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Affect and emotions in sports work: A research agenda

Abstract

Affect and emotions are integral to everyday social life, and they have, in recent years, been the subject of increased sociological theorising. Despite significant mainstream advances in the study of affect and emotions in formal and informal organisations, sports work is largely understood and practiced as a technocratic, disembodied, and linear activity. Indeed, while an embryonic body of literature has provided useful insights regarding the micropolitical dimensions of sports work, the role of affect and emotions and their related implications for sports workers remain little understood. To attend to this lacuna, this paper brings together in conversation select theorisations of affect and emotions to highlight how they might be productively drawn upon to a) advance our understanding of sports work and, relatedly, b) to promote the development of more ethical sports work practices on the other.

Keywords: affect, emotions, sports work, ethics, wellbeing

Introduction

Social life is imbued with affect. Every interaction with others can influence our emotional state, and affect, in turn, plays an important role in the way we form judgements and behave in strategic social situations (Forgas and Smith 2007, 146).

To move past the cogito is not to reject the existence of emotion; instead, such a move suggests that emotions never spring from within a body but are produced through a circulating relationality between and among bodies. This is affect — dispersed subjectivity, posthuman emotion so diffuse it travels through crowds, up mountains, and down spines (Robinson and Gutner 2018, 112).

As the above quotes illustrate, affect and emotions are integral to social life (Harris 2015) and increasingly recognised as important areas of study in mainstream sociology (Ahmed 2014; Bericat 2016; Burkitt 2014). Amongst other outcomes, the turn to affect and emotions in social science research has enabled a productive re-centering of the material body and relationality (Fotaki et al. 2017; Stark 2016). As Wetherell (2013, 349) stated, the study of affect and emotions draws attention to “the interweaving of the material, the social, the biological and the cultural”, thus, enabling fruitful explorations of “processes of co-joint figuring and articulation”, which disrupt traditional modernist dualistic ways of thinking about the boundaries between mind and body, nature and culture, and human and non-human bodies.

Within organisation studies, affective theorising has been productively deployed in a broad range of settings and in pursuit of varying aims and objectives. These include, for example, an examination of how certain emotions might be cultivated in support of anti-oppressive pedagogies within different pedagogical contexts (Zembylas 2013) and the emotional work/labour associated with pastoral and care professions (e.g., teaching, social work, counselling, nursing; Grootegoed and Smith 2018). Central to affective studies is a renewed emphasis on affect and emotions as important “ways of knowing, being, and doing” (Pile 2010,

6) and a recognition of the need to push back against the ever-increasing quantification and rationalisation of all aspects of social life associated with a dominant neoliberal logic (Charteris et al. 2019; Gane 2012). Concurrently, feminist organisation scholars have turned to affect and emotions to map, critique, and initiate change in relation to organisational ethics and gender equity and diversity within organisations (Kenny and Fotaki 2015; Vachhani and Pullen 2019). Indeed, such work has, in part, been motivated by a heightened awareness of the connection between affect and emotions and the reproduction of unequal relations of power-knowledge, as well as the need to contend with the affective dimensions of social change to develop meaningful organisational change (i.e., that which goes beyond surface-level rhetoric) (Fotaki et al. 2017; Van den Brink and Benschop 2018).

Despite these significant advances made by scholars in the parent discipline, reductionist depictions of sports work as a technocratic, disembodied, and linear activity continue to dominate scholarship and shape how sports work is understood and practiced (Potrac et al. 2017a; Roderick et al. 2017; Williams and Manley 2016). This dissonance has motivated some sport scholars to pursue affective lines of inquiry — for instance around the emotional labour of sports work (Magill et al. 2017; Potrac et al. 2017a), the ill/wellbeing consequences of certain emotional enactments and embodiments for individual sports people and organisations (Avner et al. 2014; Nelson et al. 2013) or the way sports workers actively perform and regulate their identities through affective relations with others (Pavlidis 2020). While this emerging body of literature has provided useful initial insights regarding the micropolitical, emotional and affective dimensions of sports work, this knowledge base remains embryonic, with little systematic consideration of the role of affect and emotions or related implications for sports workers (Potrac et al. 2017b; Ref redacted in press). For example, among a plethora of potential directions for

such scholarship (see Roderick et al. 2017; Potrac et al. 2017b), there remains much to be understood about the emotions associated with navigating the precarious working conditions of professional sport, how sport workers manage their own and attempt to influence others' emotions, and the emotional support given (or not) at home and in the workplace.

