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Published

2022

Book Title

Motherhood and Sport: Collective Stories of Identity and Difference

Version

Accepted Manuscript (AM)

DOI

[10.4324/9781003140757-5](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003140757-5)

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Non-Motherhood and motherhood in sport

CHAPTER 4

Non-motherhood and motherhood in sport: Entangled relations of care

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Submitted: 1 May 2021

Abstract

In this chapter we explore the relations of care that are entangled with the material-discursive relations of motherhood, women and sport. Through our feminist new materialist approach, we explore how motherhood is valorised, and entangled with infrastructures of care, such as mentoring, or other gendered roles in clubs that are tied up with motherhood. Drawing on Barad's notion of diffraction as a methodology, along with post-qualitative inquiry, we explore these relations of care, through our writings as two sportswomen, one a mother (Adele) and one a non-mother (Wendy). Diffracting our stories through popular tropes we ask, what do notions of sacrifice, guilt, privilege and criticism *do* in relation to non-mothers and mothers in their sporting experience? We argue that if we hold onto the notion of sacrifice, for example mothers putting their participation on hold, then we risk perpetuating sport inequalities. Our research also highlights that there are many women athletes, who are not mothers, either by choice or not, and we need to be sensitive to these differences when researching mothers in sport. Womanhood and motherhood are often conflated, but are not the same.

Introduction

You're a caring, nurturing person.

You'd have grandchildren who play?

These two comments were made to me, the first author (Wendy a non-mother), by men, during the course of my 're-turnings (turning 'over and over again as a multiplicity of processes' (Barad, 2014, p. 168) to consider what it meant to be a non-mother or child-free in the place where I play sport. The first comment came from the president of the club I belong to and occurred in a phone call during which he was asking me to help coach a team on game day. The second was from a random stranger, in the club connected to the sports facility and was made in a conversation after a game. Both comments jolted me in quite unexpected ways, producing, and perhaps raising the level of discomfort I have felt as I have delved into how it feels to be a non-mother in the sports environment. As I discussed these feelings of discomfort with my co-author Adele, I similarly became highly sensitive to pronatalist ideals that conflate womanhood and motherhood (Graham et al., 2019). As a mother, Adele's feelings of discomfort, did not arise from pronatalist ideals, but rather from the pulls and tugs from her children when she left them to play sport or train. For me (Wendy) it seemed in my day-to-day intra-actions, so many things reminded me of my childless status, adding to my rising discomfort and agitation every time I re-turned to writing. As Fullagar, O'Brien and Pavlidis (2019) note most bodies sexed as female have the potential to become mothers, to grow and birth and nurture a child (Fullagar et al., 2019). Yet statistical surveys indicate the number of women who, either by choice or by circumstances, are non-mothers or child-free is rising, with 35% of women aged 25-44 not having children (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). At the same time, not being a mother is still considered unnatural or unwomanly (Rich

et al., 2011), which across private, public, societal, community and individual domains, produces “us” and “them” relations (Graham, et al., 2019).

For women who are mothers, another set of relations are produced, entangled in a different “moral terrain” (Fullagar et al., 2019). Normative ideals of a “good mother” conflate care and mothering in complex and entangled ways. Intensive mothering has become a common trope that places more demands on women to be ever present in their children’s lives (Damaske, 2013). Notions of sacrifice, and suffering sit alongside the valorisation of motherhood (Fullagar et al. 2019). Centred on “notions of the home, the interior ... while simultaneously entangled with exterior sociocultural concerns motherhood is materialised through the spacetime of increased surveillance and judgement” (Fullagar et al., 2019, p. 111). Motherhood and sport are complicated relations, with women negotiating social and cultural ideals surrounding good mother discourses, and juggling care and feelings of guilt in order to participate. At the same time motherhood is also suggested to give sportswomen an advantage through a sense of completeness that is not afforded childless sportswomen (Hodler & Lucas-Carr, 2016; McGannon, McMahon, Gonsalves, 2018; Walsh et al., 2018).

