions (instead of assuming) and where I could, being critical about experiences some of the women shared. Where necessary, I would ask the women to explain in their own words what they meant by some of the experiences they shared. This was often tricky (and possibly a limitation) because they often assumed I would understand their experiences as someone who was familiar with general intra-community dynamics. Sometimes, they would also laugh at me for doing this. Furthermore, I would ask critical questions when I felt significant group cohesion (i.e. mutual trust and respect) was built amongst everyone in the room, including myself (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007). For example, I pushed some of the women to think through and/or explain why they were not interested in participating in sport at a young age. By doing so, we were able to collectively identify how choosing not to participate was deeply connected to their experiences as racialized, ethnic, religious, immigrant and/or working-class women. These mechanisms of facilitation and practice relate to Hylton’s (2010, p. 343) understanding of CRT because they push past “common sense” understandings that reinforce racist ideas about Asian bodies and their lack of participation in sport.

Overall, I found this method of “chai and chat” style focus groups worked extremely well for this group of participants. However, I recognize some limitations as well. First, not all members of the Punjabi community necessarily relate to this cultural specificity of discussion over chai. In fact, some might have decided not to participate because of this method of focus group. Secondly, these focus groups had a maximum of six participants (including myself) in the
room. For some participants, sharing individual experiences in a group setting might have been overwhelming. Furthermore, I recognize that the focus groups were not representative samples of all ways Punjabiness can be expressed. The next section will contextualize the particulars of the actual study.

3.3.2 This study

In this section I describe the research process in detail. I will briefly outline how participants were recruited to the study, outline the structure and content of the focus groups, detail the people who participated in the study and then highlight how data was analysed to find emerging themes for the research.

This study was carried out, under the guidance of Dr. Simon Darnell, as part of my Master’s thesis in the Department of Exercise Sciences at the University of Toronto. Research ethics was successfully obtained by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board from March 2016 (Appendix A) to March 2017, and active data collection occurred in April, May and June 2016. A research poster (Appendix B) was created for participant recruitment for this study. It was put up at local community centres in Toronto and circulated on-line via email and social media for further outreach. Most of the participants recruited for the study came as a result of word of mouth or social media outreach.

As part of the data collection, there were a total of five focus groups and two one on one interviews conducted between April to June 2016. There were three to five participants in each focus group in addition to myself. Four focus groups were conducted in a community space that was located and rented out in the Junction Triangle neighbourhood in Toronto and one focus group was conducted at a participant’s home, upon the participant’s request, where other women
were invited to attend. The focus groups were recorded, with participant consent, and were one hour to two and a half hours in length. All the participants were offered transportation tokens, $10 Tim Hortons gift cards and snacks for their contribution to the study. The one on one interviews were carried out with women who could not attend the focus groups but still wanted to participate in the study. They were conducted at locations convenient to the women and again, upon consent, recorded and lasted one hour to two hours in length.

The first four focus groups were structured in the following way: individual introductions, research overview/questions, collective ground rules, ice breaker activity (“Need for Speed”), followed by semi-structured discussions. After brief individual introductions, I provided an overview of the research (Appendix C) and participant consent forms were signed (Appendix D). Moving forward, collective ground rules were created by everyone in the room. Some of the ground rules included: no interruptions, keeping conversations confidential and respecting each other’s views. Then the activity I call “Need for Speed” was used to facilitate the discussion portion of the focus groups. In Need for Speed, five to six themes were listed on a sheet of paper. These themes were chosen based on their prevalence in the literature and research topic. The themes were: “Punjabi,” “Canada,” “feeling included,” “family” and “physical activity.” Everyone in the focus group was given one theme and approximately a minute to write, draw and/or reflect on the theme in front of them. After approximately a minute, the papers were passed around in a clockwise direction and everyone repeated the process adding to what was written, drawn and/or reflected upon from the previous participant. I also participated in this activity with the participants. After everyone had commented on each theme, at random, a participant in the focus group was asked to share what was written on the theme in front of them. This provided a great springboard to start the discussions.
As the facilitator, I moderated the discussions following the group guidelines allowing for participants to delve into and build on the themes they felt most reflected their experiences. The moments where the conversation tapered off or strayed off topic, provided the opportunity to use my research questions to bring the discussion back to the research purpose and goals. I adapted my research questions [(i) What are the PA experiences of second generation Punjabi women in the GTA?; (ii) How are these PA experiences influenced by intra-community dynamics?, and (iii) How are these experiences influenced by inter-societal dynamics?] into questions to lead the focus groups. The focus group questions were: How often do you/did you engage in PA? What forms of PA do you/have you engaged in? What venues/locations do you go, or prefer to go, to be physically active? How/did sport play a role going up? How/did your family influence your willingness to be physically active? And are there challenges you feel being a Punjabi woman in Canada? One on one interviews followed the same interview protocol. To end each chai and chat, participants were asked (if willing) to share one thing they learned from the discussion. This was done to allow for collective group reflection.

The last chai and chat was conducted with women who were willing and available to come back for a second discussion. It was structured similarly to the initial focus group in terms of introductions, ground rules and the semi-structured nature of the discussion (which I facilitated), however, the activity Need for Speed activity was not used to facilitate the discussion. Instead, the major themes from the previous four chai and chats were constructed as questions and proposed to the women to serve as a springboard for discussion. These emerging themes were: What are some of pressure you feel are placed on your/Punjabi women’s bodies? Why do you think Punjabi girls stop participating in PA at a young age? What are some of the taboo topics in the Punjabi community? Why is there so much emphasis on academic
excellence? Do you think playing hockey makes you a “better” Canadian? What are some moments that make you feel better about yourself/your body? Does the incident of the Komagata Maru impact you today? As each question was proposed, it was written on a piece of paper and taped on the wall behind us, thus allowing the women, and myself, to visualize the discussion as it unfolded (Appendix E). This last chai and chat was very useful in narrowing down the themes of the discussions and coming to a consensus regarding one of the dominant themes from the data collection, namely the pressures placed on Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies (i.e. the Body Triad).

3.3.2.1. Participants and data analysis

Overall, there was a diverse group of participants who took part in the study. In total, 18 self-identified Punjabi-Canadian women took part in the research process (focus groups and interviews). The women were between the ages of 15 to 35 years of age and lived in the GTA (i.e. Toronto, Brampton and Mississauga). For those under the age of 16, parental consent was obtained to participate in the focus groups. In total, 11 women identified as Pakistani, six as Indian and one woman as Kashmiri. Of the 18 women, 12 women identified as being Muslim, four as Hindu and two as Sikh. Their connection to their religion varied as a few shared that they were atheist but still culturally connected to parts of their religious identities. This was less prevalent amongst the Muslim women who more strongly associated with their national/religious identities. Discussions were held primarily in English but Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi were also used. Very few of the women knew how to speak Punjabi fluently but all shared the sentiments of wanting to learn the language.

1 As Punjabi is a multidimensional marker for identity, national and religious indicators were some of the dominant ways the women located the identity.
Two thirds of the women were either born or had spent a majority of their lives in Canada whereas others had either immigrated to Canada, with their husbands/families or alone usually for education purposes. Besides a few of the women who explicitly stated that they grew up poor, the class composition of the women varied between working to middle class. Regardless, all the women spoke about the impact and effects of the immigration process for themselves and/or their parents/families. Less than half the women were married in heterosexual relationships but not all the women identified as heterosexual.

Focus group and interview recordings as well as Need for Speed participant notes and the call-back focus group wall visual were all included as part of the data analysis. Focus group and interview recordings were transcribed and pseudonyms were given to all participants. Major themes were highlighted based on the literature (i.e. role of the family, identity formation, racialization of women, sport participation) in consideration of their emergence in the focus group discussions. The call back focus group was particularly useful because it helped to confirm the significance of the gendered body as a major research theme. By cross checking and categorizing all the discussions on the body over the course of data collection, the Body Triad emerged as a major research finding. In turn, the data that corresponded to the lack of participation based on race and class revealed the dominance of whiteness/Othering to be a second major research finding. The transcriptions showed that the women constantly described how they “felt excluded” based on their race, class, religion and/or gender growing up in Canada. The exact point of exclusion was rarely named (i.e. whiteness) however, almost all the women could name or point to the markers of their exclusion/Othering in society. This forced me to go back to the literature on race and whiteness and investigate further. Further literature analysis led me to conclude that the tension the women constantly referred to was the underlying
dominance of whiteness in Canadian society and the pressure towards assimilation. Their
descriptions of exclusion, Othering and forced assimilation all matched this theoretical
framework and thus, whiteness emerged as the second major research finding. Based on this, the
next two chapters focus on and describe these themes.
Chapter 4
The Regulation of the Body

4.0 Results Chapter 1: The Body Triad and the regulation of the body

In this chapter, I describe the results from the focus groups to demonstrate the ways in which participants’ bodies were regulated, particularly in relation to patriarchy. In doing so, I introduce the idea of the Body Triad, in which participants understood their bodies to be simultaneously too fat, too skinny, and too muscular, all the while being too hairy. The Body Triad summarizes the ways that Punjabi-Canadian women understood and felt their bodies being regulated in order to produce an ideal “good girl” femininity premised on sustaining rigid gendered roles. I discuss the body in primarily cultural terms but at times physically as well. The last section of the chapter summarizes the ways the participants negotiated these expectations placed on their bodies, given the pressures they faced.

4.1 The Fat Body

The Fat Body was the most talked about body segment of the Body Triad. The following section will outline how the Fat Body was produced, disciplining mechanisms used to control it and the disciplining of those defined as “deviants” when marked by their perceived “hyper-sexuality” by elderly women in the community. The ways the Fat Body was controlled revealed cultural markers of an ideal “good girl” femininity.

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12 Historically, the categorisation of the body in public health has manifested in similar ways to the organization of my Body Triad (i.e. fat, skinny and muscular). The most popular of such influences is William Sheldon’s (now refuted) biosocial theory related to body type (endomorph, ectomorph and mesomorph) and associated (deviant) behaviours as well as the widely popular use of the Body Mass Index scale (Ball, 2011; Maddan, Walker and Miller, 2009). By contrast, the organization of the body into the Body Triad in this thesis is twofold. First, it represents how Punjabi-Canadian women felt their bodies were given cultural, social and at times, visceral meaning and secondly, it describes how the women in the study expressed the limits of their bodies in regards to social acceptability.
Growing up, the Fat Body was produced by elderly women. Messages surrounding the Fat Body were inconsistent as weight gain was encouraged prior to puberty but weight loss into adulthood. The participants shared how their mothers, aunts and grandmothers encouraged them to eat as this was associated with well-being and health. One of the participants spoke about how her female relatives encouraged her to eat a lot during childhood because it was seen as a sign of family wealth. That is, well-fed and larger children in the family were related to the outward appearance of a family’s wealth because it represented a family’s ability to feed and take care of one another. Raushan, a Punjabi-Canadian Sikh Indian woman now in her late twenties, spoke about how she felt pressured to eat by her mother growing up. She said:

...(T)here’s always that stereotype that “if you’re healthy and chubby you come from a wealthy family” you know, you know you have food (other women agree). This is how we grew up, we were literally like drinking chubby (sugary juice) every day and every meal you know. And it was cause for my grandfather, he was very from back home kind, and that’s always the perception he wanted to give: if everybody’s big in the family then we have lots of food and we’re rich and we’re wealthy. Which we were but for him it needs to be like physically shown.

Here Raushan referred to the cultural perception that being “chubby” during childhood was associated with the wealth of a family. This was marked as an idea “from back home” because the emphasis to eat came from her grandparents who wanted to portray the family as healthy (i.e. financially and socially secure) to others in the community. Irrespective of gender, both her brother and she were treated similarly during childhood.
This changed during adolescence. As the women grew up, the Fat Body for women became an increasingly unacceptable feminine body and it was regulated through comments from elderly women in the community who encouraged weight loss. Unlike childhood, the participants who had experienced the Fat Body talked about the constant pressure they felt to lose weight. Jeevitha, a 22 year old Punjabi-Canadian Indian Hindu woman, talked at length about her experiences with this growing up and to date. Her mother and female relatives would openly discuss her weight and figure with each other and then to her. They would pass comments about her body being “too fat” and then tell her weight loss strategies to help her lose weight. She said:

...(F)or me it’s like my family and ... I mean yes close family but even like distant relatives like they’ll call me and say “oh this person’s daughter did this, like are you aware of this thing and now she’s really thin and you should do this. This person did yoga and you should do this.” And I’ll be like “yes, I need to lose weight, I know I need to lose weight and I wanna lose weight for myself and I’m gonna do that” but like my mom every time she calls me she’s like “so like have you lost weight?” and I’m like “you called me yesterday” (everyone laughs). I don’t understand, like what are you expecting overnight I drop 3 kilos (everyone laughs)??! And like I feel like that happens lot.

As Jeevitha explained, her Fat Body was marked as being “too fat” based on evaluative comments by her mother and aunts. There were no numerical measurements per se that defined the Fat Body but rather comparative tendencies that viewed her Fat Body in relation to women in the community who had a Skinny Body. As mentioned above, her mother and aunts would compare her to other women who were viewed as “really thin” in the community. Their
evaluative comments to Jeevitha suggested that she was “too fat” and should therefore lose weight by dieting and/or exercising (i.e. yoga). The other participants in the chai and chat laughed at the persistency of elderly women who kept passing remarks about the Fat Body, producing similar feelings for the participants. Jeevitha later shared how the persistency of such comments from elderly women in the community (i.e. pressuring her to weigh, try weight loss strategies, exercise etc.) from a young age left her feeling frustrated and constantly uncomfortable in her body.

The Fat Body was also closely associated with hyper-sexuality for women who had big breasts, buttocks and/or hips. The participants who fit these criteria shared how they constantly felt scrutinized by elderly women in the community for looking “too sexual.” Regardless of their intent, those who were viewed as “too sexual” by elderly women because of their curvy figure were forced to cover up. The pressure placed on these women to cover up was because they deviated from an acceptable form of femininity in the community portrayed by cultural images of “modesty” and “good behaviour.” One of the women shared how she was constantly scrutinized by her mother and female relatives from puberty onwards for her big breasts and curvy figure. Her female family members blamed her for how her body developed after puberty. They disapproved of her large chest and curvy figure for looking “too sexual” and forced her to cover up her figure by wearing loose clothing. She said:

* I always had larger breasts than my age… but my mom was never supportive.

* She was always like it’s my fault for having it because they never had it (mom and aunts) up until they got married or had kids… This (points at chest) was what I was born with but I was always penalized for it... even (wearing a) chunni like this (across the body)...drape it all the way (but) it (still) comes
into a sexual context of, um, how your body image shouldn’t be looking like. They would appreciate somebody who had nothing or little (breasts) because you seem more delicate or fragile looking you know...physical body appearance like you shouldn’t be looking too sexual, (rather) modest and decent.

Even though she was naturally bustier, the participant spoke about being “penalized” for looking “too sexual” by her mother. She was made to feel self-conscious about her large breasts because even after covering up, she was still labelled as being “too sexual.” This directly opposed what was considered an acceptable femininity by the elder women who, as she argued, would have preferred if she had smaller breasts and a less curvy figure which was viewed as being more “delicate,” “fragile,” “modest,” and/or “decent” in character. As the participant shared later on, these characteristics were culturally more favourable because they were associated with a feminine passivity that did not seek or attract attention from others (especially men). This meant her Fat Body, with big breasts, buttocks and/or hips, did not align with the characteristics ascribed to an ideal “good girl” femininity which was viewed as more acceptable in the community by female elders. This resulted in constant feelings of self-consciousness about her body and frustration to always appease her mother and aunts.

