

2017 Fay Gale Memorial Lecture: Making “space” for women and girls in sport – an agenda for Australian geography

Abstract

In this article, I argue that there is need to rethink how sport is inherently spatial and political. I outline the importance of doing research on the spatiality of inequality in sport, and consider the ways in which ideas about affective atmospheres and textures can support nuanced understandings of sport, particularly for girls and women. From change rooms to board rooms, sporting fields to dance halls, sport happens somewhere—it is inherently spatial. Australian geographers continue to make scholarly and practical impacts of social and cultural significance by focusing on spatiality, but the geography of sport has yet to be fully developed in that respect, notwithstanding influential work on sport in rural communities, surfing and sporting events. Despite such contributions, there is still considerable work to be done, particularly in the area of women’s and girls’ team sport. Sport is an arena where geographers can make broader and, importantly, bolder contributions, and a concern with spatiality gives geographers unique and critical insights into sport and its manifestation across scales from the global to the local.

Keywords sport; spatiality of inequality; affect; feminism; women and girls; Australia

Introduction

To many observers, it may seem to be a good time to be a woman or girl in sport. The “Australian Football League Women’s” (AFLW) launched its first season in 2017, with paid players and quality media production, including broadcast deals with public and cable television networks. Netball Australia secured a broadcasting deal with free-to-air and pay

television in a move touted by the-then CEO, Kate Palmer, as ‘the most significant broadcasting rights agreement in the history of Australian women’s sport’ (Netball Australia 2016). Australia’s women cricket players have also gained support from increased pay and better conditions (Cricket.com.au 2016). Rugby Sevens and Rugby League are making strides with their women’s teams and the visibility and popularity of women’s (and girls’) team sports is growing across these fields. For the first time, the Australian Sports Commission is headed by a woman—the aforementioned Kate Palmer—and the lack of gender diversity on sports boards is being questioned and challenged. Male-dominated football codes such as the Australian Football League (AFL) and the National Rugby League (NRL) have been modified to demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and respectful relationships, with the AFL forcing the resignation of two senior executives for having office affairs and the NRL looking to implement lifetime bans for players convicted of domestic violence (Holmes 2017).

It is important to acknowledge the successes of women in sport chronicled above, and vital to emphasize the point that these successes do not signify the end of gender-based exclusion or discrimination. Instead these successes are part of a continual dynamic that shapes public debate over the value of women’s sport and, indeed, the value of women’s participation in a range of public forums. There is, of course, a line of notable *individual* sporting ‘heroines’ such as track and field stars, Betty Cuthbert, Cathy Freeman, Sally Pearson, swimmers, Dawn Fraser, Shane Gould, Leisel Jones, Susie O’Neill, and Stephanie Rice, tennis players, Margaret Court, Sam Stosur, and Yvonne Goolagong, golfer, Karrie Webb, and winter sport stars, Alisa Camplin, Torah Bright, Kirstie Marshall and Lydia Lassila. These individuals are marked out as “extraordinary” and “exceptional” women, and have blazed trails for others to follow. Yet their successes do not diminish a prevailing sense that sportswomen are outliers, exceptions to the rule.

The shift from the individual sportswoman to groups of sportswomen working in teams opens up debate over the value of women's sport and makes space for women in more sports. This observation is particularly salient given the pervasiveness of an orthodoxy in Australia that there is an inherent goodness and power in sport—what Coakley (2015) calls the “Great Sport Myth”. But sport is an affective, embodied, cultural formation, evoking strong feelings of national pride, excitement, and belonging, as well as aggression and violence. Sport evokes powerful feelings, and is celebrated for its ability to break down barriers and build healthy communities (Hoye & Nicholson 2009). Yet research demonstrates that sport is not all-inclusive: women have been excluded and marginalized from recreational to elite levels, and in many sport contexts marginalization, contestation, and discrimination are continually and dynamically at play shaping public debate over the value of women's participation.

In this article, I detail my introduction to the scholarship that is sport geography with a focus on feminist sport geography. I examine the “turn to affect” and insights from new materialism to unsettle several fixed couplings in sport, including sport/gender, sport/winning, competition/cooperation and elite/participatory. In this way I argue that, as well as attending to the places and spaces that form part of the ‘sport-assemblage’, a feminist sport geography with a focus on the spatiality of inequality is well suited to intervene and refigure these couplings.