Juxtaposing these two entangled relations of womanhood, in this chapter we draw on a feminist new materialist approach (Barad, 2003, 2007; Fullager 2017) to explore the biological, material and discursive terrains of motherhood, non-motherhood, and sport. While the terms of non-motherhood, and childfree are contested, we deliberately stay with the concepts to trouble how differences get made. Our new materialist approach draws on Baradian (2003, 2007) notions of intra-action and entanglement. We also deploy Barad’s (2007, p. 811) notion of diffraction as a methodology that involves “reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter”. We begin with our theoretical approach and the entanglements and intra-actions of womanhood, motherhood and non-motherhood. We then

explore how these relations are re-produced through care intra-actions in sport. We move on to outlining our post-qualitative inquiry, to diffract relations of care in sport. In the final two sections we explore the entanglements of the two authors, Adele (mother) and Wendy (non-mother), in relations of care, valorisation, guilt and sacrifice in sport.

A Baradian feminist new materialist approach to motherhood, non-motherhood and entangled complexities

Fullagar (2020, p. 1) notes the value of “new materialist feminisms lies with the relational questions that reorient our thinking about what gendered bodies can ‘do’, how matter ‘acts’ and what ‘effects’ are produced through the production of difference”. A relational approach also emphasises that both the human and non-human are dynamic and vital forces that produce matter and meaning (Clark & Thorpe, 2020). This approach also allows us to begin to think about how humans are affective, sensing, feeling subjects, in which a range of affects or forces produce change. These forces can work to open up or shut down capacities. Affective relations surrounding mothers are deeply entwined with “cultural, psychological and biological narratives ... to produce highly gendered” and normalised expectations which in turn are entangled in notions love, care, entitlement, sacrifice valorisation and need (Fullagar, et al, 2019, p. 108). Sportswomen with children are also doubly valorised as being ‘strong’, but also positioned as a mother who can do it all (McGannon, et al., 2012). These complex entanglements of sacrifice, valorisation, and care produce different relations for mothers and non-mothers. For mothers sacrifice or selfishness can produce feelings of guilt (Appleby and Fisher, 2009). Non-mothers may be positioned differently and seen as being selfish, or even inadequate.

We also take inspiration from Barad’s (2003; 2007) work on intra-action and entanglement. The notion of intra-action is central to Barad’s (2007) new materialism and through it we can begin to think about how components of a phenomenon, such as sport and

gendered bodies have agential capacities that intra-act. Intra-action is quite different from interaction, where there is a distinction between entities before the interaction. In contrast entities are always entangled, and do not pre-exist prior to their intra-action, but they be/come or become different together, through their intra-action (Barad, 2007). Both the human and non-human intra-act through relations and bodies to produce phenomena such as motherhood and non-motherhood. An intra-action “enact cuts that cuts (things) together-apart (one move)” (Barad, 2015, p. 406). Intra-actions also produce exclusions through boundary-making practices. These boundary drawing practices are particular doings or performances, rather than being fixed or stable entities (Barad, 2007). Boundary drawing practices also work to produce exclusions, depending on the material-discursive intra-actions (Barad 2007). In this way boundaries are arranged and re-arranged through material-discursive intra-actions and are in a constant state of becoming with, and through entangled agencies. This raises questions about gendered bodies in sport – on the sports field, does it matter/how does it matter that a woman has/does not have children?