These feelings of self-consciousness about the Fat Body slipped into reasons why some women decided not to play and/or continue to play sport. Jeevitha had been a high school athlete all her life and her parents had told her that being fat was undesirable for a woman her age. After high school she started gaining weight and internalized the negativity associated with her Fat Body which eventually led her to stop being physically active. She explained that:
For me it’s because I gained weight...growing up my whole family’s been like “you can’t be fat.” Like you can be anything but you can’t be fat. I feel like for me the lack of confidence came from gaining weight... I underestimate myself way more than other people do... and I think I just underestimated my own capacity to do sports way more than other people... I’d be like “no I’m gonna fall over the ball and trip and everyone’s gonna remember this forever” (other women agree) and they don’t...

Jeevitha stopped playing sport because of internalized feeling of self-doubt caused by her weight gain. Her weight gain marked her Fat Body as undesirable and unacceptable in the community and this left her doubting her physical capabilities in sport. Even though she played sports growing up, she underestimated her capacity as she got older and gained weight. In co-ed sport spaces, her self-doubt was compounded by the fact that she was a woman. At times, she was the only woman on the field and felt even more pressure to perform physically. This resulted in her internalizing social and cultural pressures (especially in the absence of positive reinforcement and/or support), which left her feeling as though she was physically incapable to play sport and as a result, she stopped playing.

Discussion regarding the Fat Body revealed several things about an ideal “good girl” femininity produced through the Body Triad. The Fat Body became marked as an undesirable body after puberty because puberty marked the time where increased regulations and disciplining mechanisms were carried out on young women by older women in the community.¹³ Regulations

¹³ I use “regulation” and “discipline” here to refer to the ways older women teach younger women how to perform and/or behave in the home and community. This aligns with Yuval-Davis’s (1996) theoretical framework surrounding the allocation of power allotted to women under patriarchal conditions (p. 22-23). I recognize that “regulation” and “discipline” also align with a Foucauldian analysis too and thus there is room to expand on this in the future.
were carried out through discussions by elderly women in the community about a younger woman’s body in regards to its physical shape, size and meaning. These were manifested through disciplining mechanisms which included scrutinizing what the Fat Body ate, judgemental comments that emphasized weight loss, blaming young women for how their bodies developed after puberty and forcing the Fat Body to “cover up” as a means to control its sexuality (from men) especially for those women who had large breasts, buttocks and/or hips. The effect of such control of the Fat Body led women to stop playing sport. This was due to perceived self-doubt and self-consciousness about their physical capabilities and the sparseness of intra-community support about their physical appearance and ability. Furthermore, discussions about the Fat Body revealed what an ideal “good girl” femininity was considered to be and have. That is, it was one viewed as “delicate,” “fragile,” “decent,” and “modest” in characteristics and physically had small breasts and a less curvy figure so as to not draw attention to itself. We will continue to build on these ideas with the other segments of the Body Triad.

4.2 The Skinny Body

The next segment of the triad considers the Skinny Body. The Skinny Body was viewed by elderly women as being “unhealthy” and held to “higher expectations,” and directly compared to the Fat Body as a basis to anchor its opposition. The following section unpacks the pressures placed on the Skinny Body.

The Skinny Body was unfavourable because it was viewed as being unhealthy. Only a handful of women in the chai and chats shared their experiences having the Skinny Body. However, the Skinny Body played a pivotal role in informing the relationship between the Skinny and Fat Body. Basanti, an Indian Punjabi-Canadian woman in her late twenties, spoke about how her mother and close female relatives were always worried about her weight. They
felt she was too skinny and slender in her physical shape and passed remarks about what she ate by telling her to eat more. Basanti shared with the group that:

_I feel like my family are opposite (not concerned with fatness)... my mom is soooo concerned because I’m soooo skinny in her mind. Every time I come home she needs to know what I ate for lunch every day. If I skip a lunch she’s very concerned... My aunts say the same thing to me like “why aren’t you eating!” Like my mom will get like, she will be so concerned and upset if she knew I missed (lunch) so I lie to her sometimes. I’m like “yea I ate this whole big meal at lunch” so she’ll leave me alone ‘cause she’ll be really worried. It’s never enough._

Basanti’s mother and aunts viewed her body as being too skinny according to their standards. Her mom would regulate her Skinny Body by trying to produce a “healthier” looking body. She did this through disciplining mechanisms that questioned Basanti in regards to what she ate and by telling her that she needed to eat more if she was unsatisfied with the answer. Basanti responded to the disciplining mechanisms by lying to her mother about what she ate in order to satisfy her mother’s concerns about Basanti’s Skinny Body. Consistent with the Fat Body, the Skinny body was also open for discussion by elderly women in the community in regards to its body shape, size and meaning. Control mechanisms manifested in pressures to “eat more” in order to gain weight and look “healthy.” These pressures were associated with an ideal shape and image. Furthermore, there were no empirical measurements that explicitly defined the Skinny Body, rather it was subject to opinions determined by elderly women. For example, Basanti went on to explain how her mother would tell her to “be bigger” saying:
... (S)he’s (her mother) like “you know, you need to be bigger” – to my aunts as well. They think in their minds Punjabi Indian girls are supposed to be medium because you know you don’t wanna look too skinny because it’s like “why aren’t you eating?”... Even my friend at her wedding her mom was like “she’s too skinny, she doesn’t eat”.... You’re either too skinny, too big, too muscular.

The Skinny Body was policed for not being “big enough.” The pressure to “be bigger” was related to expectations surrounding the physical appearance of “health.” As mentioned in the Fat Body, Raushan spoke about the pressure to eat more during childhood to represent the outward appearance of health for a family. That meant, the “bigger” the children, the wealthier the family. The messages towards the Fat Body were inconsistent as narratives shifted towards weight loss in adulthood. In the case of the Skinny Body, the pressure to “eat more” reflected the anxiety of elderly women to have the Skinny Body “look healthier.” Narratives of family wealth associated with “bigger” children shifted after puberty towards the social and cultural representations of a daughters/woman’s body (Yuval-Davis, 1993). This means, the pressure to gain weight and look “healthier” for the Skinny Body reflected a woman’s “health” as it related to her childbearing abilities (King, 2004, p. 31). The concern for elderly women was to produce an ideal “good girl” femininity that portrayed a young women’s ability not only to look “healthy” and conceive children but, furthermore, to be considered a viable candidate for marriage because this secured physical and cultural reproduction of familial and cultural lineage (Yuval-Davis, 1993). Again, what it meant to be “too fat” or “too skinny” was disciplined through comments, remarks or opinions by elderly women about younger women in the
community, thus marking the boundaries of acceptability regulated though the Body Triad in production of an ideal “good girl” femininity.

The women in the chai and chats also talked about how the Fat Body and Skinny Body informed one another. Instead of explicitly telling younger women they were “fat,” elderly women would use the term “healthy” to describe the Fat Body and “smart” to refer to the Skinny Body. Embedded in this was the attribution of personality characteristics to physical bodies. This was explained through the following focus group exchange between the women:

*Jeevitha: Like I don’t know, a lot of times whenever I go back my dadi (grandmother) will be like “healthy, looking very healthy.” Like healthy in India does not mean healthy … in South Asia it means you’re fat.*

*Naadira (sarcastically): it’s the nicest way to compliment (someone for being fat).*

*Inaya: And smart means skinny (other women agree and laugh)*

*Jeevitha: Like you’re ascribing weight qualities to personality qualities and it’s just like that’s not how it works. Like I’m not smarter because I’m thin, I’m not like stupid because I’m fat, but like that’s like how it seems.*

This dialogue between the women showed how “healthy” and “smart” were used as evaluative comments to describe physical characteristics ascribed to the Fat and the Skinny Body. As Naadira explained, being called “healthy” referred to the physical appearance of looking “fat” which marked the Fat Body as undesirable. Even though “healthy” in the West is associated with the maintenance of one’s optimal health, in the Punjabi/South Asian community,
it usually reflected evaluative and judgmental commentary about the body. Similarly, Inaya elaborated on how being called “smart” was a way to refer to someone as being “skinny.” The evaluative commentary of being “smart” did not refer to one’s intellect but rather, it reflected more social acceptability of the Skinny Body in comparison to the Fat body. As shown above, personality characteristics were often ascribed to the physical body as in the case of the Skinny and Fat Body. As most women fell into this discourse, there was a constant tension between the two where “skinny” could not be healthy and “fat” could not be smart thus limiting the possibilities of the complex ways the Punjabi female body could be.

In relation to sport, the Skinny Body was viewed as weak and not physically inclined. Aditi, a Hindu Indian Punjabi-Canadian woman in her late twenties recalled internalizing those stereotypes as a young woman growing up. She was never encouraged to play sports but rather to focus on academics and so she self-selected out of sport. Other students bullied her for being skinny, weak, and not good at sports and that impacted her decision to stop playing. She said:

*I remember just feeling like, sorting fitting those stereotypes ‘cause I was smaller, weaker but then also feeling like a freak because of my leg hair and various parts of my body made me feel like a freak and gross. That was it, after grade nine that was it.*

Students at her school assumed she was not good at sports. She was also not encouraged to play sports by her parents and therefore she self-selected out. This was due to compounding factors based on how her physical body was viewed by others and related intra-community dynamics. In direct relation to the Fat Body, there seemed to be more expectations imposed on the Skinny Body because it was more socially/culturally acceptable. Naadira weighed in on these by saying:
I was sitting around a lot of aunties\textsuperscript{14} and cousins... I was noticing how they were talking to one another. I noticed like how they expect like, they had higher expectation of prettier, thinner girls, not pretty but thinner girls.

Here Naadira talked about “higher expectations” imposed on the Skinny Body by family members. The other women also spoke about these expectations in relation to the production of an ideal “good girl” femininity. This femininity was further defined by characteristics marked as “obedient,” “passive,” and “quiet” as well as behaviours and actions which encouraged the reproduction of domestic and household labour. All of this was linked to familial and cultural reproduction where the production of this femininity was closely connected to a daughters/woman’s potential to find suitors/get married. This was described in the following exchange:

\begin{quote}
Naveet: I think it was just like “be a good girl” which was doing what my parents wanted (and) eventually it was to marry a nice Punjabi boy... mostly just like being a nice quiet Punjabi girl... learn how to cook, help out at home, don’t go out too much. Be a good girl means being quiet and doing what other people wanted you to do.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Other woman: Yea same thing, “be a good girl,” get married that was basically it. Stay at home, (being asked) “what will your mother in law say?” (other women laugh), “what did I teach you etc.” I remember mom saying when I was born “haath me ka tha, ke ye duhlain bunay ge (“her destiny is to become a bride one day;”) other women burst out in shock and laughter)” like
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} “Aunties” here, and moving forward will usually refer to both familial relatives as well as non-familial elderly women in the community.
literally we just came into the world and now you're already thinking about our rukshathi (engagement).

Arzoo: Oh yeah definitely! Me and my sister were just talking about this today.
Like yea def! Growing up the pressure was to be a “good girl.”

Here the women illustrate how regulations by elderly women carried out through the Body Triad resulted in disciplining mechanisms on younger women to produce an ideal “good girl” femininity. Both the Fat and the Skinny Body were disciplined through evaluative, judgemental comments about body shape, size and meaning. The Fat Body was scrutinized for what it ate and was told to “lose weight” and/or “cover up,” whereas, the Skinny Body was told to “eat more” and “look healthy.” In turn, this resulted in the pressure for the participants to produce/perform an ideal “good girl” femininity marked by characteristics and behaviours of “modesty,” “passivity” and “obedience.” The monitoring and control of the women/their bodies was closely connected to familial/cultural reproduction as it manifested in the women’s and the women’s families’ potential to find (male) suitors for marriage for the women. The next section of the Body Triad will further build on these ideas taking into account the Muscular Body and its impacts on both the Fat and Skinny Body.

4.3 The Muscular Body

The third part of the Body Triad was the Muscular Body. This section outlines how the Muscular Body was actively controlled alongside the visibility of body hair. Followed by this, I describe how the Muscular Body directly challenges the gender binary thus causing the need for its control. Even though many of the other women had not personally experienced the Muscular Body, the women spoke about how its lack of presence in the community added to the limited
acceptability of complex femininities in the intra-community. The end of this section then connects all segments of the Body Triad together, explaining how ideals of a “good girl” feminine body are produced leaving little room for women to exert their agency.

The Muscular Body was often regulated for looking “too masculine.” In a case study on Madeleine, a South Asian American collegiate female athlete at the Indo-Pak Basketball Tournament, Thangaraj (2015, p.191) explained that “Toughness, aggression, and competitiveness were deemed masculine traits that were superimposed on male bodies.” This meant, Madeleine and other South Asian women who portrayed or challenged such heteronormative characteristics by taking part in athletics, were often confronted with fears and anxieties about their “loss of femininity” (p. 192) by others. For example, Mehreen, a Muslim Punjabi-Canadian woman in her early twenties spoke about how she enjoyed working out at a gym or outside in a park near her home. Although she did not want to become “too big,” she enjoyed being physically active and liked the results PA had on her body. Contrary to her beliefs, her family worried about her figure and often passed evaluative comments about her muscular arms. They related this to her looking “too masculine,” thus compromising her (or their) ability to find a potential suitor for her. She said:

_They (family) see muscles, they knock you over for it too… there’s a joke about me, (my family says) “when we go rishta shopping (seeking a potential suitor)

for you, you have to show the guy your muscles so they know what to expect. We’ll look at his muscles to compare yours”_

Although phrased jokingly, her family teased Mehreen about her musculature which was explicitly linked to her potential (or not) of finding a suitor in the future. As part of the joke, her muscles would be compared to the suitors suggesting her musculature as a woman threatened the
male suitor’s masculinity. As this was framed within a hetero-normative concept of marriage premised on patriarchal gender roles, where men are allotted the role of protecting women, Mehreen’s muscular arms threatened this dynamic because her physicality suggested that she may/could protect herself irrespective of the male suitor. This limited his need/role in the relationship. Furthermore, this deviated from an ideal “good girl” femininity, which was marked by “fragility” and “passiveness,” therein resulting in evaluative comments about her Muscular Body.

Similarly, I shared with the other women at the chai and chats my mother’s comments towards me after I picked up kickboxing. I had developed broad muscular shoulders and biceps and my mother feared for my femininity, passing comments such as “you look like a man,” “log kya kahenge (what will other people say)” and “girls don’t look like this.” Mehreen’s family’s teasing and my mother’s comments about my muscles reveal two prominent connections at all aspects of the Body Triad. First, consistent with the Fat and the Skinny Body, the Muscular Body was again a site of open discussion by family members and subject to discipline in similar ways. In the situation described above, Mehreen’s body and muscles became a joke as a way to tease Mehreen about her muscles. Secondly, the occurrence of the Muscular Body required regulation because it deviated from an ideal “good girl” femininity. Its association with masculinity required its regulation because of the narrow definitions ascribed to masculinity and femininity in a gendered binary. Before delving into this further, I also contextualize the significance of body hair.

At all segments of the Body Triad, the visibility of body hair was scrutinized. Body hair was marked as undesirable and unfeminine for women and subject to control through hair removal and/or corrective techniques to control its visibility. These included laser hair removal,
waxing, threading and tweezing. One woman spoke in length about the laser hair removal treatments her mother encouraged her to do at a young age. Initially this was to avoid bullying from other students during adolescence but evolved as a way to make her body look “more feminine.” This femininity was linked to her desirability as a single young woman for marriage which was a central concern to her family. She explained how:

> They’re like “…just do it (laser hair removal)... if you’re hairy you’re never going to get married (other women sigh).” I’m like I’m pretty sure I’ll get married, I don’t think I need to worry about that (everyone laughs)... I think for them it’s all about being feminine right... Like I know I’m hairy, I would love to not be hairy but I am...Why are my parents so bothered about this? But they’re like “no, you need to go and need to get laser done, you can’t have hair, you can’t do this. Like what’re you gonna do with your life?” And I was like, I don’t think being hairy is contingent on my life at all (other women agree).

