What are the possibilities for taking up a physically active subject position for young Qatari women?

Background: Discourses constitute knowledge. They are multiple, contradictory and offer different ways of knowing and being that shift across time and space. Also, they offer ‘subject positions’ that can be taken up or rejected. If taken up, subject positions offer the individual a particular repertoire, a way of seeing and speaking about the world. Analysis of discursive constructions and subject positions of young Qatari women in relation to physical activity offers insights beyond a binary construction of norm and ‘other’. This is particularly important considering that dominant academic understandings of physical activity have been constructed through western systems of knowledge.

Purpose: This research explores the multiple subject positions available to young Qatari women constituting themselves as physically active. It challenges western notions of physical activity to introduce new ways of understanding physical activity and young Qatari women and the terrain negotiated in being physically active.

Methods: Grounded in feminist post-structuralism, this study employs semi-structured interviews with 10 young Qatari women aged 18-25 years. Interviews were transcribed then analyzed using discourse analysis.

Results: Young Qatari women negotiate an array of cultural discursive practices including those deeply enshrined within Qatari tradition and culture and the medicalized view of physical activity as something which ‘should’ be done for good health. The ‘physically active’ subject positions available to young Qatari women vary, but tend to be bounded by discursive practices of family, tradition and gender.

Conclusion: Opportunities for young Qatari women to constitute themselves as physically active subjects are enabled and constrained by strong discursive practices of family, gender and tradition. Understanding the impact of such practices invites discussion about new possibilities for different positions that capture being young Qatari women as well as being physically active.