With sport entangled in identity politics and new technologies (Farquharson & Marjoribanks 2003; Redhead 2016; Rowe 2016), the spatial context of inequality in women's and girls' sport matters for geographers, social scientists, and industry professionals alike. This is particularly the case as we continue to grapple with sexism, discrimination, and gender-based violence, despite increasing pathways and spaces (including virtual spaces) for women in the Australian sport landscape. In what follows, I take up the complex position of women in contemporary Australian sport by reflecting on recent examples of spatial

inequality, drawing on interview data from a larger project on the subject.¹ With these data, I aim to think methodologically *and* philosophically—‘thinking with theory’ as Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe it. Ethical clearance was gained through Griffith University and interviews were undertaken with senior administrators involved in developing and operating the AFLW. The multiple fragments of data form part of a complex *sport-assemblage*, laying flat traditional hierarchies in sport (for example, from national governing body, to state governing body, to community clubs, to social clubs, and so forth). This flat ontology, central to new materialist frameworks in geography (for example, Roberts, 2012) and cognate disciplines (for example, Fox and Alldred, 2017), supports a rethinking of the ways matter, including physical spaces and places where sport is experienced, shape subjectivities for women.

In the following section of this article I provide the impetus for my current research agenda and make visible the connections between sport, space and politics, in particular gender politics. This is followed by a section that outlines the ways insights from New Materialism and feminism can work through key impasses in sport geography, emphasising the vibrancy of matter and spaces. I then turn to a discussion of textuality and affect as a way of providing an example of the way these ideas can be deployed to analyse spaces and places where sport happens. The final section concludes, posing some key questions for sport geography, and, more significantly, suggesting some of the contributions a specifically feminist sport geography can bring to the discipline. The development of these ideas and arguments have only been made possible by the legacy of Fay Gale, AO, a trail blazer who opened up spaces previously only accessible to men. In delivering the 2017 Fay Gale Memorial Lecture at the Institute of Australian Geographer’s Conference in Brisbane, Australia, I was challenged to think in bold terms about my work in the field of sport, and its relevance beyond sport, across the various geographical subfields. In an interview with Kay

Anderson in 1997 Fay Gale emphasised a key point, that, ‘the interaction between culture and the environment is fundamental to geography’ (Gale, in Anderson, 1998, p. 368). This interaction is obvious in some fields (for example, rural, or urban geography), yet perhaps less visible, yet no less fundamental to sport. Like Fay Gale, my mission is an ongoing attempt at ‘trying to validate cultural geography within a scientific tradition’ (Gale, in Anderson, 1998, p. 368), and it is to these ends that this article contributes.

Space for women and sport: a named Sport Geography

In 2010, I entered the Business School at Griffith University to study for my PhD in the field of feminist leisure studies focusing on the sport of roller derby under the guidance of Professor Simone Fullagar, who introduced me to a key figure in the field, Betsy Wearing. Expanding on the concept of leisure to space or, more specifically, the Foucauldian-inspired concept of ‘heterotopias’ as sites of difference, Wearing (1998, p. 146) suggested that

both physical and metaphorical leisure spaces can act as heterotopias for struggle against and resistance to domination of the self and inferiorized subjectivities. They also provide a space for reconstituting the self and rewriting the script of identity.

This view of leisure as space resonated with the ways in which many of the women in my ethnographic work on roller derby in Australia spoke of their practice (Pavlidis, 2012; Pavlidis, 2013; Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014), yet on its own it was an insufficiently broad way of thinking. For space is not only a literal or imaginary place where objects and identity can be experienced differently, and one space is not distinct from another in a neat and limited way (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Rather, space is where politics of community, identity, and sexual difference can be reterritorialized. Inspired by the work of feminist geographers before me, my desire has always been, as Joanne Sharp (2009, p. 74) notes, ‘to challenge

instrumental reason as the dominant form of knowledge'. I came to understand everyday space as a site of feminist struggle, resistance, and negotiation, as well as of potential liberation, freedom, and transformation. It is inherently political, for it is in and through space that relations of power are resisted, negotiated, fought, and overcome. Conceiving space as open to the possibility of divergent meanings and transformation, while also political and imbued with power, enabled me to write women's experiences of roller derby as open ended: their stories were neither fixed nor stable, nor were they finished when the research was over. As Massey (2011, p. 11) writes in this regard:

in this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which may or may not be accomplished.