The hair on her legs, arms, underarms and face were subject to removal by her mother—even though she was content with the visible body hair. Her parents felt that corrective measures to remove her body hair would make her look more feminine. Similar to Mehreen’s family, this corrective measure was to enhance her femininity, thus making her more acceptable in the community. This acceptability was closely linked to her family’s anxiety about her visibility as an ideal woman for whom they could find a potential suitor for marriage. The issue of visible body hair can also be located in societal standards of beauty that centralize (white) hairless slender women as ideal representations of beauty as articulated by George and Rail (2005). In an exchange with the women about what it meant to be hairless, all the women said it was
associated with a more feminine looking body and one woman shared how she felt more judged
and self-conscious about her body hair rather than her body. The exchange was as follows:

*Urooj*: What does it mean to be hairless?

*Everyone responds at the same time*: it’s just beauty/ part of beauty/ it’s just pretty.

*Inaya*: Feminine, mostly feminine (other woman agrees)... to be honest, I think
well maybe because I’m brown, I think hair is the biggest issue for me. For
other people it’s weight or like they have to be thin like stuff like that (but) for
me it’s hair! I’d rather be fat and hairless than super hairy (other woman
agrees). ‘Cause other people are like “oh I’m so fat, I’m so fat, I don’t like this
about my face, I don’t have any eyebrows, I have thin hair” but for me I’m like
I don’t want hair anywhere... ‘cause that’s the one thing (having hair) that
makes you less feminine.

Inaya, a young Pakistani Punjabi-Canadian Muslim woman, spoke about how being hairy
made you “less feminine.” This was based on a number of factors: dominant portrayals of South
Asian women in the community, social media, and the lack of visible role models to challenge
this type of constraining femininity caused by the gendered binary and reinforced by the Body
Triad. Having visible hair on her underarms, arms, legs and face made her a target of
surveillance by others, especially other women in her community. The women spoke about this
in another exchange where they shared how other women their age either commented or bullied
them based on their visibility of their body hair. They said:
Naadira: (a girl in school) walked by and hadn’t shaved her legs. All the girls turned their heads and were like “why isn’t she shaving?” All the girls were shocked, none of the guys noticed. One of the girls pointed out “oh look how hairy she is.” It was mostly the girls.

Aditi: Yeah all this policing of each other.

Jeevitha: I remember when I started removing hair on my face… I went to school and the girls were like “omg you look so good” and the guys were just like “somethings wrong with your face, somethings different.”

As elderly women policed younger women at all aspects of the Body Triad, the women spoke about this cycle being reproduced within their age-group as well. That is, oftentimes young women policed other young women for the visibility of their body hair as a way to gain power in the narrow dimensions that were allotted to them, thus reproducing the patriarchal elements of the Body Triad with each other. Overall, unlike the Fat and the Skinny Body that were directly compared to each other, the Muscular Body and body hair were often compared to masculinity, thus compromising the stability of the narrowed definitions ascribed to masculinity and femininity in the gendered binary.

These discussions of the Body Triad highlighted several key ideas. First, the physical shape, size, texture and meaning of Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies were closely monitored by elderly women in the community to produce an ideal “good girl” femininity. This monitoring led to disciplining mechanisms, often imposed on these young women, which served to regulate the way gender was constructed and maintained as a binary by elderly women and the intra-community. Related to this, the regulation of the Body Triad not only reinforced but also
reproduced gender as a heteronormative binary where strictly disciplining femininity meant enhancing its desirability in ways that made it more acceptable in the community and for marriage. As regulations of the Body Triad were often carried out by elderly women, the policing of younger women’s bodies by elderly women shows the limited scope in which power is allotted to women in patriarchal settings where women’s bodies play a central role in familial and cultural reproduction. Lastly, the Body Triad had an overall negative affect on PA participation. The intra-community pressures to (re)produce an ideal “good girl” femininity meant that the women and their bodies were constantly monitored, judged, and evaluated. In the absence of role models and/or positive support to participate, stopping or opting out and/or sparingly participating became ways of managing intra-community pressures they faced. The next section expands on the ways the women did this.

4.4 Managing Intra-Community Expectations

The Body Triad reflected the ways Punjabi-Canadian women felt their bodies and actions were regulated and groomed to perform an acceptable femininity in the community often associated with their marriage potential. The disciplining they faced included judgemental comments about their body size, shape and texture, revealing that there was very little space for the women to hide particularly as regulation occurred at all aspects of the triad. The following section describes the ways Punjabi-Canadian women managed these expectations surrounding their bodies through the patriarchal regulations placed on them via the Body. These include actively choosing to “feel blessed” with one’s body, talking back to policing members, challenging patriarchal gendered norms, self-selecting out of spaces that put them down and/or using a combination of these tactics. These results show that Punjabi-Canadian women actively
negotiated these situations given the circumstances while confirming the centrality of women’s bodies in the reproduction of gendered, cultural and familial norms.

Kiran explained how she felt the pressure to physically manage her body size, shape and appearance. She described feeling this pressure as it related to both intra-and-inter community settings, but she focused her attention on explaining the pressures she felt from elderly women and young men in her community. She also explained feeling frustrated at the idea that her body meant more to other people than it did to herself. In our discussions she explained that:

*I feel like my body doesn’t mean as much to me as it does to other people* (another woman agrees)... *I feel like when it comes to guys and like, even sometimes aunties (other women enthusiastically agree) - actually a lot of times aunties (everyone laughs), it's just like, I feel like it’s just for them. I have to eat less: for them. I have to work out: for them. I have to make sure my butt looks nice: for them- well not like for aunties but like for guys (other women laugh). You know what I’m saying...*

Here Kiran described how the Body Triad impacted her, how regulations imposed were enforced by elderly women and young men and how these contributed to the ongoing management of intra-community relations. As a curvier, self-identified “fat” woman, she described her frustrations around having to “eat less” and “work out” as a way to manage the expectations placed on her body. In her passage, Kiran also directly rooted her frustration to how elderly women and young men were the source of such pressure, frustration and expectations. She ended her statements “for them” to highlight her frustration to appease “them” referring to “aunties” and “guys” in the community. The consequences of this were the ways Kiran felt she
had to manage the expectations placed on her body in comparison to how she viewed herself or wanted herself to be viewed by others. She built on this in a following passage saying:

*Yea, I don’t really feel like I care about what my body looks like for myself, it’s always for other people. I really don’t care… to be honest I don’t care if I’m fat, I don’t care if like, as long as I’m healthy and I don’t have like diseases and stuff like I feel blessed. Like I don’t really care…*

Here she indicates the struggle to manage expectations based on external pressures towards conformity and acceptance of the associated “good girl” femininity. She mentions how she was not as concerned about her looks as much as others around her were. Her reaction to this was to “feel blessed” in response to the pressures placed on her. This meant being content with how she looked as long as she was not ill or diseased. Another woman spoke about talking back as a tactic to manage expectations that aunties and young men imposed. She herself felt comfortable in her Fat Body however aunties and her brother questioned her eating habits, comparing her Fat Body to the Skinny Body. She explained:

*I feel comfortable in my body…but aunties try to make me have them (anxieties about her body shape and size)... when I started to gain weight (they would say) “oh sis you’re getting so chubby” so to spite them I’d eat more. I hate that they can come up to you and comment on your body... one time even my brother commented “you’re not like other girls, you just eat and eat (other women laugh) you don’t maintain your body.” I’m like “yea, I started being this way because other people told me not to be this way”... (Aunties) always compare me to my sister who’s slim... I got used to this idea that I’m not*
skinny, I’m never gonna be, so why try, I don’t care... Now I’m fat and you better get used to it.

She heatedly verbalized her dislike for how others openly commented on women’s bodies in the community. Again, the majority of the comments negatively framed women’s bodies in comparative and limiting ways that narrowed their acceptability in the community. Her Fat Body was policed for what it ate and was marked as being unfit and lazy because it was not “maintained,” suggesting a lack of concern for physical appearance. As a result, she decided to actively talk back to aunties and her brother who passed evaluative comments about her Fat Body. She told them “I’m fat and you better get used to it” as a way to disrupt the expectations produced by the Body Triad and its cultural norms. In return, she became known for doing this in her community and managed to evade open scrutiny from some members of her community. Nonetheless, it was a tactic she used to manage the expectations imposed on her.

Similarly, another woman spoke about managing the gendered norms she experienced in the community around acceptable behaviours associated with Punjabi femininity. As a Sikh Punjabi-Canadian woman, she spoke about the consumption of alcohol in the community. She talked about how men were allocated the privilege of openly drinking alcohol at parties, family gatherings and community functions but women were not. Instead, women were frowned upon for this. She said:

It’s so weird to me that it’s okay for men (to drink) but not for women. Women are expected to do all the work for it. Men get together and they’re loud, like they’re allowed to party but the women aren’t... Now as I’m growing up, I drink and told my mom and she was like so mad but it’s like one of my things-
if the men in our culture are allowed to do it, then I’m gonna fight to do...I don’t want to be restricted because of my gender, it’s just not fair.

Here she explained the patriarchal gender norms that existed within the community and how she was committed to fighting them. At social gatherings, men were allowed to be loud, expressive in their actions and drink alcohol whereas women were limited to doing work (i.e. cooking, taking care of kids), staying quiet and being passive. She expressed her dissatisfaction with these norms and their alignment with the “good girl” femininity. Having grown up experiencing these double standards her whole life, she decided to drink and eventually built up the courage to tell her mother about it. She communicated facing resistance from her mother in regards to her decision, but for her, managing expectations meant (re)producing relationships that challenged the dominance of patriarchal gendered norms. Even though Muslim Pakistani Punjabi-Canadian women shared that drinking/alcohol consumption was a taboo topic in the community, they felt similar frustrations about the gendered division of labour that privileged men to openly make choices at social gathering but limited women to domesticated roles.

Likewise, the policing of the Muscular Body along with the entirety of regulations associated with the Body Triad and the dominance of men in sport spaces, led many women to leave, stop or self-select out of sport/PA especially around puberty. Aditi explained this as:

...(It’s) the way we learn to disconnect to our body. I’ve done that for most of my life. Having any experience of being in your body can be scary when any associations are negative.

This negativity surrounding women’s bodies as a result of the control carried out through the Body Triad stopped many of the women from participating in sport. The constant scrutiny to
adhere to cultural norms and to look and behave in particular ways led Aditi to disconnect from
her body and inevitably stop playing sport. Participating in sport meant putting her body out
there for the visibility and/or judgement of intra-and-inter community members and the thought
of this was “scary” because of the evaluative and judgemental commentary she faced all her life
about her body. To avoid (even more) scrutiny, not playing sports provided her peace of mind
and less pressure and expectations to manage considering the intra-community pressures she
already faced. Another participant spoke about the significant impact this particularly had on
her. She spoke in depth about how she left playing sport because of the struggle she had with her
weight gain after puberty. This was paired with the pressure to lose weight placed on her by
elderly women. Her parents put her in sport at a young age but for years she had struggled with
her weight gain due to the constant evaluative commentary she received from community
members about her Fat Body. This was compounded with trying to fit in at school and the effect
of this was extreme social anxiety and eventually an eating disorder. She described that:

*By the time I hit puberty I was already like “I’m not good at sports. Not
coordinated, not good at this stuff, I don’t wanna do it.” And also these ideas
of what it means to be fit. I was fat and so I was like “I can’t be good at sports
because I’m fat. I don’t wanna do it…” I was like “everybody’s looking at me,
I don’t wanna do this…” I had awful experiences because I was fat my entire
life. That’s the thing about the culture, no one is shy about commenting on
your body. It would really get to me. Played a lot into my social anxiety. I had
an eating disorder in university… I had heard it (evaluative comments) my
entire life. I wish I could have let it roll off but… even the well-meaning
comments affect you. Yea, it definitely had a huge impact on me. I have like at*
least one other friend who had the same experiences, she also developed an eating disorder...

The negativity surrounding her Fat Body after puberty led her to quit sport as well as manage her extreme social anxiety and eating disorder. As mentioned above, her entire life she felt her body being disciplined by elderly women in the community who openly commented on her weight/weight gain. The effect of such commentary left her feeling the pressure to lose weight to become physically and socially acceptable in the Punjabi community. She developed social anxiety because she could not fit in because others marked her body as being outside the boundaries of acceptability. Furthermore, her Fat Body contradicted ideas of what it meant to be “fit” in general society and she developed an eating disorder as a result, which took years to overcome. I relate this to Kumar’s (2004) study that also described a similar pattern stating:

Thus, in order to protect themselves from further ridicule and embarrassment during those times when their bodies were most on display, such as during physical education classes and recess time, Monica and Avril preferred to either hide their bodies from assessment to minimize attention to their bodies...constantly preoccupied with the fear of having their bodies noticed by others. (p.179)

Similar to the adolescent women in Kumar’s study, puberty marked the point of extreme intensification of women’s bodies. In my study, most of the women actively self-selected out of sport because of the severity of policing (and lack of supportive spaces) they faced as a result of the Body Triad. The limitations of complex femininities (Thangaraj, 2015, p. 192) as a result of an ideal “good girl” femininity forced the women to manage the surmounting pressures and expectations placed on their bodies. They did this by “feeling blessed,” talking back to policing
members, challenging patriarchal gendered norms and self-selecting out of PA/sport spaces that put them down.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter describes the ways Punjabi-Canadian women managed the expectations placed on their bodies as result of the Body Triad, which groomed women to perform an ideal “good girl” femininity. The ways that the women negotiated these circumstances are critical to understanding how intra-community dynamics impact Punjabi-Canadian women and the ways the women actively make choices about PA given the circumstances. Even though many of these decisions minimally challenge the ways patriarchy manifests in these communities, the women in this study actively contended with these forces to make their own decisions. In the next chapter, I relate these experiences to the ways the women navigated inter-community dynamics of whiteness, racism, and class based barriers in Canada.
Chapter 5
Navigating whiteness in Canada

5.0 Results Chapter 2: Navigating whiteness in Canada

In this Chapter, I describe the results from the focus groups that demonstrate how participants’ decisions to participate (or not) in PA were affected by social structures in Canadian culture, particularly the dominance of whiteness, which is itself produced and maintained through the intersections of race with class and gender. I do this by identifying the racial markers that marked the women as Others in relation to the unmarked nature of whiteness and then connect this to the significance of social class and the ways that it systematically disadvantages immigrants and their families.

5.1 The normativity of whiteness

In this section, I describe the results as they reflect the normativity of whiteness in Canadian society. Throughout the duration of the chai and chats the women referred to the ways they felt excluded and/or made to feel like outsiders in society. I use these experiences to explain the process of “Othering” Punjabi-Canadian women felt in society and relate this to the unmarked nature of whiteness in Canada. To do this, I describe the dynamic nature of the Punjabi-Canadian identity. Then I will describe how the women’s bodies were marked as Others by racial markers of “Asian/South Asian/brown” as well as by markers of language, culture and national/religious histories. Lastly, I conclude by contextualizing the pressure to “fit in” as assimilation, and by locating sport in the reproduction of whiteness as the dominant culture in Canada.
5.1.1 Conceptualizing Punjabiness as a multi-dimensional identity

This section describes the dynamic ways the women related to their Punjabi-Canadian identities. This was defined by the ways language, culture and national/religious histories informed the women’s experiences. Overall, all the participants identified as Punjabi/Punjabi-Canadian women. They were either born in Canada, immigrated with their families or came to Canada to study. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the women identified as having ancestral origins to Pakistan, India, and Kashmir as well as having different connections with the following religions: Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Given the nature of the focus groups, we were not able to go deep into how they defined their Punjabi-Canadian identities, but we were able to get an overall sense of the ways Punjabiness informed their experiences given their respective histories.