Motherhood, non-motherhood, care intra-actions and entanglements in sport

The notion of “maternal bliss” centered around the home and the duties of care associated with motherhood creates tensions for mothers who are elite athletes and wish to pursue their sporting interests (Appleby & Fisher, 2009; Hodler & Lucas-Carr, 2016; McGannon, McMahon, & Gonsalves, 2012), with motherhood presented as a barrier that women have to overcome. This often involves mothers juggling their caring relations in different ways in order to participate in sport resulting in a complex arrangement of negotiations that are both emancipatory and constraining (McGannon, et al., 2018). Other research on recreational athletes (Spowart, Hughson & Shaw, 2008) suggest that some mothers were able to redefine discourses of good motherhood to find ways to negotiate the

guilt and discomfort of leaving their child to engage with sport. This negotiation of guilt occurred through a range of strategies, such as valuing their needs, or resisting normative discourses of motherhood that helped them find the time to snowboard. This suggests that for mothers who play sport their participation is entangled in a complex arrangement of judgement, criticism and guilt, together with affective relations of pride and strength ('doing it all') often amplified when a mother is in the public sphere. For example, a mother may put her "caring" aside to be aggressive or competitive in the sport she is playing. Aggression and competitiveness may sit uncomfortably alongside being a "good mother".

Women's care intra-actions in sport are often centred on the gendered roles that they take on or which are available to them within sporting clubs (Evans & Pfister, 2020). These are roles such as working in the canteen, catering, minute taking (Sibson, 2010) or supporting roles with juniors such as "soccer mums", which emphasise how caring and motherhood are often synonymous. As Fullagar, et al. (2019, p. 109) note, discourses of motherhood and the notion that "the love a woman has for her child is somehow different or special ... circulate particular affects". Sacrifice and care are entangled in ways that can create expectations that care will include sacrifice. Within the context of this chapter, central to these affects are the notions of sacrifice, selfishness and guilt. Previous research has explored notions of guilt, particularly in the context of being a good mother, wherein women experience guilt when they place their needs ahead of the care and protection of their (Pedersen & Lupton, 2018, p. 58). However, this work has not extended to considering the "boundary" making practices that potentially place more value on sacrifice. These boundary making practices also valorise motherhood and caring to produce "us" and "them" (Graham et al. 2019) relations that are entangled to enact particular "cuts", such as those that produce mothers and non-mothers. Hird (2003, p. 6) notes that women who are non-mothers or child-free,

tend to be portrayed as white, tertiary educated, middle class women who prefer their own careers over raising children ... and are often constituted as desiring to be (like) men by devoting greater time to their paid careers and rejecting motherhood as an inadequate or less valuable contribution to society.

Yet this same discursive terrain can work to exclude non-mothers through stigma and discrimination (Graham, et al., 2019). Non-mothers also potentially face none of the barriers or expectations that mothers encounter when they choose to play sport. But what do notions of valorisation and sacrifice *do* to those women who are child-free or non-mothers? How do normative expectations of womanhood impact on those women who have either chosen to be child-free or unable to become mothers due to some biological or relationship “failure”? Does being child-free, or a non-mother, lead to feelings of being less valued or excluded because these women have no stories or experiences of motherhood?

Post Qualitative Inquiry and diffracting relations of care in sport

Fullagar (2017, p. 254) notes that post qualitative inquiry has “emerged out of desires to ‘do’ research that is critical and generative of different ways of knowing”. Producing different ways of knowing involves resisting what has become normative in qualitative research, the production of an authentic “human” experience, and instead focus on how matter, both human and non-human is felt through embodied experiences (Fullagar, 2017). Adopting a theoretical approach such as new materialism provides a way of producing new ways of knowing through engaging in the practice of thinking with theory. Post qualitative inquiry is an opportunity to explore the complexities of the world we live in through engaging deeply with theory (St. Pierre, 2019). If we fail to engage with theory, we are left with little else to think about in our analysis other than “normalized discourse that seldom explain the way things are” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 154). As Taguchi and St. Pierre (2016)

further explain, these theories orient both thinking and practice, which may or may not include traditional methods. Theory also allows the researcher to “*complicate*” their inquiry (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 7 italics in original). It is also pertinent to note that doing post qualitative research is not proscriptive, it shuns efforts at representation. Post qualitative inquiry, is also not a methodology, but rather is a form of inquiry, and as such there are no systematic processes on how to conduct research (St Pierre, 2019). When one engages in the process of inquiry one is attempting to “experiment and create something new and different” (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 6). It is through engaging with the various concepts of theory, as well as writing, reading and thinking that the researcher begins to see how to approach their inquiry (St. Pierre, 2021). To explore and experiment with creating something new we draw on our Baradian inspired approach that is in “relation with” intra-action, entanglement and diffraction. Thinking through these notions provides the opportunity to explore “different starting points, ways of engaging, moving through multiplicity” (Fullagar, 2017, p. 252).