Since that time, I have understood sport as inherently spatial and political, and now seek to outline some of the possibilities for feminist sport geography to influence and even reconceptualise leisure and sport management, suggesting ways by which cultural geographers can progress the field. As women's sport continues to change to include those from grassroots through to elite and professional teams, it influences both participation trends and intervenes in the sport/media/industry complex (Fink, 2015; Maguire, 2004). It is in this context that I argue it is vital to develop how we conceptualise the "sport assemblage", accounting for the ways sport and its management are spatial and gendered in specific and persevering ways. In doing so, I take up new lines of flight that are perhaps unusual for geography, and in doing so I challenge what Rose (1993, p. 4) calls the 'masculinist' quality of geography.

Sport and spatiality go hand in hand—particularly in Australia. As does sport and gender, with sport being one of but a few fields of social life so clearly and definitively cut along gender lines. Despite the seemingly clear and direct relationships between sport, space and

gender, sport geography, and in particular feminist sport geography, is still thought of as being in an “establishment” phase. Several scholars have made significant contributions in the field of women’s sport (for example, Andrews 2016; Tonts 2005; Waitt 2003; Waitt & Clifton 2013; Waitt & Stanes 2015; Van Ingen 2004). Articles, such as Johnston’s piece on female body-builders began to interrogate the relationship between space and the body, exploring how the ‘hard core gym ... [and the] specific corporality of female body-builders ... [provide] a challenge to the stereotypical constructions of femininity and masculinity’ (Johnston, 1996, p. 328). This work provides an important starting point for my own ideas, yet again, the focus is on individual sports, rather than the team sports currently in focus in Australia. More recently in this journal, but still almost a decade ago, Edoardo Rosso (2008; 2009) highlighted the use of sport geography in his study of women’s soccer (football) in Adelaide. His work is important for demonstrating the ways in which sport geography can contribute to broader geographical debates, with a focus on social capital (Rosso, 2008; 2009).

Yet despite these examples sport geography is embedded in other sub-disciplines, which, I would argue, continues to marginalise feminist work in the area. While, for example, health geography and rural geography have their own streams at conferences such as that hosted by the Institute of Australian Geographers, sport geography remains outside the fold, despite the important insights to be garnered. My sense is that a named geography would provide a space for the sub-discipline to make theoretical, conceptual, methodological and *practical* advances, particularly as women enter spaces previously the sole domain of men, often for the very first time. As it stands, sport-geography, does not fit neatly into the “first order” sub-disciplines into which geography is currently organised. Sports geography cuts across urban, social, cultural, emotional, economic, land-use, health and other geographies. Having a named sports geography, such as that which I am arguing for here, would acknowledge the

important place of sports, particularly in Australia, where sports relate to global, national, and local contexts in powerful and meaningful ways.

Sports transform cities and rural areas alike. Just recently, 25,000 runners descended on Queensland's Gold Coast, where I live, for the airport marathon. Roads were closed and many locals took the opportunity to watch runners from around the world push their bodies to the limit. Waking early in the crisp early morning for the start of the race, there was an undeniable sense of excitement in the atmosphere as families wished loved ones good luck and the swarm of participants gathered at the starting line. In rural Queensland, there are examples such as the Cycle Queensland Tour, where over a thousand men, women and children cycle from town to town, stopping at day's end to camp and explore a new place (Cycle Queensland 2017). These temporary "tent cities" transform the landscape and have particular gendered affects (Fullagar & Pavlidis 2012). Melbourne brands itself as a "sport city" (Francis & Murphy 2005), as do many other places, and competition to host major or mega sporting events is fierce, despite the lack of evidence supporting any long-term legacies from such events (Horne 2007).