Language and culture were the dominant factors that informed the women’s connection to their Punjabi identities. Language (regardless of dialect) was linked to a sense of family lineage, ancestry, and indigenous origins. The women expressed that elders in the community were central to the exposure and inheritance of the Punjabi language. For example, a Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian participant explained that,

For me it (Punjabi identity) comes from my grandparents, not from my parents that much because they (grandparents) spoke Punjabi and through them we learned to speak Punjabi... So that’s where like I connect with being Punjabi.

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15 The majority of discussions on the Punjabi identity were related to ethno-cultural-religious histories. For the most part, the “Canadian” aspect of their identities were discussed in relation to them living, having grown up or being born in Canada. There is room to further explore this dynamic in the future.
Here, she connected the language with her intergenerational familial history and understanding of her Punjabi identity. She shared how her grandparents, who moved to Canada to live with her family, only spoke Punjabi to her and her siblings. They used story telling as a way to pass on ancestral and indigenous knowledge. Besides language, some of the cultural markers for Punjabiness identified via the Need for Speed ice breaker activity included: “pride,” “strength,” “fun,” “Bhangra/music” and “hardworking.” For example, the women expressed that at celebrations and weddings their Punjabi relatives and family members were often the most dominant within such cultural spaces. The women also collectively expressed that a lack of exposure to community elders (for various reasons) limited their exposure to such linguistic and cultural markers.

The extent to which the women interacted with their Punjabi identities also varied based on national/religious histories. The Sikh Indian Punjabi-Canadian women were more likely to talk about their Punjabi identity in comparison to the Hindu Indian Punjabi-Canadian and Muslim Pakistani Punjabi-Canadian women, who themselves were more likely to talk about their national and/or religious identities. For example, one Sikh Indian Punjabi-Canadian woman spoke about how her Punjabi identity was integral to her growing up. She deeply connected the culture and religion and said that it was hard to separate the two. In her own words she explained that:

*It is also a really hard thing for me (to separate because) being Sikh and being Punjabi are so connected especially in my family. So how do I take out the part of being Sikh and still identify as being Punjabi?*

Here, she describes how Sikhism and Punjabi culture/ancestry were synonymous with how she viewed her identity. Subsequently one of the Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian
participants explained how she learned about her Punjabi identity much later on in life explaining:

...(I)t wasn’t until I got to university that people asked me “well what kind of Pakistani are you?” Before it wasn’t really something that you know my parents were ever like “oh you are Punjabi and you must be like this and this.” It wasn’t that explicit in the house (other Pakistani women agree). I actually had to ask my parents like “what are we?” because I didn’t quite get that or understand until much later.

She was only made aware about her Punjabi ancestry in university after someone asked where in Pakistan she was from. After this, she asked her parents to elaborate as they had previously not foregrounded that aspect of her identity. Again, the spectrum of identification of Punjabiness was reiterated in the following exchange between the women. This exchange particularly highlights how religion became the dominant maker of identity for some Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian women:

*Jeevitha (Indian Hindu Punjabi-Canadian):* It is very different. You are so different but so similar... for them (her Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian friend), being Muslim comes first then Punjabi.

*Naadira (Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian):* (I agree) being Muslim comes first, then Punjabi.

*Inaya (Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian):* We know more about our religion than background.
Kiran (Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian): That’s what’s been built into our brain.

Inaya (Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian): ...(I was) put into a class to learn Arabic, to read the Quran... (I) know so much more about our religion instead of our culture.

This exchange illustrates how women who identified as Pakistani and Muslim, were more likely to be taught more about their religious identities (and then national) identities growing up rather than cultural or ancestral components. Furthermore, it also reflects the unity that was shared by the women in regards to identifying as Punjabi summarized as “so different but so similar.” Therefore, the Punjabi identity was marked by its language and culture and the extent to which the women identified as being Punjabi varied based on their independent and collective histories. Overall this reflects the diversity shared within the Punjabi-Canadian community itself and the many ways that members of the group relate to their identity. I contrast this diversity with the erasure of multidimensional histories with the racialization of Punjabi-Canadian women thus marking the dominance of whiteness in Canada.

5.1.2 Identifying “racial markers” to conceptualize the dominance of whiteness

This section will contend with the ways the women were racialized and marked as Other in society. The markers of Otherness placed on the women in society are important as they revealed the dominance of the unmarked nature of whiteness. This is demonstrated through racial markers of “Asian/South Asian,” as well as cultural, religious and language markers that were subject to at times invisibility, hyper-visibility and/or assimilation.
Given the dynamic ways Punjabiness was expressed, the women spoke about the homogeneity and invisibility that racial markers of “Asian/South Asian/brown” often produced. Generally, racial hierarchies have focused on white versus black binaries, however, the organization of “brown” bodies is also important to understanding how race/ race-relations permeate and operate in society (Thangaraj, 2012). A discussion on the dominant racial narratives in society that focused on white versus black tensions came up during the course of the focus groups. For example, Kiran spoke about feeling invisible about her own struggles under such dualistic interpretations of racialized experiences saying:

*I think that they think we’re like irrelevant or something… like I’m irrelevant.*

*Like they don’t really care. Like white people, black people that’s it. And we’re just supposed to work and live our lives normally.*

Here Kiran spoke about the frustration about not seeing or hearing her own struggles represented in mainstream discourses. Aditi contextualized Kiran’s frustration saying:

*I remember growing up and feeling like super invisible… I think that’s a really common feeling for South Asians and East Asians to have. And it’s also like this weird, pitting against, that happens because we feel invisible but black people are like hyper visible… and it’s like, I used to listen to MJ songs “black and white.” But what if you’re brown (other women laugh)? But um, I think also it’s important to understand the hyper visibility of like black people. Just because they’re so seen, doesn’t necessarily doing them good either. That’s exactly… (why the) police are constantly stopping them or they’re being*
followed around at stores. And those are things that I haven’t faced. ‘Cause like people don’t even know I’m there.

Aditi’s insights were important. She explained how racial markers of the black body led to the hyper-visibility of black bodies in society, and associated violence against them, and secondly how dualistic interpretations of racial binaries generally concealed racial tensions for brown bodies. The invisibility Aditi spoke about is closely associated to the ways academic success is also “naturalized” for “Asian/South Asian/South East Asian” bodies in society (Thangaraj, 2015, 2012, 2010; Nakamura, 2012; James, 2005). For example, Naadira spoke about being marked as “Asian” at school and the racial connotations that associated “Asian” with only academics. She expressed her frustration saying:

Ideas that Asians are being smart (for example) “oh you got this because you’re Asian,” “you’re smart,” “good at math.” It sucks because it does affect you. It’s not because you’re Asian it’s because you’re actually working for it, not because you’re a race.

Here Naadira described how students at her school erased the hard work, time and effort she put into achieving academic success because they conflated her “Asian race” with her “inherent” academic abilities. This lent itself to the “model minority” racial marker whereby Asian/South Asian/South East Asians are racially codified by their “inherent” academic abilities, thus typecasting them as only academically inclined and limiting their access to other opportunities (Thangaraj, 2015, 2012, 2010; Nakamura, 2012; James, 2005). In turn, an effect of
this particular racial marker is the flattening (Thangaraj, 2015, p. 75) of the Punjabi/South Asian identity to only academic success.\footnote{Thangaraj (2015) documents the “flattening” (p. 75) of South Asian masculinity to “nerds” (p. 75) in America and how venues such as the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament provide spaces to challenge such mainstream racialization of South Asian American men.}

Furthermore, the dynamic ways culture, religion and language informed how the women related to their Punjabi identities were also used to mark the women as being Others in society. This meant their bodies were marked as racialized and deviant from the unmarked and normalized dominance of whiteness in Canada. For example, Waseema recalled her experiences growing up as the only Pakistani family that lived in an all-white neighbourhood. In school she avoided her mother because of the shalwar kameez or traditional clothing her mother wore to drop off/pick her up from school. She said:

_"I remember trying to not be brown at a very young age. Knowing I was different. I remember once my mom came on to the playground and she was wearing shalwar kameez… I wanted to hide ‘cause I didn’t want anyone to see her coming near me. You know (she looked like) this ‘strange’ looking woman._

Here Waseema recalled “trying not to be brown” from a young age. “Trying not to be brown” meant disassociating from the “strangeness” ascribed to her mother (and inevitably her) because her mother wore traditional, cultural clothing (i.e. shalwar kameez). The traditional, cultural clothing contrasted the “normalized” clothing (i.e. pants and t-shirts) that other students wore therefore marking her ethnic/racialized body as hyper-visible against the “normalized” white culture at school. This relates to Frankenberg (1993) who says that “whiteness, as a set of normative cultural practices, is visible most clearly to those it definitively excludes and those to whom it does violence” (p. 228). From a young age Waseema knew she was an outsider because
of her Punjabi/ Pakistani identity for whom she was targeted for. When I asked “What does it mean to be too brown?” Premila also spoke about the ways traditional clothing and other factors marked Punjabi-Canadian women as Others in society saying:

...(I)t was acknowledging that you speak another language, it was, um, wearing traditional dress outside of a fetishistic capacity - for example if you’re wearing a bindi it’s like “oh you’re cute, it’s cool trendy” but anything beyond that... wearing a kurta or something, there’s a line you don’t cross. Othering yourself beyond how they accepted you to be Othered. So, there’s a very specific category of how you’re supposed to operate and if you kinda embraced that too hard, it was considered bad. If you’re like “oh yea I’m brown” and started speaking to your friends in Punjabi in class... that’s like bad. That’s like you’re not the acceptable other. That makes you a target for violence and social exclusion. Whereas if you fall into an acceptable category it’s like okay you’re brown, you can sit there and we’re not going to bully you.

Premila summarized how language, culture and embracing one’s ethno/religious/national identity “too hard” marked one’s body as deviating from the acceptability of how Others were incorporated into the normalized culture of whiteness in society. Those who attempted to claim their own non-white identities beyond what was deemed acceptable were made, as Premila said, “targets of violence” via bullying and/or social exclusion. One of the Muslim women spoke about how wearing the hijab, a religious article of clothing, made her feel like an Other and target for violence as Premila had described. She expressed:
Sometimes I feel like I don’t belong. I feel like an Other completely. Because of this (points to hijab) not because of this (points at self)… I don’t think I ever felt overt racism growing up... but wearing the hijab is totally different… (I’m) constantly feeling like I’m someone else, not Canadian...(People) don’t open doors for you at the mall, in your face say “go back to your country,” “you don’t have to wear that here,” “your English is so good,” (and I get) middle fingers all the time when (“terror attack”) incidents happen... Are we really that free (in Canada)? I really feel like we’re constantly securitized.

As she decided to wear the hijab later on in life, she explicitly felt overt forms of racism hurled towards her especially after 9/11. The overt forms of racism intensified after sensationalized coverage of incidents involving Muslims happened in the media. Some of the overt forms of racism she faced included racial slurs, offensive hand gestures and ill-informed comments about her identity. The other non-hijab wearing Muslim women shared how they or other Muslim women they knew, had experienced similar experiences. For example, Naadira shared how, as a non-hijab wearing Muslim woman, others asked questions based on ill-informed ideas about Islam and what it meant to wear the hijab. She said that:

If it’s non-Muslims (they’ll ask) “why aren’t you covered?” “Are you allowed to do that?” “Do you have to do this for your parents?” (They) have this one idea about how they (Muslims) should be.

The sentiments shared in regards to religion (mostly Islam) reflected the ways the hijab marked the women as Other in society and, by association, marked it as oppositional to or incompatible with the normative dominance of whiteness. This was because of ill-informed assumptions about the religion and culture that manifested into racial “knowledge” and fantasies.
This highlights the racial tensions that define the limits of inclusion in the way Canadian society is organized. That is, under the façade of “multiculturalism” non-white bodies still find themselves being racially marginalized for their culture and religion. The limits of difference allotted under such practices only allow the Other to exist non-confrontationally or through an overconsumption of dominant Canadian values. Related to this were the tensions surrounding language.

As mentioned previously, all the women agreed that speaking Punjabi was a significant factor that informed their understanding of the Punjabi identity. At the same time, most of the women did not speak Punjabi. This was because they grew up in Canada and were surrounded by English most of their lives. Other reasons identified for this included limited interactions with community elders, limited exposure and interactions with family or extended family members who spoke Punjabi (due to separation as a result of immigration), and the normalization of English (and French) as the dominant languages in Canada. The institutionalizing of English as a dominant language in Canada and its associated benefits can be seen in the decision made by two of the women’s parents. After they immigrated to Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, their parents decided to teach the women English over Punjabi and Urdu so that the women would fit into Canadian society better. As one of woman said:

…”(E)veryone spoke English. Now all the kids they’re grasping for straws for Punjabi and …. trying to do same with Urdu… their (parents) thing was assimilation… they all came at the same time in the 60’s.

Related to this, many of the women spoke about hiding their secondary language skills at school by changing the way they said their name to sound “white” and only speaking in English with other students who spoke similar languages. The ways the women were racialized as
“Asians/South Asians/brown” in society reflected the ways the women were marked as outsiders in society. This also flattened the multidimensional ways language, culture and religion informed their Punjabi-Canadian identities as these were used again, to mark their bodies as different from the unmarked normalcy of whiteness in Canada. The next section will contend with assimilation and the role of sport in reproducing this dominant culture.

5.1.3 Assimilation and sport in the reproduction of whiteness

As Punjabiness is a multidimensional identity, the racialization of Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies often flattened their identities or marked them as outsiders in society. In this section, I describe how some women felt the pressure to assimilate into whiteness in order to fit in, and by extension, the role sport played in actively reproducing this dominant culture. Embedded in this section as well, is how the women themselves identified the limits of inclusion in society (i.e. multiculturalism) and the mechanisms associated with the reproduction of the dominant culture.

Listening to the experiences of overt racism that one of the Muslim women faced, Navneet expressed the contradictions under the discourse of multiculturalism that she grew up with. She spoke about the limits of acceptability concealed under the discourse by saying:

I wanted to speak to the thing you (looks at other participant) were saying about the hijab. There’s always a limit to that... multicultural(ism) practices your beliefs but only to a certain point... (Until) they get uncomfortable. Like wearing bindis, full Punjabi clothing...that’s uncomfortable (for them)... So it’s always just a stipulation, “we’re multicultural until we get uncomfortable” is what I’ve noticed.
Here Navneet spoke about the limits of multiculturalism. She identified how cultural markers such as the “bindi” and/or Punjabi and traditional clothing were accepted under a multiculturalism framework for their difference but simultaneously defined the boundaries of acceptability for Punjabi/South Asian people. The limits she spoke about were defined by those who “get uncomfortable” and therefore policed the expression of cultural markers. In this case Navneet referred to white people who passed judgments about cultural markers thus indicating their own dominance and the unmarked normative dominance of whiteness in Canadian society.

Notably Navneet elaborated on the above based on her own experiences as she connected language to exclusion and also sport as a marker of inclusion. She was born in Canada as her parents had immigrated to the country in the 1960s/1970s. They faced discrimination for being racialized immigrants and wanted her and her sibling to fit into Canadian society. Fitting in for them meant Navneet and her sibling speak English and play sports at a young age:

My parents always wanted me to be active in sports. And as you (acknowledging the woman sitting next to her) were speaking I realized that they wanted us to assimilate into Canadian culture as much as I can, and I think that’s why they were pushing it (sport participation) as much. They didn’t want our experiences to be different from other peoples... we started going to school it was very strong that “we don’t want you to have issues when you’re there, we don’t want you to have to be in ESL” right. And so, I grew up speaking English to my parents.