As we have suggested our starting point is deploying Barad’s diffraction as a feminist analytic tool (van de Tuin 2014). Building on Haraway’s (1997) work, Barad (2007, p. 30) argues that this involves reading insights *through* one another to “illuminate the differences as they emerge: how differences get made, and what gets included and how these exclusions matter”. Diffraction is different to reflexivity or reflection, in that it involves the processing of ongoing difference. It also involves moving to “understanding the world from within and as part of it” (Barad, 2007, p. 88). Following the example of Handforth and Taylor (2016), we also diffractively read the material-discursive context of motherhood and non-motherhood through bodies of literature, such as popular tropes, and academic literature to create a critical dialogue, that explores “how differences come to matter *differently*, both within and outside of boundaries” (Clark & Thorpe, 2020, p. 21, italics in original). As Clark and Thorpe (2020,

p. 13) further argue, Barad's diffractive method "seeks to think through and with these multiplicities in order to yield alternative patterns and possibilities".

Another way of thinking through these multiplicities was to explore the "affective intensities" (Ringrose and Renold, 2014, p. 773) produced as we re-turned to consider the material-discursive context of motherhood and non-motherhood in sport. As we highlighted in the introduction Barad's (2014, p. 168) re-turnings suggest we went over, and over the affective intensities such as those of discomfort. Re-turning to the affective intensities of discomfort (Chadwick, 2021, p. 2), was indeed a "visceral and relational intensity that needed to be 'worked through'" (p. 3). Staying with the discomfort, our analysis explores the "forces of affect, entangled with recognised emotions" and what they "do" as they create particular kinds of intra-active relations that produce different ways of feeling (Fullagar, 2017, p. 253). Hence, rather than seek to produce a realist representational account, instead we used our creative critical dialogue as a way to "flesh out" other ways of thinking through meanings (van. Ingen, 2016, p. 477). This allowed us to think about the affects produced, such a discomfort and unease, as both authors "felt" their way through the entanglements and intra-actions of motherhood and non-motherhood with writing, thinking, reading and diffracting. Drawing inspiration from Fullagar et al. (2019, p. 1) we also seek "to invite readers to engage" with our writings "as a constituted process of reading-writing through visceral connections" to think and feel their way through the relations of non/motherhood in sport

Writing, thinking, reading, entangling, diffracting and intra-acting motherhood and non-motherhood: A creative critical dialogue through Wendy and Adele

Wendy: I approached this project as a sportswoman who is a non-mother. I have played various sports throughout my life but mostly I have played field hockey, in Queensland Australia, both as a child and then as an adult. I had a significant break of 10 years in my twenties after a serious back injury, sustained while playing. I returned to social hockey when

a friend invited me to come back and play. Realising how much I missed the sport, I re-discovered my passion, moving quickly back to first division and then once I turned 35, I also began playing representative hockey again, in Master's competitions at regional and state level. Now some forty years since first playing as a child, through and beyond my 'reproductive' years, I am still a passionate competitor, playing at representative levels, locally in Toowoomba Hockey's Women's Division 2, as well as a Mixed Masters (with men) competition.

Adele: I have two young children (aged 4 and 9) and work full time. I played field hockey in high school (for my high school in Victoria, Australia), starting when I was 12 and finishing at 16. We played in the North West Pennant Competition and were promoted to the Shield Competition after winning a grand final. Talent identification scouts came to watch our games but I was never chosen. I left hockey and found myself disconnected from sport and most other physical activities and it wasn't until the birth of my first child at 32 that I started playing hockey again (I had thought about it but never made the leap). I now play in the Division 3 Women's competition on the Gold Coast, training once or twice per week, with games each weekend.