Then there are the other spaces where sport "happens": change rooms, school gyms, community centres, stadiums, boardrooms, clubhouses, sport equipment shops, fitness clubs and gyms, medical and health facilities, local parks and, increasingly, online. Historically, men have been the primary occupiers of these sport spaces and—with the exception of online spaces—remain in the majority in them.

Sportscapes have been created or envisioned predominantly as apolitical, inert surfaces that simply 'host' the practice. As Lefebvre and Enders (1976, p. 30) note, a planned space was assumed to be 'objective and "pure"; it was a scientific object and hence had a neutral character'; space was deemed 'innocent'. In the field of sports management, scholars writing about sporting facilities and venues tend to seek out an internal or driving force for

commercial success (for example, Greenwell, Fink & Pastore 2002), focusing on separate dimensions such as programs, opportunities for socializing and loyalty (Hill & Green 2012). The experiences of sport participants are sidelined in these studies and assumptions made as to the quality of and access to these spaces. In particular, gender relations and women's ongoing marginalization in these spaces do not receive a mention (see Sotiriadou, Wicker & Hill, 2016 for a recent exception). These studies of sport spaces assume sport and space to be apolitical and inert.

Many sporting facilities and venues are heavily subsidized by public funding, the rationale being that these facilities and venues represent economic value. In the United States, Crompton (2004, p. 42) has demonstrated that the

most prominent type of economic impacts presented by facility advocates invariable is the economic impact of money spent in the community by users of the facility ...

Economic impact is defined as the net economic change in a host community that results from spending attributed to the sports facility.

Crompton also notes that this core economic rationale comes up against public scepticism, leading to more complex arguments being put forward for ongoing public subsidies, including their ability to attract media coverage for a city, and hence attract more tourism to the area, and their ability to 'engender community pride which is an element in a community's quality of life' (Crompton 2004, p. 42). Studies such as this one begin to politicize the spatiality of sport; however, they fail to engage with geographical, nor feminist geographical insights.

Rosentraub and Ijla's (2008, p. 246) argument for thinking about sport venues as central to the development of social capital begins to acknowledge the vitality and potential of spaces other than as spaces of sports entertainment:

Facilities or public spaces create opportunities for people to congregate, the potential for relationships to be created exists. The relationships can become part of the social capital of a society that reduces feelings of social isolation while enhancing a sense of political and social unity.

Yet often the social good highlighted by sport management research is purely quantitative, and contributes little to understanding the cultures, contexts and experiences of sport (Coalter 2007; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell 2008). Without questioning the inherent “good” of sport, sport-management practices and research will continue to serve to justify and maintain the status quo, assuming a unified, masculine subject, apolitical spaces and negating or reinforcing sexual difference.

New materialism and the “sport-assemblage”

Spaces, like matter, are part of the complex assemblages that make up social life. They are emergent, contingent, and in flux, consisting of human and non-human relations. As Butler (2015, p. 65) states, ‘the body is less an entity than a living set of relations; the body cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living’. A feminist sport geography enables an analysis of the embodiment of women’s and girls’ sport that can account for its relations with infrastructural and environmental conditions.

According to Fox and Alldred (2017, p. 55), a new materialist perspective ‘rejects entirely any sense of structures, systems or underlying mechanisms, finding a basis for both power and resistance in the micropolitics of the affects that assemble “events”’. And, as Irigaray (1993, p. 32) notes, ‘women do not constitute, strictly speaking, a class’. Categorizations such as gender are ‘*aggregations* of dissimilar persons, rather than categories and collectivities of individuals that possess some foundational similarities to one another’ (Fox and Alldred 2017, p. 55; emphasis in original). Rather than taking concepts such as class,

gender, or sexuality as explanations for the way the world is, Fox and Alldred's (2017, p. 56) materialist approach conceives the social world as produced through the 'flux of assemblages and affects'. This is a focus that shifts away from the interior—some kind of driving force, such as patriarchy or hegemony—and on to what DeLanda (2006, pp. 10–11) terms 'relations of exteriority'. Reconceptualising agency in this way does not negate the political dimensions of class or gender, but instead enables a more contextual and spatial account of inequality, moving away from monolithic theories, towards more nuanced accounts of difference and multiplicity.