Similar to the experiences mentioned above, where the ability to speak English leveraged itself to social and cultural privileges in Canada, Navneet realized how the pressure placed on her by her parents to fit in was that of assimilation into “Canadian culture.” Assimilation was itself
connected to key markers of inclusion, namely speaking English and playing sport. As a result, she spoke English (instead of Punjabi) at home and she and her brother were put into hockey and skating accordingly. The rationale justified by her parents was that as a result of speaking English and playing sports, she and her brother would not face “issues” at school (i.e. feel excluded or different). This also meant that Navneet had very limited knowledge or exposure to her Punjabi history.

Azroo elaborated on this by connecting access to sport to social and class privilege. She referred to this as the “social cachet” sport had by saying:

*I think it (sport) also brings you social cachet in the sense that like if you’re into hockey then you have some money, right? Like you have some privilege (other women agree)... ‘cause you can afford for your kids to have hockey lessons or like be on a team (because) like even just participating costs money.*

Here Azroo connected sport, particularly hockey, as a marker of social and class privilege. This “cachet” she referred to was having access and knowledge of hockey. Socially, “if you’re into hockey” then you have knowledge about Canada’s dominant sport which was/is a marker for its dominant culture. Similarly, knowledge of hockey paired with financial access to consume and participate in hockey itself was a marker of class privilege. As Arzoo said “even just participation costs money.” In an exchange between the women who were working professionals in the group, the women spoke about how knowledge and access to sport (which most of them did not have) provided advantages professionally. One of the working professionals joked about joining a running club as a way to advance her career by networking. Since she did not drink alcohol, she found herself disconnected from social activities that centred on drinking such as after-work drinks, bar and pub nights. In comparison, she knew running
clubs served similar purposes. These spaces became sites where networking and professional advancement often took place and therefore she joked about accessing running clubs to meet other professionals and make connections:

...I’m gonna get into running... I feel like it’ll help me make white friends (laughs, the other women laugh as well)...like that’ll be good for me on a career level because my profession is dominated by white people (other women agree) and if I can’t connect with them about drinking, well at least I can be like “oh yeah I ran a marathon too,” whatever. It’s a way to make friends. Of course I said it tongue and cheek but it’s true (other agree).

She joked about actually joining the running club but saw the value running clubs had on advancing her career. Her profession was dominated by white people and navigating her career meant navigating whiteness and the spaces it was (re)produced. Sport became one of those sites. Similar sentiments were shared by Thangaraj’s (2012) participants who related “whiteness...with opportunity and symbolic capital” (p. 997). Here access and knowledge of cultural norms were closely linked to whiteness. Basanti and Premila also spoke about cultural norms in regards to applying for jobs and “corporate culture.” They specifically talked about how candidates were valued more if they had sport experiences and the pressure to acquire such experiences in their professions. Basanti shared:

When you’re applying to jobs and stuff and when you’re trying to like beef up your resume in an interview and if you say you're in softball or if you say you’re in something for example in like firms and stuff, as soon as you say you’re in a sport team, they want you even more (other women agree). I would
always be like I’m in this sport, but exaggerate my sport ‘cause they do want you more if you’re in sport… Yea there’s like pressure when you apply to jobs so you wanna say you’re active so they want you more.

Premila also commented:

It’s like that in my profession too. You have to be part of a sport team, have to be part of the corporate team. Corporate law and accounting… majority of big firms you have to be active, it’s part of like your corporate identity partly because of health, partly because of appearance and partly because of, um, team building activity within the companies. Being part of a sport- being part of that world- is extremely important.

Basanti and Premila spoke about the social and cultural privilege that access to sport had in the corporate sector. This “beefed up” one’s application, built rapport during interviews and reflected good moral behaviour and health, thus personifying an ideal candidacy for a position. The issue with this, as I delve into more in the next section, is that many immigrant families and children do not have access to such social or cultural sport privilege, thus disadvantaging them over others who do. In conclusion, assimilation into the dominant culture of whiteness via learning English and accessing sport were ways the women described they could access the dominant culture (Thangaraj, 2012). This illustrates the limits of inclusion under multiculturalism and the ways in which multi-dimensional Punjabi identities were marked as racially outside the unmarked dominance of whiteness in society. In the next section, I connect 17

An analysis of social and cultural capital can be further investigated in the future in regards to the waves of Punjabi immigration, class status and associated access to sport/sport cultures.
these experiences to the significance of social class as it manifests through the immigrant experience.

5.2 The Significance of Social Class

In this section, I will build on the racialized experiences the women described as they navigated the dominance of whiteness in Canadian society. To do this, I connect their racialized experiences to class (and gender) and show that they simultaneously informed each other. By doing so, I describe how the women’s experiences with these social structures reflect the systematic inequities within Canadian society for immigrants and their children. I begin by explaining how the immigration process for their parents shaped the pressures placed on them as immigrant Punjabi-Canadian women.

In the chai and chats, many of the women spoke about the hardship the immigration process had on their childhoods growing up. They grew up hearing their parent’s frustrations surrounding the expectations versus realities of immigration particularly around education, credentials and securing employment. After a lengthy exchange between the women about how their parents struggled to settle into Canada, Jeevitha summarized the women’s sentiments surrounding their parents’ immigration process by saying:

_You’re really qualified when you come here, and that qualification doesn’t translate [into becoming] doctors or lawyers or teachers. They come here and they have to study again... When you’ve sold everything to come here, you don’t have the money to sit down and study. You need to be working and supporting your family. It’s difficult._
Here Jeevitha summarized the expectation versus realities their parents and relatives faced during the immigration process. As qualified professionals or persons with well-paying jobs from their country of origin, their parents expected to find the same professional and/or well-paying jobs after coming to Canada because that was the dream that was told/sold to them prior to immigration. Instead, after arrival, they were met with barriers that prevented them from accessing education and employment equal to others who already lived in the country. This, as Jeevitha explained, meant qualifications were not accredited, professions prior to immigration did not translate into the same professions after immigration, and their parents had to start their lives all over again in Canada. The women expressed that their parents told them they left their families and support networks behind only to be forced into precariousness in Canada. This meant finding survival jobs to feed their families, getting reaccredited and/or establishing new careers altogether while learning the language and skills needed to navigate their new homes.

Many of the women expressed how hearing, seeing and constantly being told how immigrating to Canada was a difficult process for their families, relatives and family friends directly impacted them. They felt they had to live up to the expectations their parents had of them to succeed in Canada because of their parents’ own struggles to succeed given the barriers they faced. Aditi spoke about this pressure to manage her parents’ expectations growing up and how this was a common trend for South Asian families. She and her brother both knew they had to do well in Canada in order to justify their parents’ decision to reroute their lives to Canada. She expressed that:

Some of the common things amongst South Asian immigrants I’ve seen is like lots of pressure or lots of expectations... I know I felt that growing up. I had to justify to my parents their decision to come ‘cause it was so disruptive for their
lives, so hard for them, and it definitely felt like me and my brother had to live up to certain expectations. Me and my brother had to make it worth their while to come here which is a lot on kids, yea.

From a young age, she and her brother knew they had to live up to their parents’ expectations when they got older. The process of rerouting their homes from India placed her parents under a lot of stress to re-establish their careers and she grew up witnessing the stress of immigration and how it impacted her parents and family. Her parents had spent a significant amount of money to immigrate, left their support networks behind, had to redo their education and gain “Canadian experience” while trying to raise her and her brother in a new country where they had no pre-existing networks of support. This impacted her access to PA because of the financial and time constraints her family faced as a result of immigration.

Kiran shared similarly about the pressure to live up to her parents’ expectations as she got older. Kiran was born in Canada and identified as being a Pakistani Muslim woman in her early twenties. She spoke about growing up without financial security and the importance of securing financial stability for herself and her parents. She lived in a low-income neighbourhood and grew up watching her parents work minimum wage jobs to support the family and listening to their stories about how difficult immigration was. Like many of the other women’s parents, her parents left all their support networks and family in Pakistan. After immigration, they were unable to find the same jobs they had back home because their university degrees from Pakistan were not recognized in Canada and they lacked “Canadian work experience.” As her and her siblings were young, her parents had to take care of them while finding financial stability and therefore they could not afford the time to go back to get their university degrees re-certified. Consequently, her parents worked minimum wage jobs to raise the family. Growing up in this
environment, Kiran knew she wanted a better life for her and her parents. She shared with the group that:

*I feel it. I’m starting to feel it more now. I guess ‘cause I’m going to university and I don’t really know what I want to do with my life. Yeah... Like all I know is that I need to make money. And I know that’s not a good way of thinking but... like the way I grew up, like, if I have kids I don’t want them to grow up like that. And I don’t want my parents to go without having like, you know, a nice home and nice cars. I just want to give that to my parents. I don’t know how I’m gonna do it.*

Kiran felt the pressure to go to university, get educated and “make money.” She knew that narrowing her focus to just “make money” to give her parents the life they wanted put more pressure on her to meet theirs (and her) expectations but she also felt obliged to do so. She acknowledged the sacrifices they made for her and her siblings moving to Canada and understood the unrealistic expectations told to immigrants prior to moving to Canada versus the reality they actually faced when they came here. In almost all the focus groups, the women felt the pressure to meet their parents’ expectation to do well and “make money.” The path to that success was explicitly linked to upward social and class mobility associated with academic success both in high school and university.

Academic success was directly linked to meeting parents’ expectations to do well in Canada and most times justify their parents’ decision to come to Canada in the first place. Arzoo identified as a Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian woman and was a working professional. Now in a skilled profession, she spoke about the constant pressure she felt do well academically growing up because of the pressure her parents placed on her. She shared with the women that:
My parents were always like “well we came here for your education, you know. We came here for a better life for you so you have to get educated.” So that expectation that you’re gonna get good grades and go to university was always there like from the beginning (other women agree). Since I was like in kindergarten.

She said she felt the pressure for academic success as early as kindergarten as she knew she had do well in school to eventually go to university and then find a job to “make money.” The effect of this was that she only focused on academics in school and was rewarded by others for doing well academically. The focus and support on academic success over other extra-curricular activities like sport had an impact on her PA (or lack thereof). She only focused on academics, was supported to focus on academics and as a result, did not prioritize PA and was not supported in doing so either. Therefore, she did not participate. She explained:

Like I guess it’s also like if you start getting grades from a young age then like you think like “well this is what I’m good at (other women agree), I’m good at school.” So it’s like people telling you that you should focus on school... And then you do that, and you get good grades (but) nobody’s saying it’s because you worked hard- it’s like because you’re smart (other women agree). And so you’re like “well this comes easily to me and I’m smart and I’m good in school”... so you just keep doing that (other women agree) because you know everyone tells you to do what your good at. And if you’re not good at sports well then you’re gonna be like “well that’s not what I’m good at and I’m not gonna do it.”
Arzoo was told to do well in academics to live up to her parent’s expectations. Therefore, she worked hard to excel academically. Other students, teachers and community members praised her for her academic excellence and she internalized this praise because it felt good and therefore kept focusing on what she was good at because that provided the path of most acceptability (and least resistance from her parents). The pattern that Arzoo explains is closely linked to what James (2010, p. 62) calls the “self-fulfilling prophesy.” This is where black students are funneled into athletics and Asian students are sidelined into academics over sports because of their assumed “inherent” academic abilities which fails to acknowledge the hard work Asian students put into achieving such success. This pushes them away from PA as they are labelled as “model minorities” and streamlined into academic pathways whereas Black students are racially profiled to play sport (James, 2010). Furthermore, they are labelled “model minorities” in society, which is a racial marker that is deeply related to class-based circumstances as illustrated above. That is, immigrant children face pressures to do well academically as a result of the systemic inequities within Canadian society that limited their parents’ access to education and employment opportunities in relation to long-term immigrants. Therefore, academics were prioritized over sport and other extracurricular activities. Arzoo wished she had been able to try sports at a young age and realized the advantages this would have afforded her professionally as access to sports teams, clubs and or leagues opened doors in her profession. In fact, many of the women expressed interest in playing sports or engaging in PA at a young age and now, but years of intra-and-inter community pressures prevented them from accessing, participating or finding spaces that supported them.

Associated with the pressure to manage academic success were class-based barriers to financially and culturally access sport. Inaya, a young Pakistan Muslim Punjabi-Canadian
woman spoke about this. She was a student and talked in depth about how her working-class background limited her knowledge and access to sport because her family could not afford it. After immigration her parents were forced to work low waged jobs and could not afford the time, money and/or energy to support her interest in dance, basketball and soccer. She found this put her at a disadvantage in school because other (white) students who had access to such leagues had the knowledge and physical skills to excel on such teams compared to her. She said:

   …(S)ince we’re like low income it’s hard to get into those really, really, um, good sports like house leagues recreation and stuff. So when I was very little…
I really liked soccer and I like always played soccer but then, um, I never got into a soccer club or anything ‘cause those are really expensive… I (also) really like basketball… when I went to middle school I really wanted to join the team but like again I didn’t have like the experiences like a lot of other kids have… (And) all the schools I went to were really … um lots and lots of white people… I’m not even saying all white people are rich but all the schools I went to were full of rich white people… they all had like really good experiences from clubs and stuff… teachers were obsessed with them too. And obviously they’re gonna be better than me ‘cause they have more experience.

In this quotation, Inaya connected her working-class status to her limited access to sport because of the financial and cultural resources she did not have. She was unable to access sports leagues because her family could not afford it and her parents did not have the knowledge of such extracurricular activities. Their lack in knowledge came, not entirely from their lack in interest, but because they were busy working and earning money to support her and her family. They could not spend the time and energy into supporting Inaya’s interests because their time
and energy was directed towards earning money to take care of the family. Inaya explained later on how her parents told her about the professions they had prior to coming to Canada but again, as many other women in the focus groups explained, they could not find well-paying jobs like the ones they had back home. Central to this passage as well is the (lack of) cultural knowledge that Inaya and her parents had about such leagues growing up. She only found out about the leagues after starting school and likewise her parents did not have the privilege to access such opportunities because of work. Likewise, some of the other women shared their frustrations:

*Naadira: Growing up I wasn’t put into sports at an early age. They (other students) already had the experience before, like it never motivated me to participate because the teachers picked the other kids (other women agree). We never really got a fair chance. I like to play volleyball, badminton and swim. And I’m not bad at it, I’m pretty decent. But I never got to play you know…*

*Aditi: That was a huge thing for me too... I didn’t wanna publicly be so bad (laughs). Also, just access. It wasn’t a thing when we moved here to think about sports teams. Not a thing. The only activity I would’ve been getting into was dance (but) we couldn’t afford it.*

*Urooj: What kind?*

*Aditi: Any kind of dance, maybe Bollywood. But it was too expensive. Did khatak for a while in an aunty's basement. Stopped that because (I thought) it was not legitimate. I wanted to do “real classes.” (It was) just like internalized classist and racist stuff. I should’ve been fine with any kind... a “real class”*
(meant) some sort of institute or something. I was really, at a time when I was hating everything brown.

This exchange explained how factors of race and class and gender compounded to inform the women’s experiences and decisions. Naadia and Aditi both had limited access to sport because their families could not afford. Likewise, sport “wasn’t a thing” because of how academic excellence was central to their upbringing based on their parent’s expectations and the lack of knowledge about sports. “Hating everything brown” reflected the tension the women felt to assimilate into whiteness which, as Aditi shared, meant quitting dance class in her aunt’s basement because it was not “legitimate,” with legitimacy closely connected to mainstream institutional knowledge and acceptability.