We are both feminist scholars interested in exploring women's embodied experiences in sport through various theoretical approaches. We began with re-turning, and turning over, what our experiences of being a mother and non-mother feels like in field hockey. These re-turnings for Wendy were at times unwelcome, provoking a visceral agitation, an inability to settle and concentrate. Our critical dialogue also highlighted differences. Wendy did not feel the same tugs or pulls as Adele. As Wendy also engaged with Barad, and other literature about being a non-mother, what surfaced over time were feelings of extreme discomfort, and agitation, along with feelings of exclusion.

We began our dialogue with Wendy first writing about her re-turnings and then sending them to Adele for her to respond. This was an unfolding diffractive process, as we read our stories through one another, as well as literature, tropes of motherhood and non-motherhood, to see how our intra-action built on or differed from each other. We also probed and prodded the “affective intensities” (Ringrose and Renold, 2014, p. 773) produced through our writing, reading and thinking. Following Kuby and colleagues (2016) our thinking and relation with theory also shaped how we intra-acted with each other’s dialogue, with these intra-actions also affected our thinking and writing to create a critical dialogue. For example, when Wendy read Adele’s response to her dialogue, it prompted her to consider how her re-turnings were very disengaged and failed to express the discomfort and agitation she felt. These intra-actions also prompted the surfacing of a range of questions such as what did intra-actions during training and playing produce? What were the agentic capacities of discomfort, exclusion, babies/children on the sidelines, stories of motherhood, difficulties, sacrifice, guilt and pleasure and what did they produce? What did good mother and non-mother tropes do and in what ways were they entangled in sport?

An intra-active critical dialogue

Good mother and non-mother in sport (privilege and criticism, exclusion and discomfort)

Wendy: I’m not sure how I feel about good mother discourses. They seem so narrowly defined, so exclusionary and yet also valorised, judged, pulled in different directions by competing demands. I have not had to deal with any of these demands or pulls on my time and energy. It seemed that I was largely free to choose when and how often I would play sport and most of the time I really only had myself to consider, and then later my partner and husband. I certainly did not really “see” other women as mothers on the field, perhaps

because I wasn't one, although I may have felt a little annoyed when their children distracted them from the sidelines. When women spoke of the joys or difficulties of motherhood, did I feel excluded? At the time possibly, now most certainly. Was I also then excluded beyond the hockey field, because I did not fit in with other mothers? I am not sure, but thinking about possible exclusion raises points of discomfort as well as agitation. But probing at these feelings is like the ache of a phantom limb, a niggling or nagging sensation that unsettles me and yet resists pinpointing. I also now wonder if not being a mother was perhaps the reason that I embraced my identity as a sportswoman so intently.

Adele: It's interesting because I never embraced a conception of myself as an athlete or sportswoman until *after* I had children. I played hockey for a few years in high school and really enjoyed it, but still never thought of myself as "sporty". It is a constant push and pull on my feelings as my desire to play is entangled with my desire to stay with my children. They tug at my clothes and say (quietly or loudly depending on their mood), "don't go to hockey, mummy". The same when I go running, or to the gym. "Why are you going running, mummy?", asks the three year old in a sweet voice. I tell him, "It's good for me", or, "for exercise". Sometimes he accepts this response but other times he protests, "no, don't go, mummy". My body trembles. I rip myself away. It takes a few minutes to reorient myself, to shake off the feeling that I have upset someone I love in order to do this thing. It does feel selfish, but then, once I warm up, I relish in that feeling of being untouched, of being led (by the coach, or teammates, or the route taken, the trainer, the electronic voice telling me my pace, the referee blowing the whistle). I think sport is a place where I can be careless? carefree? Where I can care less about caring?