Here I take a specific example of women's and girls' sport in Australia as a sport-assemblage to help explain spatial inequalities, without seeking an internal or driving force. One of the key features of sport is its spatiality—whether on the field, track or court, or in the clubhouse, sport is *organized*. From a materialist perspective, a sporting organization can be conceptualized as an assemblage, comprising human and non-human relations (respectively, workers, managers, owners, fans, members, athletes, coaches, health and wellbeing support; and facilities, equipment, uniforms, transport, administrators and so on). As Fox and Alldred (2017, p. 58) note, an organization gains 'continuity (and the appearance of being a thing-in-itself) from the affects between these multitudinous relations'.

Rather than view sporting organizations, including facilities and venues, as somehow rigid and structural, a materialist approach helps one to view these assemblages as contingent and always contextual (Fox & Alldred 2017). This capacity is particularly important for sport, which is both organized and conceived of as a social institution (Martin 2004). As a social institution, sport is typified by masculine dominance, toughness, and the exclusion or marginalization of women. In this way, it is often referred to as a building block of society, 'apparently stable, pervasive and enduring' (Fox & Alldred 2017, p. 59), as well as 'controlling, obligating, or inhibiting' (Martin 2004, p. 1251). Social institutions help explain

the social world and form taken-for-granted rules about society (depending on the paradigm used). Those using a materialist approach question the stability and taken-for-grantedness of social institutions such as sport, and instead examine the repetitions of events over time.

From this perspective, feminist sport geography can support the incorporation of a range of relations—including the non-human—when scholars want to think differently about the spatiality of sport. Research in sport has failed to theorize the relations between clubhouses or facilities in sport in analyses of how women and girls experience inequality in sport, with venues and facilities somehow presented as inert, apolitical objects. Yet, with women's and girls' increasing entry into a range of sporting spaces, the sport landscape is undeniably changing. In this respect, sport journalist Simon Massey (2016, np) states, 'I'm confident that historians will look back at 2016 as a defining year in women's sport, an awakening to its untapped potential.'

But what is women's sports untapped potential, and how does or could it extend to girls? How—if at all—is sport transforming public and commercial spaces in ways that support diverse people to flourish? As Rowe (2017, n.p.) notes, 'Sport is not a magical space that transcends social inequalities ... it reproduces and even reinforces them.' Older people, people with disabilities, women, girls, people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and LGBTQI people are positioned as marginal to sport's "main stage". Access to sport for these people and communities can be a struggle, yet access to sport matters—particularly as an integral part of "cultural citizenship" in Australia (Rowe 2017).

Access to sport and physical culture spaces also matters for reasons beyond community and citizenship, including mental health and wellbeing; and employment opportunities (Fullagar, 2017; Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2014). Evidence mounts daily of the benefits of sport and physical activity for relieving stress, avoiding chronic health problems, and generally

coping better with contemporary life (see, for example, Eime, Harvey, Brown & Payne, 2010; Iwasaki *et al.* 2006). A feminist sport geography works towards a socially just and inclusive society, and its practitioners and scholars raise and examine important questions about women's experiences of sport in a range of different spaces in order to understand the nuances of power.

Spatiality, textuality, and affect in sport

I have argued for a focus on the affective relations of exteriority (Pavlidis and Fullagar, 2014; see also DeLanda 2006), looking at the interactions between bodies, objects, and spaces in sport, including the policies and rules that govern these assemblages. This is a move *away from* ideas around the autonomy of affect as proposed by scholars such as Massumi (1995) and towards feminist theorizations of affective practices. Scholars such as Wetherell (2013) and Ahmed (2004), for example, emphasize the entanglement of emotion and affect. Instead of viewing emotion as somehow too discursive or too linguistic, and privileging non-representational affects—which is difficult to do in a profession that uses writing as its primary form of communication—the feminist sport geography for which I argue highlights the importance of texture and atmospheres in thinking through the spatiality and assemblages of sport.

Reading the work of Sedgwick, Wetherell (2013, p. 358) writes that

textured sensations are a model for what should be central in social research—texture is perceived by the body and involves repetitive pattern. The experience is organized, yet that organization is inarticulate, felt and intuited, rather than systematised.