In summary, social class played a pivotal role in shaping the women’s experiences. Their parents failed expectations and realities immigrating to Canada placed enormous pressures on the women to, oftentimes, justify their parents’ reason for coming to Canada in the first place. This pressure often centered on the women’s academic success which was summarized as “go to university, get educated and make money.” The effect of this was that academic success was prioritized over sport and extracurricular activities. Parallel to this, social class also limited the opportunities that were afforded to some of the women. They, and their families, could not financially or culturally access sport thus putting the women at a disadvantage in school and later on in life. The next section will connect these findings and those in Chapters Four and Five to the literature in a discussion on women’s bodies, whiteness and resistance/agency. Before that, I turn to a discussion of negotiation given the circumstance the women were placed in.
5.3 Negotiating whiteness

The following section describes the ways Punjabi-Canadian women negotiated the spaces in which whiteness, racism and class-based oppressions existed. The first half of this section contends with the ways racism and whiteness dominated society and how women centered their own well-being after years of enduring such inequities and exclusions. The second half contends with sport as an unrealistic option given the racial, classed and gendered material realities and experiences.

Many of the Muslim women spoke about the ways racism and whiteness manifested in their experiences as they were forced to negotiate inter-community spaces. As mentioned previously, assimilation was sometimes used as strategy to negotiate whiteness in order to fit in and also to deter racist, Islamophobic and/or white supremacist violence. This manifested in the ways some of the women spoke and talked about their experiences to others. For example, some opted to not draw attention to their Otherness by wearing “normalized” non-traditional clothing, speaking English only and concealing any cultural markers that would differentiate them from their peers (i.e. bindi, clothing etc.), as well as downplaying their parents’ pressures on them to succeed because of the hardships lived through immigration.

Other women spoke about talking back. Arzoo elaborated on how misinformed, racially charged assumptions about Muslims intensified after 9/11. As a result, growing up she felt pressured to be an “ambassador” of Islam which meant educating people who passed racially charged comments and judgements. Years of doing this left her frustrated because of the mental and physical burden she had to take on to account for other people’s ignorance. Therefore, she
decided to stop and just focus on her own wellbeing having to live in a racist society. She shared with the group that:

...(W)hen I was younger after 9/11 happened, I was like “I’m Muslim!” Felt like I had to conduct myself as an ambassador about Islam- like to justify to others “I’m a model Muslim”… (now it’s) not my job to educate people. People are racist and if that’s what they think (passing judgement), well fuck you, I don’t give a shit. I’m comfortable being me. I’m happy and this is me. This is my lived experience…. other than my family, I don’t care what people think.

Arzoo mentioned having to be a “model Muslim” in order to maintain a façade that eased the racist Islamophobic assumptions about Muslims that dominated mainstream narratives. Her frustration managing racist anxieties led her to call out Islamophobic comments because of the ease with which they were made and normalized in society. This response reflected her lived experience because of the years she had to muzzle her own views in regards to the racism she faced, and feeling like an outsider trying to fit into what was defined as “model” Muslim (minority) citizen. Another Muslim woman felt similarly. Waseema spoke about the rise of Islamophobic attacks against Muslim women after sensationalized media incidents. After years of passively managing her Otherness, she realized the normalized nature of such Islamophobic comments and responded accordingly:

...(N)ow I give them the middle finger right back. They’re only targeting women, (they) won’t go up to men. Mostly women who are getting harassed because they don’t talk back. Morning after an incident this guy gave me
middle finger. I did it right back, eff you, and he was floored that I was doing it right back. His eyes popped out... He (white man) felt so comfortable because he thought I would turn away... It's (her hijab) defining me too much, too much of a statement, like I don't want that, it's been a bit tough.

Waseema spoke about how her hijab made her a target for violence and how such Islamophobic comments were passed with ease. The targeted racialized violence against Muslim women relates to Sherene Razack’s (2008, p. 5) interpretation of the “the imperilled Muslim woman.” Here acts of violence against Muslim women reflect racist fantasies to “save” Muslim women from their religion and men. Similarly, white supremacist acts that target non-white women reflect the ways whiteness attempts to mark its cultural dominance on and through women. This is because women’s bodies are central to social and cultural reproduction (Yuval-Davis, 1993), which means targeting non-white/Muslim women reflects tensions surrounding patriarchal control and cultural dominance. The ease at which Islamophobic comments were passed reflect the normalized (and entitled) dominance of whiteness. When Waseema gave the middle finger back, she disrupted how her passively constructed non-white body should have responded. In turn, the white man was stunned.

Similarly, in light of the pressure to assimilate into whiteness by wearing unmarked cultural clothing, Mehreen talked about challenging this rationale. In high school, she saw how other students were bullied for wearing their cultural clothing and decided to wear her kurtas (traditional tops) regardless of what other students said:

When I was in high school, I wore kurtas and jeans... I accepted the fact that we are different from them (white people) and I’m never gonna be like them or they’re not gonna see me like them so I made it even more like, um, visible that
I am different from you, look at me but then I still did what I needed to do. I stopped caring about that and just let myself be who I am.

Here Mehreen used her hyper-visibility as a non-white woman to challenge assumptions about her body. She acknowledged her Otherness, realized it would not make her palatable to whiteness, decided to stop caring about dominant norms and instead chose to “feel blessed.” That is, she chose to be whom she felt most comfortable being.

Managing whiteness and racism impacted the women’s decision around sports participation and PA. Even though almost all the women in the study spoke about wanting to play or try sports, unlike intra-community challenges where there was minimal encouragement to try sport, the option to participate in sport was available in the inter-community. However, because of the way whiteness, race, class and gender impacted the women’s lives, it was still difficult to access such spaces. For example, as mentioned above, Inaya spoke about how she could not access sport because of her parents’ immigrant status. To contextualize this further, she spoke about the multidimensional ways her class status intersected with gender and race. She spoke about how she wanted to learn basketball on her own time, but that was difficult as she explained:

Yeah, I could’ve worked on (basketball training), by myself, like that’s good too but like it’s harder because I don’t like going to the park myself… I hardly …have that many friends… I don’t wanna go to the park alone and I wasn’t even that confident when I was little… I was really unconfident cause yea… so (laughs) I didn’t wanna go to the park alone and practice by myself cause and there’s like all these older guys there too and I was too scared...
Here, race, class, and gendered factors impacted her experiences. In terms of class, her parents could not afford to pay for her to be on sports clubs. Likewise, this was compounded by their unfamiliarity with how sports clubs and leagues are organized in Canada because they could not afford the luxury to research such extra-curricular activities. The result was that she was not skilled enough to make it onto her school teams because other students who had league experiences would surpass her skill level. The gender-based barrier was itself twofold. First, her other South Asian friends had already self-selected out of sport and secondly, at the park, the basketball court was dominated by men. This made it dangerous and she felt scared because of the ways in which men controlled access to the court. Therefore, even though she was motivated and had the option to access sport, in reality there were several social and cultural barriers preventing her from doing so.

The possibility of creating and finding spaces for WOC-only also surfaced during discussions. Naadira spoke about how she only felt comfortable being around other “brown women” who understood her multidimensional histories. She continued by saying that any positive experiences she had with PA occurred in the presence of:

(B)rown girls when they’re together, complimenting each other. That’s the only time (I feel comfortable). We understand each other, what we go through and relate. Even though we don’t talk about it, we all go through it. Helping each other out.

Here Naadira mentioned the unspoken nature of some experiences but the common understanding that these experiences existed. Aditi felt similarly saying:
For me, it’s women of colour. Being in a space where there are a bunch of women of colour, queer and hairy to take over a space. Without that I wouldn’t be there…. Like I’ve never really felt comfortable in “women spaces.” Another thing I tried to do was yoga. I will not do yoga with white women. It’s infuriating… (becomes) capitalist practice here… exoticized spirituality… removed from its origins.

Here Aditi highlights the shared lived experiences of non-white woman that left her feeling comfortable. She compared this to “women spaces” which were dominated by white women whom she felt could not relate to her because of the ways she experienced racial and classed exclusions in society growing up. Likewise, the popularity of yoga (which was dominated by white women) frustrated her because of how yoga was popularized in exoticized ways in the West which was different from how she saw it in her community and in India. The palatability of yoga and the unpalatability of her non-white hairy body, left her frustrated and therefore she preferred to be with other women who understood her frustrations. Although one woman spoke about her sister pushing boundaries for her to play sport, there was overall a lack of supportive spaces, friends and/or role models in the inter-community which impacted the women’s decisions to self-select out.

In summary, negotiating whiteness took many shapes and form. After years of managing racist anxieties, some women spoke out whereas others decided to own their Otherness and “feel blessed.” In the context of sport where opportunities were available, material manifestations of race, class, and gendered factors impacted the accessibility of and to such spaces. As a result, some were motivated to push back against such limitations whereas others desired to carve out
spaces that reflected their own experiences. In turn, the decision not to play is act of agency given the circumstances and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

In this section I highlighted the ways whiteness, racism, and class operated in the lives of Punjabi-Canadian women and how these women negotiated such spaces. Punjabiness was marked by language, culture and national/religious histories, however these became markers for women’s Otherness and exclusion. The result was the pressure to assimilate into whiteness, with sport being identified as a means of accessing such privilege. Furthermore, immigration became an institutionalized, classed based barrier to immigrant families, making it hard for them to access resources. This resulted in the inaccessibility of opportunities and the excess pressure placed on women to achieve upward social mobility through academics. As a result, there were many tactics the women used to negotiate the ways whiteness impacted them. These included talking back, self-selecting out of sport and seeking out WOC spaces-only.
Chapter 6
Discussion and Conclusion

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter connects the research findings to previous literature. Based on this, I describe how there is very little space where Punjabi women can freely participate in physical activity. The scarcity of these spaces with intra-and-inter community pressures forced the women to navigate these circumstances and therefore their decisions, often times not to participate, must be viewed and respected as acts of agency. Lastly, I contextualize how the problem of women’s participation is a problem of racism, whiteness and immigration and needs to be considered in those contexts.

6.1 Previous Studies

In this section I discuss the ways that the findings from this research relate to previous studies. In particular, I focus on work by Rice (2002), Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010) and Kumar (2004). I connect my work to that of Rice (2002) by connecting the ways men and elderly women define an acceptable femininity. Then, I converse with Thangaraj in discussing the limitations of the gendered binary and how this binary polices and reinforces patriarchal norms. Finally, I make connections about the scrutiny placed on women’s bodies after puberty, how these narratives change as women get older and the limitations of viewing experiences though the lens of “fitting in” (Kumar (2004).

6.1.1 Speaking to Rice: The social constructions of femininity

In her work, Rice (2002) described how “normative” femininity was defined by others’ “evaluative comments” (p. 152) about women’s physical body shape, size and texture, in turn
informing the ways women viewed themselves. I relate this to the Body Triad and the experiences of racism the women faced which informed how they negotiated such spaces. Rice (2002) wrote about how young women’s physical appearances are attached to meanings about their bodies which inform how they are treated in society. In her words:

_The culture assesses a young woman’s beauty and abilities… her physical attributes influence whether she is accepted, or rejected, or harassed, or even physically attacked. The social meanings attached to a girl’s physical traits—meanings that are learned through interactions with others—can greatly affect her developing feelings about her body and self._ (p. 150)

Here Rice (2002) weaves together these meanings by making connections between women’s bodies in these spaces and how they are impacted, viewed and treated. This is similar to the Body Triad and the regulations imposed on the participants’ bodies to produce a “good girl” femininity within the community. The Body Triad symbolized the ways elderly women and men passed evaluative comments, judgements, and subjective expectations on Punjabi women’s bodies for being “too fat,” “too skinny,” “too muscular” all the while being hairy. These assessments, by elderly women about younger women, about their physical body and behaviours corresponded to how the women were accepted, rejected and/or harassed. For example, the Fat Body was harassed by being told to lose weight, whereas the Skinny Body was more acceptable but still viewed as being “unhealthy.” Furthermore, in line with Yuval-Davis (1993) who relates women’s bodies as central to national and cultural reproduction, the “good girl” femininity policed and produced via the Body Triad corresponded to characteristics associated with femininity within the community. These emphasized “obedience,” “passiveness,” “fragility,” and
“modesty” which were marked as socially acceptable. In turn, anything contradictory to this was subject to harassment.

Likewise, when this analysis is extended outside the community, similar trends existed. The dominance of whiteness in Canada marked the participants’ bodies as Other’s within the culture. This was also similar to the work of Rice (2002) who documented how non-white women in her study felt like Others in relation to the normalization of whiteness in Canada. Their experiences of Othering and understanding of how they were Othered were described in the ways they were treated. Rice wrote:

Women of colour receive lessons about colour and race growing up in a white society... (this) is reinforced in their adolescence and adult years by experiences of racial discrimination, racial harassment and economic marginalization. (p. 170-171)

Here, Rice highlighted how whiteness and associated bodily traits (i.e. fair skin, blue eyes, long flowing hair, p. 170) marginalized those who look “ethnic” (p. 170) therefore making them targets of violence because of their differences and defining the conditions for assimilation. The women in my study similarly spoke about how language, culture and national/religious histories became markers that differentiated them from the normative culture in Canada. This made them targets of racism, violence and assimilation. For example, they identified being called “model minorities” which “naturalized” their hard work in academics, while similarly enduring Islamophobic remarks by others based on ill-informed racist ideas about Islam. The impact of this was that social markers were imposed on their bodies as their bodies were assessed based on their deviance from the dominant white culture in society. This study aligns with Rice’s findings, suggesting many of these same processes remain in place.
6.1.2 Speaking to Thangaraj: Keeping women off the court

Next, I connect this study to the work of Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010), by comparing and contrasting the experiences of the men in his book and the women in my study. Particularly, I argue that South Asian American masculinity connects to and reinforces sentiments of the Body Triad, which in turn normalizes sport as a masculine site and confines women to the model minority marker more than men.

In his text, Thangaraj (2015) documents how South Asian American masculinity is defined in relation to the forces within the community as well as outside. South Asian American masculinity is constructed as “tough,” “aggressive” and known for its “physicality” (p. 169). In comparison, the women in my study spoke about the markers associated with an ideal “good girl” femininity, around which they were policed. This femininity was defined by behaviours such as “obedience,” “passivity,” and “fragility,” as well as actions that reinforced the reproduction of domestic household labour. The characteristics defined in this gender binary reinforced patriarchal notions of gender, with South Asian American masculinity viewed as a dominant decision-making force and women as passive in the relationship. Similarly, Thangaraj (2015) described how South Asian American masculinity is constructed in dominating ways in relation to women. He writes “Their (women’s) presence constitutes part of the pleasure men take in performing athletic masculinity… women play an important role in providing validations of masculinity” (p. 188). This provides context and confirms the dominating ways masculinity is constructed in this gendered (and sexual) binary, but also how it is reinforced and reproduced through the Body Triad.

For example, the women spoke about how the Fat Body with big breasts, butt and hips was associated with hyper-sexuality and therefore scrutinized by elder women to cover up. The
covering up of the Fat Body relates to the policing of women’s bodies (and sexuality) because of the dominating and threatening ways hetero-masculinity is normalized in this binary. That is, elderly women police younger women to cover up because it is understood that men seek pleasure and validation (of their own gender/masculinity) through the consumption of women. Therefore, elderly women exercise their power over young women by controlling who and how young women’s bodies can be or are viewed. The way this relationship is constructed is patriarchal because women are viewed as passive subjects who are acted upon rather than active, decision-making subjects. This patriarchal relationship became the underlying basis upon which the women negotiated, challenged and pushed back, and made the decisions they did in response to the pressures placed on their bodies and spaces of physical activity. Similarly, the Muscular Body for the women was viewed as threatening because of the visibility of its muscles which concealed aspects of ideal femininity. In his text, Thangaraj (2015) described how men viewed muscular women and South Asian femininity. He wrote:

*The butch figure haunted my informants’ conceptualizations of femininity and basketball in ways that demand a regulation of femininity and masculinity simultaneously… by labeling the participation of women in basketball as “butch,” Ali flattened the possibilities of femininity while marking the “butch” as a failed femininity. (p. 194)*

In this case, the Muscular Body or a “butch” female identity was constructed as unfeminine and inconceivable (Thangaraj, 2015, p. 194). For the parents of the participants in my study, the Muscular body threatened the participants’ “suitor potential” because muscles on women made her look “less feminine.” For the men in Thangaraj’s study, the “butch” female figure threatened masculinity because its existence threatened how South Asian American
masculinity was constructed through its physicality and domination in sport. The effect of this is, as Thangaraj describes, the flattening of the South Asian femininity which corroborates and helps to explain the findings in my study.