Wendy: I didn't think that I had practiced any mothering relations of care, until I thought about my representative trips, that involved being away from home for two weeks to attend national championships. These began when I was in my late thirties, and the women were the same age as I was and most had children at home. I am also a passionate cook and decided I could express care through assuming cooking duties to give the mothers a break whilst they were away.

Perhaps these caring relations intensified my awareness that I wasn't a mother. I can remember walking down the road with my training partner, who was also a non-mother, sharing our frustration that the mothers seem to have abandoned their decision-making capacities, which often resulted in the manager having to make decisions for them. This occurred across many trips and on many occasions, and I was acutely aware that it was nice to have another non-mother to share these feelings with, so again there was a sense of exclusion. As I have progressed further into my hockey career, I have also fallen into the role of mentor to the many younger players in my teams. With some, the age difference is so great, that I am old enough to be their grandmother, hence the comment at the opening of this chapter. Yet I have no stories of being a grandmother, and in some ways, this creates a longing that is difficult to describe or fathom ...

Adele: Oh gee, I think I abandon my decision-making capacities when I go to hockey. I just want someone else to take care of things, to be the "leader", to take responsibility. I am happy to go along, listen, take instructions. But I have nothing in terms of leadership. I am not on any sport related committees. My excuse when they ask? "I have young children". I am not sure if this is self-explanatory or not, but to me it makes perfect sense. My whole life feels

like a service, why would I take on more? But there are some women with young children who do take on many roles and responsibilities in the club.

I also find that an “uncaring” attitude is helpful in my position as a defender. The player I am marking never likes me sticking to them like glue, not letting them out of my range, intercepting their every move. I feel their annoyance, frustration and sometimes anger emerge in our encounters. But I don’t care. It’s my “job”.

Sacrifice

Wendy: Do I feel less valued because I am not a mother, and haven’t made the same sacrifices, why should we even be thinking about sacrifice? It was only when I went away on those representative trips that I really heard about or took notice of the sacrifices women had made to be able to leave their families to play hockey. Because of this they were much more inclined to take advantage of every moment they had to focus on themselves for a change, to let go of those responsibilities, and to think about and enjoy their sport. It was all about the hockey. While I shared this enjoyment and commitment, somehow it felt different, and I can’t really even describe how it felt different. Was it feelings of exclusion, or a sense of loss and disconnection, emphasizing my status as a single woman without children? Or was it a sense of hollowness, I did have family to share my victories and losses with, but again this did not feel the same.

Adele: There are sacrifices to be made. Or maybe not sacrifices but decisions. I think sometimes it feels like every decision is the wrong one. To have children or not. To play sport or not. To go away to play or not. Sacrifice and suffering seem tied up with motherhood in a way that is difficult to disentangle. There are little people for whom I am their world. This feels like a huge responsibility. Though in the end how influential will I be? Being a

mother is something that I am always becoming, not only something that I do. It is the inextricable entanglement between being, becoming and doing that leads to my guilt. Though I am a mother, there are many moments when I am not “mothering”. The actuality of “mothering” is hard to pin down. A quiet moment together on the couch. Organizing birthday parties, remembering special dates, listening to friendship troubles... are these things mothering? Sport doesn't really get in the way. But in my insecure moments – when the children are crying or screaming – I question this. I see other mothers who claim to have no time for sport or their own leisure and who prioritise being early for school drop off and pick up, who choose not to send their children to childcare, who would never leave their children for a night or a week...Perhaps I am sacrificing too much in my pursuit of a sporting life? Perhaps I want too much?