This conceptualisation of affect is differentiated from non-representational affects in that 'the experience is organised': it can be understood, yet it still accounts for embodiment in particular contexts (Wetherell 2013, p. 358). Space is textual, rough, smooth, patterned,

ordered, and so forth. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 477) state that ‘in a smooth space-time one occupies without counting, whereas in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy’.

The textuality of sport spaces

Just recently in Brisbane, there was a public example of what we might think of as a ‘tough’ space, where women were pressured to “play cool”—or perhaps “smooth” (Ford 2017).

Tegan George, a state political reporter for Channel Ten with over 4000 followers on Twitter, and two of her friends attended a boxing match between Manny Pacquiao and Jeff Horn at Suncorp Stadium, where they were subjected to hours of sexualized, gendered abuse from men sitting behind them. According to the women, none of the men sitting nearby intervened or offered support, although some asked ‘What did you expect at a boxing match?’ and told them to ‘Just calm down and enjoy the boxing’ (Ford, 2017, np). George (2017) shared a tweet in which she described the behaviour of one of the men just prior to security guards ejecting him and his associates—some of whom have now been banned from Queensland stadiums for two years. A particular sport-assemblage is thus created by the relations among Tegan George, her friends, the predominantly male audience at the boxing event, the men sitting behind her, the publicly-funded, industry-sponsored stadium, the virtual space of Twitter and responses from both men and women online, seating arrangements, government officials who decided to ban the men, the boxers and their entourage who were the reason for the event and the history of boxing.

Social media—increasingly used by women to call out instances of sexism and abuse—intervened in this boxing space in a particular way: whereas in the past the men may not have been banned, or even asked to leave, Tegan’s social media use and her influence (many of her followers were prominent television or radio personalities) reconfigured this space from

'rough', where the women were subjected to abuse, to a more complex assemblage. Although the majority of the audience were men and the boxers themselves were men, as were most of their entourage, social media (in this instance, Twitter) provided Tegan and her friends with a more enabling and networked space of men and women that supported a refiguring of subjectivity: Tegan and her friends could become more than sexualized objects, and the men delivering abuse were no longer just 'normal', but deviant and eventually excluded.

Affective atmospheres and sport

In my own work on the AFLW, environments and spaces were dominant themes in interviews (n=16). As one senior AFL sport administrator stated clearly in relation to the exclusion of girls and women from the AFL, 'There's attitudes, but there's also hard physical constraints ... and then there's that whole welcoming environment.' Many of the people I interviewed spoke about the importance of creating such environments. Two administrators in formal roles commented,

Don't put them [women or girls] on a little oval with one light and poor change rooms because they're not going to come back. Make them feel special, bring them in part of the club, all those sorts of things (State based administrator).

People have plenty of choices and if your club isn't providing the environment that people would want to be involved in then they will go elsewhere simply (National based administrator).

They also spoke about 'disgusting toilets' and the lack of change rooms or showers for women and girls. Others told stories of women who were actively excluded simply because of tradition—clubhouses that once held selection nights each Thursday continued to exclude women despite their growing numbers and contributions to clubs.

I have begun to think about sport environments as affective atmospheres, following Anderson (2009) and others. We can think about sport commentators talking about “tension in the air” or the “electric charge” of an event as two teams or players go head to head. But there are also the more mundane atmospheres: of cold showers, hard benches, dark carparks, and even rejection or unsupportive coaches and training (Ashmore 2017). Anderson (2009, p. 78) describes atmospheres as ‘collective affects that are simultaneously indeterminate and determine’ and asks ‘how to attend to collective affects that are not reducible to the individual bodies that they emerge from?’ This question is pertinent to sport-assemblages, and is especially relevant now as women’s and girls’ participation in sports such as AFL grows exponentially. How will atmospheres change? And what might these atmospheres produce? One poetic articulation of ordinary affects provides some insight into how we might start to think through the everyday transformations that are currently happening in sport:

Affects are not so much forms of signification, or units of knowledge, as they are expressions of ideas or problems performed as a kind of involuntary and powerful learning and participation ... ordinary affects highlight the question of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation. They’re not exactly ‘personal’ but they sure can pull the subject into places it didn’t exactly ‘intend’ to go. (Stewart 2007, p. 40)

The current wave of excitement and enthusiasm for women’s and girls’ sport in Australia is pulling coaches, participants, managers, parents, fans, and so forth into places where they had not “intended” to go. These ordinary affects are the product of decades of feminist activism and market imperatives to include women and girls in sport, as well as public health initiatives to get women and girls active, and they are influencing sport practices and sport spaces.