The racialized marker of “model minority” also prevailed in my work and Thangaraj’s. The men in Thangaraj’s study used the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament to denounce their perceived lack of physicality by occupying spaces in the gym to highlight their physical capabilities. This was done to disrupt notions of the “nerdy” South Asian body. Similarly, the women in my study spoke about how their bodies were marked as “model minorities” at school. However, unlike the men in Thangaraj’s study who used sport spaces to reconstitute their identities in comparison to the mainstream notions of “South Asian,” the women in my study did not have such spaces to do so. In fact, many of the women stopped playing sport because they were forced to bear the brunt of the immigration process their families endured therefore they were told to excel in academics. Their bodies were more closely regulated than men in the home because academic success was central in achieving upward class mobility as well as in reproducing familial lineage through marriage, via successful cultivation, itself enforced by the Body Triad. This means the marker of model minority is a racial marker that is further rooted in gendered and classed barriers. Furthermore, access to sport remains a masculinized space. Men were provided access to sport whereas women’s access was restricted and limited to academics and academic success.

6.1.3 Speaking to Kumar: The limits of “fitting-in”

Finally, Kumar’s (2004) thesis provides the opportunity to frame the intensification of pressure placed on South Asian women’s bodies as they grow up. It also provides the opportunity to further interrogate the theme of “fitting in” in ways that relate raced, classed and
gendered experiences to the dominant culture of whiteness. In her thesis, Kumar captures the moments of transition where young girls feel the pressures of womanhood particularly as puberty marks an explicit point where their bodies are treated differently by others. The women in my study also spoke about how puberty became the point at which the Body Triad became intensified. In comparison, most of the concerns the young women shared in Kumar’s study were surrounding parental pressure to be “good Indian girls.” This pressure still existed for the women in my study nearly 15 years later. In addition, as the women in my study were older than in Kumar’s study, the pressure of being “good girls” was closely associated to grooming for marriage. All the women shared that in their late teens and 20s they felt the pressure to act, behave or look a particular way as a means to secure an “acceptable” femininity that would secure their status as eligible single women in the community.

Kumar focused her study on the experiences of Hindu Indian middle-class young women. Her analysis provided critical insights into their particular national/religious/classed/gendered/raced experiences. In comparison, the diversity of Punjabiness captured in my study that crossed national/religious/ cultural/raced/classed/ gendered experiences, provided not only a chance to interrogate the particular experiences of being Punjabi women, but also, a chance to explore the similarities/ differences among national/religious/ cultural groups within the Punjabi community. Furthermore, how these women experienced their bodies as racialized/classed Others in Canadian society. This allowed me to explore “fitting in” as a theme, but one that could be interrogated further especially in relation to whiteness and pressures of assimilation to “fit in.”

“Fitting in” at intracommunity levels not only meant appeasing parental authority, but also contending with the Body Triad as a means to groom an ideal femininity to secure familial,
cultural and classed based success. Likewise, “fitting in” in society meant assimilating into/to whiteness by demarcating oneself from markers of differences associated with Punjabiness and associating with whiteness by speaking English, wearing Western “normalized” clothing and having non-identifiable cultural and religious markers. For example, Kumar wrote about how middle class/intergenerational privilege allowed the women to access sport. In comparison, many of the women in my study could not access sport precisely because of their immigration and/or classed histories. Likewise, the women in Kumar’s study were hesitant to be identified as “Indian” women. This shows that class and assimilation work together with sport and PA in recreating dominant narratives of who/how one can fit into the dominant culture of whiteness in Canada. That is, those who have access to it and/or those who perform or fit its dominant narratives have access to networks and privileges. A few women explicitly said their parents put them into sport so that they could learn Canadian values, assimilate and not face racism as immigrants. Sport was central to the reproduction of such dominant values and culture.

In summary, there are several ways this study relates and adds to the current literature. In comparison to Rice (2002), this study largely confirms that social factors inform the experiences of women both inside ethnic communities and outside. Furthermore, the narrowed expressions of gender in a gender binary reinforce a particular South Asian femininity, flatten it, and force it to bear the brunt of immigration via class, raced and gendered factors (Thangaraj, 2010; 2015). Likewise, Kumar’s study allowed me to map the changing rhetoric of South Asian femininity from adolescence to adulthood where grooming of the “good girl” femininity becomes closely associated with the reproduction of familial lineage and marriage. Lastly, interrogating “fitting in” helps to show how racial markers define the terrain of whiteness that is the dominant culture.
in Canadian society. Physical activity was complicit in the construction and management of this “good girl” femininity. Next, I discuss some of the major implications of the study.

6.2 Major Implications of the Study

There are three major implications of this study. First, the results show that there is very little space (familial, cultural, social and institutional) in which Punjabi-Canadian women can or do feel comfortable to participate freely in physical activity in a city like Toronto. The multidimensional ways that intra-and-inter community dynamics impacted the women revealed the pressures and expectations placed on them. Second, the choice of women not to play must been seen as an active choice based on the conditions created under patriarchy and white supremacy. Third, the concern of South Asian women’s lack of participation in sport must be viewed from a social lens that centralizes the ways racism, whiteness and immigration impact non-white bodies in Canada in order to provide options on how to move forwards.

6.2.1 Intra-and-inter community pressures: The tensions that exists

The intra-and-inter community dynamics faced by the women left very little room for the women to freely participate in PA. In this section I summarize the major findings from Chapters Four and Five and then reflect on them to communicate the tensions faced by the women. Locating these tensions are important because they reflect the ways women’s bodies were central to patriarchal and white supremacist narratives of reproduction and assimilation. Furthermore, they reflect the realities of the women that must be contended with in order to understand their decision making given the circumstances.

The women in the study expressed how elderly women and men in the community were the source of policing and/or grooming, via the Body Triad. The result was the constant pressure
towards an ideal “good girl” femininity that the women had to contend with for most of their lives. Elderly women passed evaluative comments, judgements and imposed expectations about their bodies to control how the women’s bodies were viewed, what their bodies could do and what their bodies should do in order to fit into the underlying cultural, heteronormative, patriarchal, gendered binary that existed. The impact of this was that the women and their bodies were central to familial and cultural reproduction and the women had little room to evade such imposition. Actions and behaviours were strictly regulated to be performed as “delicate,” “obedient,” “passive,” and/or “modest.” These were emphasized so that women could be presented as ideal candidates for marriage to potential suitors. A successful marriage meant family and cultural succession could be reproduced. The impact of this is that women’s bodies are policed in ways that make it difficult for them to participate freely in PA. Connecting intra-community tensions in relation to inter-community dynamics are described by Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis (1995) as the “unfree conditions” of immigration. They say:

...(The) unfree conditions of entry inscribed in restrictive immigration and citizenship laws... explicitly or implicitly reproduce the (white) settler society assumption that only those who embodied or could be assimilated to the culture and values of dominant racial/ethnic group were legitimate ‘settlers’ or citizens of settler societies. The outcome of these racially/ethnically exclusionary polices was... the imposition of generations of hardship upon minority communities. (p. 15)

Here Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis highlight how immigration into a country like Canada, whose dominant culture is whiteness, forces inter-generational hardship on immigrants because of the systemic inequity faced by immigrant parents and the pressures of assimilation often faced
by their children. Therefore, the ways the women felt Othered in society was also important. Whiteness was the landscape on which the women were racialized and the women themselves had to negotiate racial and classed-based tensions. The spectrum along which the participants identified with their Punjabiness varied, but markers of language, culture and national/religious histories were key factors that informed the identity. These markers of identification for the women also became the markers of exclusion that rendered their bodies as Others in Canadian society. Similarly, immigration was central to reiterating racial and class-based hierarchies that existed. The failed expectations their parents lived through after moving to Canada led to surmounting pressures on the women themselves to live up to their parents’ dreams. Immigration as a class-based barrier meant some women grew up living in poverty not having access to resources and privileges like sport. The implication here is that these racialized and immigrant experiences impacted the decision to participate (or not) in sport and PA where whiteness as well.

Both the intra-and-inter community dynamics lived by and through the women informed and impacted each other. The experiences shared during the chai and chats reflected the constant tension the women felt they had to negotiate in order to exist as they did. The patriarchal pressures of the Body Triad were compounded by the dominance of whiteness, racism and immigration in society. The reproduction of familial lineage, via daughters/women’s bodies, became a way of accessing and/or securing power for families in the ways immigration denied it. Regulating the women to become “good girls” meant narrowing their focus to academics so that they could “go to university, get educated and make money.” Similar pressures existed for men (Thangaraj, 2015), however men were allotted the patriarchal privilege to play sports whereas women felt the visceral impacts of such patriarchal control, control that manifested in the
cultivation of successful candidates for marriage under intra-familial and cultural pressures of assimilation produced by Canadian society. Here, sport reproduced dominant cultures of whiteness and its associated privileges. This manifested in access to sports leagues and professional networks, and reproduced Canadian cultural privileges to those who could access and afford it (including some women themselves). This was “social cachet” as the women put it. In doing so, it reproduced the sidelining of racial, gendered and classed Others.

The main implication here is that the familial, cultural and societal circumstances left very little room for the women to participate freely in PA because their bodies were constantly regulated. The importance of naming and describing these dynamics, or tensions, is that they are the realities lived by the women. These are the circumstances in which decisions had to be made. That is, patriarchal, sexist, racist/Islamophobic/white supremacist and classed based conditions were the landscape in which the women made decisions about their PA participation. Naming and documenting these experiences are important as they push back against simplistic narratives that isolate and individualize non-white women’s experiences. Given this framework, I now locate how the decisions made, especially that of not playing, are acts of agency.

6.2.2 Intra-and-inter community pressures: Navigating terrains and decision making

The conclusions drawn from the previous section describe the circumstances created by intra-and-inter community dynamics and how these impacted women’s choices to, or not to, participate in PA. In this section, I argue that the decisions made by the women, in response to patriarchal, and often times white supremacist acts of violence, reflect acts of agency and must be understood in these terms. This complicates simplistic narratives surrounding South Asian women’s decision to play (or not) and is central to understanding how the “problem” of low PA
rates among women need to be understood in relation to their agency and not as a fundamental deficit of women.

To reiterate, familial, cultural and societal circumstances experienced through the Body Triad and whiteness in Canada became the conditions in which Punjabi-Canadian women had to negotiate their decisions surrounding PA. Punjabi-Canadian women were disciplined at all aspects of the Body Triad by elderly women and men in the community. The conditions created by the dominance of whiteness in Canada demonstrated pressures of assimilation stratified along race and class. Cultural markers of Punjabi-ness were targeted as racial markers against the women and immigration resulted in pressures for academic and financial success rather than the privileges of sport participation.

When confronted with these patriarchal conditions, the women in the study exercised their agency. Several strategies were used to navigate these intra-and-inter community dynamics. These included: “feeling blessed,” talking back to elders, challenging dominant ideologies, assimilating and even opting out of sport. The decision to “feel blessed” was a response to community elders and men who harassed one woman’s Fat Body. Likewise, talking back to aunties and racists after years of body shaming and intolerance were other ways women contended with their material realities. Other participants opted towards assimilation as a tactic to avoid racist bullying at school from their peers. Strategies were used interchangeably and circumstantially as needed but all reflected decisions by the women in response to the pressures placed on them/their bodies and must be understood as such.

Thus, one of the most important takeaways of this study is that the choice not to participate in physical activity, while by no means a free choice, is nonetheless an act of negotiation more so than simply an example of oppression or passivity. Thangaraj (2015) writes
similarly in relation to women’s (lack of) presence at/in relation to the Indo-Pak Basketball
tournament saying “women found ways to assert agency… Some found agency through spaces
available at the Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments…while other women worked outside these
leisure spaces to assert agency” (p. 188). Here he contextualises the ways women negotiated the
hyper-masculine patriarchal construction of the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament to find ways to
exist and participate as they could through by supporting players, carrying out administrative
duties and participating at parties. In the context of this thesis, the choice to leave, self-select out
of or disengage from sport/PA was also a choice reflective of the circumstances the women had
to navigate in light of patriarchal and white supremacist forces of assimilation they were faced
with. Often times, opting out was a way to negotiate PA spaces where the women were bullied,
excluded, teased, unsupported, misunderstood and/or forced to assimilate. Even though these
decisions may not necessarily resist or fundamentally disrupt the underlying patriarchal, white
supremacist structures, these decisions nonetheless reflect choices and acts of agency made by
women.

Furthermore, these decisions complicate the narratives and decision making that occurred
when multidimensional forces impacted, shaped and played out on women’s bodies. The
women’s acts of agency challenged patriarchal assumptions about the passivity associated with
women’s bodies. As the gendered binary characterizes men with rationality and decision making,
the women in the study challenged the binary by making informed decisions about their bodies.
Based on this, their decisions must also be contextualized within larger discourses of patriarchy
and white supremacy that existed around them. As the women negotiated their individual terrains
to survive, their individual actions were still carried out within a system that reproduces systemic
violence against women, racialized and classed Others. This is best contextualized in the role
elderly women play in policing younger women. Even though some of the women chose to talk back to their auntsies as a result of the Body Triad, the agency they carried out often came at a cost of taking agency away from elderly women (and vice versa) as a result of the patriarchal division of power allocated to women. That is, power was granted by taking it away from other women rather than fundamentally challenging the organization of power that created those conditions. Rice (2002) situates a similar discussion between able-bodied women and women with disabilities. Here Rice describes how able-bodied women understand their “normalcy” in relation to the “disabled” female body. In putting themselves above disabled women, they understand themselves as superior and “normal” (p. 175), but patriarchy largely remains intact.

Overall, understanding the complexity surrounding agency and decision making is these situations is important. They reveal the tensions placed on women’s bodies, describe how women’s bodies are central to multiple sites of reproductions, and reveal how women respond in light of these circumstances. The women in the study communicated that they did want to and wished they had continued to play sport and PA but they made informed decisions, or acts of agency not to participate, based on the pressures and circumstances they/their bodies faced. Therefore, the “problem” of low PA rates among women needs to be understood in relation to their agency and not as a fundamental deficit.

6.2.3 Women’s participation (or not): Broader social, cultural and political conditions

The third major implication of the study is that the issue of South Asian/Punjabi-Canadian women’s participation in sport must be understood as a social, cultural and political issue. Here I revisit the ways in which immigration had a significant impact on women’s decisions about PA. I further contextualize this by describing how racial markers ascribed to
non-white bodies expose the limits of multiculturalism and the dominance of whiteness in Canada.

This study shows that immigration has a significant and lasting effect on people and hurts WOC while confirming the dominance in the settler state. The women in the study spoke about the disadvantaged position immigration caused their families and inevitably them. For example, the emphasis and resources spent on education often came at a cost of sport participation. This was associated with a lack of knowledge of the dominant (sport) cultures and the financial resources to participate. Likewise learning English came at a cost of not learning Punjabi and other native languages. What this is reveals is the ongoing dominance of whiteness in Canada (i.e. knowledge, participation and access to sport cultures and speaking English to access institutional structures), as well as the structural inequities caused by immigration which led to pressures towards assimilation and/or associated barriers to sport. It is these structures and pressures that were the real barrier to PA. Thus, I argue that the problem of low PA is socially, culturally and politically constituted. Immigration, patriarchy, whiteness all contribute to explaining low PA levels among Punjabi-Canadian women.