Discomfort

Wendy: I guess all of these previous discussions have led me to feelings of discomfort, an uneasy and disquieting affect, that I didn't want to explore. These feelings of discomfort have surfaced repeatedly, and in rather unwanted ways, and at one point, in the mire of a migraine, I felt that I really did not want to push further into my discomfort of non-motherhood. I questioned the relation between my discomfort and my sporting involvement, how were the two entangled, what intra-actions produced these affects? As Chadwick (2021) suggests “[a]ffects ‘turn us on’ or ‘turn us off’ to certain lines of thinking, conceptualising, knowing and making sense”. As I struggled to make sense of these affects, it also seemed important that I “stay with” (Chadwick, 2021, p. 8) the discomfort. Chadwick (2021, p. 9) suggests that this involves, “dwelling on its textures, implications, viscosity and resonances”. Even writing about this call to delve deeper into discomfort, is itself discomforting.

Adele: It is uncomfortable to take up a position not meant for you. Like the position of athlete which wasn't meant for women. Motherhood is a position meant for women. So I hear Wendy's discomfort. Stories of women in sport, in the media, popular press and online forums, often highlight their status as mothers – as if that was the only reason women were previously denied or limited access to certain sporting competitions. Other stories emphasise pride in sportswomen's lesbian or queer sexuality and the ways sport was a space where they could be themselves (Waldron, 2016). There is a silence when it comes to other women. Women without children. Trans women. Women with disabilities. The discomfort I feel when I walk away from my children to practice sport lifts as soon as I am away from their cries. I shake it off. They are safe. And I am respected for my efforts. My "sacrifice" is known, visible or at least intelligible to others. There is some comfort in that. Perhaps that is why I didn't fully embrace sport until I became a mother.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, we sought to explore how the material-discursive relations of non-motherhood and motherhood were entangled and intra-acted with sport practices and sport environments. Pronatalist discourses can privilege motherhood and work to produce feelings of exclusion and discomfort for women who are non-mothers. Mothers may feel the tugs and pulls of their children, and other caring responsibilities, yet these feelings "fit" within material-discursive notions of normative womanhood. While they may experience feelings of sacrifice, guilt and discomfort, which can work to exclude mothers, it is different from the discomfort non-mothers experience both in the sporting community and more broadly. Just as we need to recognise the "complexities and multiplicities associated with moving motherhood and sport" (Clark & Thorpe, 2020, p. 22), so too we need to understand and recognise the complexities and multiplicities for women and gender diverse people who are not mothers.

While we have focused here on the critical conversations of the co-authors, a post-qualitative approach could be extended to explore the affective intensities produced for other women who are mothers and non-mothers, at elite and recreational levels of sport as “way of thinking with and through ... moving bodies” (Fullagar, 2021, p. 118) and co-creating a vision of sport that is more inclusive for all. This might also be imagined through a different theoretical lens, as well as different creative approaches such as van Ingen’s (2016) use of paintings to explore a gendered boxing program or Fullagar’s (2021) body mappings through The Confidence Project. Thinking beyond sport, post-qualitative inquiry might be deployed to think through what pronatalist relations do in the workplace, where choice, biology and expectations are entangled and intra-act in complicated and exclusionary ways.

Perhaps as Hird (2003) and other feminists have since suggested we also need to challenge pronatalist ideals that offer few alternatives. Instead, we might begin to trouble and destabilise dichotomies (Barad, 2014), to think about being child-free as offering radical opportunities for women’s becomings. Certainly, being child-free, as is being a mother, is just one part of the multiplicity that is woman. “Suffering”, as in having to sacrifice opportunities to play sport because of children, or feeling discomfort around not being a mother in sport, might be generative of new modes of being and becoming in sport where “care” is uncoupled from femininity, widening the margins of manoeuvrability for gendered subjectivities in sport. As women gain more autonomy within sport assemblages, including in leadership positions, normative notions of womanhood and motherhood will also potentially change. Resisting or refusing these norms opens up the possibility to “break with mechanical patterns of repetition, deviating from, re-signifying, and sometimes quite emphatically breaking those citational chains of gender normativity, making room for new forms of gendered life” (Butler, 2014, p. 8). Post-qualitative inquiry provides one way of opening up gendered subjectivity to more-than-human entanglements within sport and beyond.

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