In very recent times, state governments around Australia have committed financial support to improve sporting facilities for women and girls. The Queensland State

Government (2017) has committed \$15 million, the Victorian State Government \$14 million (Premier of Victoria 2017), the South Australian Government \$10 million (*The Advertiser* 2017), and more has come from individual city and regional municipal governments. The tide is turning, and there are now opportunities for innovative research that might help to support the long-term sustainability of this change. It is also important that women's and girls' entry into sport is not made into a novelty, as can be seen with women's boxing and gridiron, or regarded as a burden on or distraction from men's sport.

Already in some interviews I have heard laments about reverse sexism from men who now have to work with what they term 'alpha women' and descriptions of how 'people used to just accept facilities as they are, now that ladies are involved they expect a better standard' [male participant]. Hence there are tensions in the affective atmospheres of sport. Clubs are opening their doors to women and girls, improving facilities and focusing on the creation of welcoming environments. But at the same time there seem to be resentments and challenges: the entrance of women into these spaces is fundamentally changing their "feel" and their texture.

Conclusion

Although women have been playing sport for centuries (Hargreaves 2002), their move into professional sports and their mass participation in community and club-based contact sports beg several questions: What is sport? What spatial dimensions are yet to be considered? And how might these spaces change in the coming years? As an institution, sport is often assumed to be inherently "good"—to be a way to learn teamwork skills, leadership and so on. But sport is not only this, nor is it simply a practice; rather, it is an affective assemblage. A new materialist perspective, according to Fox and Alldred (2016, p. 55), 'rejects entirely any sense of structures, systems or underlying mechanisms, finding a basis for both power and

resistance in the micropolitics of the affects that assemble “events”. This perspective is well suited to a feminist sport geography focusing on the spatiality of inequality.

Rather than accepting taken-for-granted notions such as patriarchy and hegemony as the causes of women’s and girls’ exclusion from sport (and indeed that of other marginalized groups), we can examine the relational assemblages of human and non-human flows, finding sustainable and workable interventions “in place”. Space is not apolitical, nor is it inert. Stadiums, change rooms, clubhouses, fields, sporting shops, boardrooms, and so on are more than vehicles of this thing called sport: they are implicated in what sport is and, importantly, in how sport feels and in what it can *do*.

How we understand sport is changing as women and other groups challenge long-held beliefs and practices about male hegemony. A feminist sport geography can reconceptualize “sport” as we know it—associations with national belonging, and cultural citizenship, sexuality and gender, and leadership and organization. By decoupling sport and masculinity, a focus on spatiality can get at the ways ‘matter matters’ in Barad’s (2003) words—the ways in which facilities, venues, and other spaces are part of the assemblages of sport in contemporary cities and towns. As one of the participants in my research stated:

Why the hell should we keep investing in these really expensive public infrastructure that only half the population can ever play on? And I don’t understand why that’s not been a bigger question. I remember the first time I’d ever seen the Olympic stadium with only women on the field was when it was all girls playing at half-time Auskick.

These are millions of dollars of public assets and women are excluded from them. And that’s not an issue of equality?

In “making space” for women in sport, a feminist sport geography can pursue a range of lines of flight, garnering new discoveries and pathways through the current surge of popularity.

Questioning assumptions about sport—as masculine, as social institution, as organization, as

inherently “good”—a feminist sport geography supports diversity and an openness to other ways of being in sport spaces.

Notes

1. This article draws from a larger qualitative project including interviews, media analysis and ethnography on women’s sport in Australia. The sample for this part of the project recruited participants involved in the administration (at any level, community, club, government, state office, or national) of the first season of AFLW (Women’s Australian Rules Football).

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