6.3 Reflections on Theory and Methods

In this final section, I reflect on the theory and method used in the study. Given the theory/method used, the results of the study, and in line with Hylton (2009), I argue that future research must continue to deploy theoretical insights that challenge dominant ideologies, primarily the rhetoric of multiculturalism which reinforces the invisibility of racial and classed based hierarchies through unified visions of nationhood in Canada. As mentioned previously, “multiculturalism” is a strategic mechanism used by settler states like Canada (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). The dominant narrative of a multicultural Canada conceals racial Othering,
immigrant/classed based histories and pressure towards assimilation of the kind that were expressed by the women in this study. In turn, even though the women themselves used “South Asian/brown” to self-identify at times, the multidimensional factors that informed their lives reveal-as the women also identified-the limitations and false claims of an “inclusive” multiculturalism. The key takeaway here is the ongoing need to contend with the multidimensional ways that social and cultural dynamics inform the lives of non-white women.

This insight also has implications for methodology. Framing and conducting the discussions in this study as open-ended and explorative was a contributing factor in documenting the experiences of the women. It allowed for a discussion on systemic/structural challenges that existed beyond experiences of PA to locate how decisions about PA were informed/limited by these experiences and (material) realities. It also helped to contextualize how sporting cultures were implicated in the ways privilege and dominant cultures of inclusion and exclusion exist and are reproduced. I argue, therefore, for an ongoing methodological commitment to open, explorative and intersectional data collection and analysis.

Thirdly, it is important to continue naming whiteness. Framing the women’s experiences as done in this study not only names whiteness as the dominant culture in Canada, but also locates the ways privileges and inequities are systemically built into the construction of the settler Canadian state. Naming whiteness marks it from the “unmarked, unnamed, status that is itself the effect of its dominance” (Frankenberg, 1993). This contradicts dominant narratives of “inclusion” under the rhetoric of multiculturalism in Canada. I agree with other scholars that framing the experiences of immigrants under multicultural rhetoric often fails to centre the ways systemic inequities are concealed and constructed (Joseph et al., 2012; Joseph, 2012; Nakamura, 2012; Hylton, 2009; James, 2005; Thobani, 2007; Bannerji, 1995) and therefore theorizing
whiteness should be central to any analysis on sporting cultures in Canada. It is in documenting experiences under such frameworks that we can connect the ways sport recreates privileges in society. Furthermore, documenting the experiences this way reveals the common barriers and struggles of immigrant/non-immigrant communities in ways that expose the organization of settler society.

6.4 Conclusion

In this final section I summarize the main findings in the thesis. These are the Body Triad, the dominance of whiteness in Canada, the correlations of this study with the literature, and its impacts on broader issues of gender, nation and immigration. Then, I outline limitations of the thesis, primarily the framing of gender as a binary and the use of focus groups. I conclude by suggesting directions of future work in the field.

6.4.1 Recap of Main Findings

The underlying argument in this thesis is that the experiences of Punjabi-Canadian women illustrate the social, cultural and political barriers that limited their participation in PA. Based on focus group or “chai and chat” discussions, the first major finding discussed in Chapter Four, was that of the Body Triad which consisted of the Fat Body, Skinny Body and Muscular Body. This exposed the intra-community tensions that played out on women’s bodies, and the “good girl” femininity imposed on the women by elderly women and men. This meant that the women’s bodies were closely regulated via the Body Triad to groom them to be ideal women for marriage which secured intergenerational familial and ethno/national/religious social and cultural (re)production. Results also revealed that at all aspects of the Body Triad the women were
disciplined, thus forcing the women to negotiate these circumstances by talking back, “feeling blessed” and challenging patriarchal gendered norms.

The second major finding was the prevalence of whiteness in Canada and its associated impacts on women regarding their navigation, access and/or opportunity to PA. In Chapter Five, I described the ways the women were racialized and classed based on their identities and histories. The dynamic Punjabi identity was marked by the women for its language, culture and national/religious histories. In turn, these markers became the ways the women were racialized, Othered and forced to assimilate into whiteness. Sport was central to the discussion given its role in the reproduction of whiteness and associated privileges, hierarchies and disadvantages. This was captured in the second half of Chapter Five by describing the ways the women were disadvantaged by class via the immigration process. This led to pressure placed on women to achieve upward social mobility and revealed the inaccessibility of sporting opportunities.

Based on this, in the Discussion I conveyed how the findings relate/added to the literature and emphasized that the choice not to participate in PA was reflective of the tensions between the intra-and-inter communities which the women were forced to navigate. I concurred with Rice (2002) on the social factors that informed an ideal femininity regulated by elderly women and men. Next, in relation to Thangaraj (2015, 2012, 2010) I argued that South Asian masculinity connects and reinforces the Body Triad. This normalized sport as a masculine site and restricted women’s bodies as belonging off the court and limited to academic success. Lastly, almost 15 years after the completion of Kumar’s (2004) study, I confirmed her findings by emphasizing the intra-community pressures placed on women’s bodies while problematizing the limits of “fitting in” suggesting fitting in was closely related to assimilation into whiteness.
In the second half of the Discussion chapter, I argued that the women’s choices not to participate were acts of agency given the conditions created through patriarchy and whiteness and thus more reflective of active decision making and not simply disinterest in PA. Lastly, I contextualized this with broader social, cultural and political conditions suggesting the importance of multi-dimensional analysis rooted in disrupting the organization of power relations in Canada that are often concealed through multiculturalism.

6.4.2 Limitations and Future Work

There were limitations to this thesis namely around framing gender as a binary and using one-time only focus groups. Framing gender as a binary in the thesis might serve to reify what it seeks to problematize. The limitation of this is that in capturing the exclusionary ways an ideal “good girl” femininity operates, it potentially further silences other aspects of gender and sexuality including Queerness (Thangaraj, 2015). This is complementary to the work of Thangaraj (2015) who queers gender in his portrayal of South Asian American hetero-masculinity to emphasize the ways this excludes women and queer men off the court. There was some discussion surrounding this issue within the focus groups but overall, this was part of the limitation of conceptualizing gender as a binary in the thesis.

Furthermore, even though focus groups provided a dynamic way to discuss the commonalities between the women and how they identified with their Punjabiness, this method often limited my ability to go deeper into aspects of the identity. This was evident as Punjabiness was often correlated to or reduced to “South Asians” and/or “brownness.” One-on-one interviews would have helped to contextualize this further, especially in relation to the Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian women who were least likely to emphasize their Punjabi identity. Adding to this, as the call-back focus group was significant in narrowing down the Body Triad,
the limitation of not building in more active participatory research potentially limited the interpretation of some data and further understandings of the women’s experiences.

With these insights in mind, future and further research is called for. Topics for further study are: elaborating on the Body Triad, queering gender to further problematize the gender binary, locating social capital in immigrant decisions surrounding sport/PA participation, and particularly focusing on locating the experiences of Pakistani Muslim Punjabi-Canadian women. The emphasis in all of these topics is the importance of capturing the multidimensional ways that WOC experience their lives.

First, the Body Triad summarized the common ways the women felt their bodies were controlled in the intra-community by elderly women. Building on this, under the guidance of Yuval-Davis’s (1996) theoretical underpinnings (i.e. women’s bodies in centrality of social and cultural reproduction) future research should seek to clarify aspects of the Body Triad (Fat Body, Skinny Body, Muscular Body and body hair) and further conceptualize these manifestations. This will assist in understanding intra-community tensions and related discourses around the ideal “good girl” femininity and its impact on women as it pertains to PA decision making.

Second, and as discussed above, even though gender in this thesis is problematized when it is viewed as a binary consisting of men and women only, the portrayal of gender in this way risks reproducing what it serves to challenge. Based on this, future research can look towards Queer theories to elaborate on the ways that gender and sexuality, when understood as a binary, exclude other bodies to flatten the complexity of these experiences (Thangaraj, 2015, p. 192). Third, the women’s reflections surrounding social and cultural capital, sport and assimilation provides room for further exploration. That is, understanding how dimensions of class and inter-generational histories impact choices to participate in sport. Furthermore, how these choices to
participate and/or consume sport relate to pressures of assimilation and the (re)production of whiteness in Canada. This would require mapping out the relationship between gender, immigration, nation and sport in a more detailed and systematic manner.

Fourth, I believe there is room for further exploration of the Punjabi-Canadian women who identify as Pakistani (and Muslim). As highlighted in the thesis, these women were less likely to acknowledge their Punjabi identities and future research can locate this across national/religious/colonial histories. Underlying all these future directions are the centrality of Punjabi-Canadian women’s voices. In conclusion, there are limitations in this study, however, these limitations provide opportunities for further exploration in the future.


Epilogue

Since the completion of data collection and analysis in this thesis, several things have occurred. One, I have had the opportunity to share the findings with some of the women who participated in the study, as well as other South Asian women and community members at large. From my interactions, the thing that stands out the most in this sharing is seeing the light bulb turn on for others, as it did for us that one night. That one night was the spring evening where I invited some of the women from the study back for a follow up focus group. It was through our dialogue where the light bulb clicked on and we realized that the choice not to play was reflective of years of exclusion. As I crudely summarized that night: “you get shit on at home, you get shit on outside of home so, why the hell would you put yourself out there?” Now, when the light bulb turns on for those who hear the stories today, I believe, is based on two insights. First, it illustrates the respect garnered in understanding the choice not to play and second, it speaks to the importance of a shared acknowledgement of unsaid issues. This thesis has revealed life-long body shaming, racism and feelings of exclusion that impacted the choice of participation amidst isolation and alienation. The real significance of this thesis is the acknowledgment of these issues as real and the naming of experiences that are too often left unsaid.

In turn, sharing the findings with the women and community members before completion provided me feedback which forced me to go back and re-theorize my interpretations. This was particularly in regards to understanding the agency carried out by the women in response to the oppressions they faced. My original thought was to frame their experiences as “resistance,” however, it evolved to “negotiation” which is how it exits in the thesis. The reason for this (as I was reminded), was that the conditions expressed by the women in relation to patriarchy and
white supremacy still exist despite the choices they made. The women’s actions and decisions, as I have detailed in length, represent the ways they contended and negotiated these spaces. They may not have disrupted the social and political organization of power per se, however they did survive and lived through the oppressions they faced in light of the little support they had or found. I think that is important. As an academic, I am grateful to have had this feedback from community members- as terrified and vulnerable as I felt, I am thankful.

In many ways, this thesis was about tensions. About narrating tensions to communicate the larger tensions at play. As a researcher, locating the women’s bodies as central to capturing intra-and-inter-community dynamics has been just as tension-filled for me. Just as the hyphen holds together “Punjabi” and “Canadian,” Punjabi-Canadian women’s bodies hold meanings and ideas central to spaces in which they (do not) exist. The strength of this thesis comes from the women who shared their experiences as openly and honestly as they did. Being able to take part and document these narratives as they are presented has been a powerful experience. What follows is a short reflection on confronting, naming and acting on one’s own experiences.

Tensions.

You run away from the things you want the most,
So as far past the horizon as I could:
I ran,
Jumped,
Fell,
Drowned,
Submerged.
Washed up unconscious on the shore eyes closed,
I knew what terrified me the most would also be the thing to keep me afloat.
So reconciled without a lingering doubt in my mind:
I felt the sun shine, stood up and opened my eyes.
Appendix A
Ethics Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 32721

March 21, 2016

Dr. Simon Cale Decker Damell
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Ms. Urooj Shahzadi
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Dear Dr. Damell and Ms. Urooj Shahzadi,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "The physical cultural experiences of Punjabi women living in the Greater Toronto Area"

ETHICS APPROVAL

| Original Approval Date: March 21, 2016 |
| Expiry Date: March 20, 2017 |
| Continuing Review Level: 1 |

We are writing to advise you that the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix B
Research Poster

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

RESEARCH STUDY CALL-OUT:
Punjabi Women Needed
What are your experiences with physical activity in the GTA?

RSVP:

If you identify as a Punjabi woman (Punjabi can relate to cultural, geographical and/or ancestral etc. origins) between the ages of 18 to 35 and have lived a significant portion of your life in Canada, you’re invited to participate in this research study. Some of the things we’ll discuss are:

Did you participate in sport/physical activity growing up? Why or why not?

What were some of the most influential factors for your participation?

I am inviting self-identified Punjabi women to share their experiences about sport and physical activity in focus groups over the next few months. Spots are limited; please email or call for more details. Chai will be served!

Subway tokens and snacks will be provided!
Appendix C
Research Letter

Research Overview: Punjabi Women and Physical Activity
April 8, 2016

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in this project! I am a Master's candidate at the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education completing a collaborative program with the Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of Toronto. This project is part of my Master's thesis that aims to understand the physical cultural experiences of Punjabi women living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

I was drawn to focus on the experiences of Punjabi women because, not only am I Punjabi, but I was curious to understand how other Punjabi women experience physical activity in the GTA. Particularly, I am interested in how intra-community (e.g. family, friends, religion etc.) and inter-societal (e.g. school, larger community/friends etc.) factors possibly influence participation. I am especially excited to have this conversation with you as this is one of the first studies of its kind in the realm Physical Cultural Studies! Our discussions will also be recognized as part of a larger project being carried out by the University of Guelph that aims to document the gendered experiences of Punjabi women in Canada.

Before our discussion, I will go over the consent form, but your participation in the *chai and chat* (focus group) is entirely voluntary. Everything we discuss will be kept confidential, anonymous and not identifiable to you. If at any point you feel unsure about your participation, you may withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, I will destroy any personal identifiable information upon completing this project. Our conversations will be summarized, analyzed and be published in a thesis made publically available through the University of Toronto.

If you would like, my thesis supervisor Dr. Simon Darnell, can be contacted by email at.

Or, if you have any questions about my approved ethics submission, you may contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office by telephone or by email.

If you have any questions about the study please let me know. Thank you again for your participation and I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Urooj Shahzadi
Graduate Student, MSc Candidate
Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto
Email:
Appendix D
Participant Consent Form

Letter of Consent for Participants:
The Physical Cultural Experiences of Punjabi Women Living in the GTA

Participant Informed Consent:
By signing this form I acknowledge that:

I. My participation in the research is voluntary and I am under no obligation to participate.
II. I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.
III. I have been told that no information that would identify me will be released or printed.
IV. I am aware that all research data will be kept anonymous, unidentifiable and encrypted in a secure and locked space.
V. The researcher has given me the opportunity to ask questions about the study and its procedures and that these questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
VI. At any time during the study, I may request further clarification from the researcher. I can do this by contacting the researcher by e-mail or phone number listed below.
VII. In no way does signing this consent form waive my legal rights nor does it relieve the researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.
VIII. I may obtain a copy of this consent form for my records.

I, ___________________________ (print name) agree to participate in the study entitled The Physical Cultural Experiences of Second Generation Punjabi Women Living in the GTA by Urooj Shahzadi (University of Toronto).

Participant Email ___________________________ Phone Number ___________________________

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Location ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Researcher Informed Consent:
I, Urooj Shahzadi, have to the best of my ability fully explained the nature of this study to the participant. This follows the ethics protocol successfully reviewed by the University of Toronto. I believe that the person whose signature appears above understands the implications and voluntary nature of her involvement in the research procedures.

Researchers signature ___________________________ Location ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Researcher Information:
Researcher: Urooj Shahzadi
Contact Information:
Researchers Supervisor: Dr. Simon Darnell;
Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto
Appendix E
Chai and Chat Visuals

Below are two images. The first depicts the set up for the focus groups conducted as part of this study and the second, the wall visual from the last chai and chat where women were brought back for a secondary discussion on dominant themes that emerged from the research.

Image One: Chat and Chat Set up
Image Two: Chai and Chat wall visual