The purpose of this paper is to bring together in conversation select theorisations of affect and emotions to highlight how these might be productively drawn upon to advance our understanding of sports work on the one hand and promote the development of more ethical sports work practices on the other. For clarity, in this paper we draw on Roderick and Colleagues (2017, 100) broader definition of sports workers as “sport industry employees who are associated with the production of sport at all levels of performance”, including elite and professional athletes, student-athletes, sport managers and coaches, sport scientists, sport organisation leaders and administrators, coach educators and sport volunteers, amongst many others. As such this broad definition of sports work extends beyond a narrow focus on sports industry workers who receive monetary compensation to also include those who receive other forms of (less tangible) compensation such as a sense of fulfilment, belonging, and self-actualisation – what has otherwise been labelled as ‘psychic’ income (Roderick et al., 2017).

In pursuit of the above aim, we address the following driving questions: (a) how can various theorisations of affect/emotions and associated methodologies help us to critically explore the material-discursive, interactional, and performative dimensions of emotional and affective experience in sports work? And (b) How can an engagement with affect/emotions and affective methodologies promote positive social change through the development of more ethical sports work practices and relations of power-knowledge in various sporting contexts? While we acknowledge that this paper is inevitably a partial and limited discussion of select theorisations

of affect and emotions, its value lies in mapping the alignments and divergences of various affective traditions while emphasising what these can respectively offer to the study of sports work. In doing so, this paper locates itself within a broader call to strengthen an ‘e/affective’ sociology of sport (Rinehart 2010).

In the first section of this paper, we review some key conceptualisations of affect and emotions based on select theoretical and paradigmatic traditions. Here we draw attention to their similarities and differences, strengths and limitations, tensions and generative possibilities. Secondly, we illustrate some of the productive ways in which these conceptualisations have been taken up in the sociology of sport and sports work to date. Finally, we conclude by summarising key points and advancing an initial research agenda to enrich our understanding of the affective dimensions of sports work.

Conceptualising emotions and affect: Mainstream perspectives

Research into emotions, affect, and feelings can arguably be subsumed under the broader umbrella of ‘affective lines of inquiry’ (Ashkanasy et al. 2017; Knudsen and Stage 2015). In bringing these concepts together under this umbrella, our intention is not to reduce or conflate these terms with each other, but rather to address some conceptual confusion while also advancing a research agenda into the affective dimensions of sports work. In doing so, we subscribe to Knudsen and Stage’s (2015, 3) argument that,

The development of affective methodologies for research should be regarded as an interesting zone of inventiveness, a zone raising reflections about what ‘the empirical’ produced tells us about the world and about the research setting, and a zone allowing us to generate new types of empirical material and perhaps to collect material that has previously been perceived as banal or unsophisticated.

The concepts of emotions and affect are sometimes used interchangeably, and other times articulated as separate and distinct (Fotaki et al. 2017). As we go on to detail, there is no

definitional consensus on these concepts, nor on how these should be used (or not) conjunctively. Indeed, emotions and affect have been variously defined and in turn understood as biological, psycho-social, social, discursive, pre-discursive, pre-cognitive, pre-personal, material-discursive, and so on phenomena depending on researchers' respective theoretical perspectives and ontological positionings (Pile 2010; Ref redacted in press). We begin with a review of some key sociological perspectives in the study of emotions.

Sociological perspectives in the study of emotion

For sociologists, emotions are an essential feature of our everyday lives (Harris 2015; Jacobsen 2019). Indeed, Harris (2015, 3) eloquently noted that while “they are often portrayed as less interesting and important than thinking and acting, emotions are intricately connected to our daily thoughts and behaviours. They sustain or threaten our most valued relationships and identities”. Sociologists, of course, recognise that emotions are multifaceted entities (i.e., they have biological, neurological, and psychological dimensions), however they focus their investigative efforts on examining the social, relational, and cultural dimensions of individual and collective emotional experience (Bericat 2016; Harris 2015). Here, researchers have utilised a variety of theoretical frameworks to illuminate how a wide range of emotions (e.g., anger, fear, guilt, joy, and pride, and fear, among others) are produced, embodied and enacted in and through our relations with others (Bericat 2016). Such inquiry has also provided important insights into the consequences of emotional experience for individuals and groups, respectively (Bericat 2016; Ref redacted in press).

To date, the sociological examination of emotions has been characterised by theoretical plurality (Bericat 2016; Stets and Turner 2014) and includes, among others, the application of symbolic interactionist, dramaturgical, exchange, ritual, structuralist, and poststructuralist

theorising. In this section, we pay particular attention to the symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical theorising adopted by interpretive researchers. Drawing on the ground-breaking thought of Mead (1934) and Cooley (1964), symbolic interactionist theorising considers the ways in which emotional experience is interwoven with matters of socialisation, identity, and the self (Bericat 2016; Turner 2009). Here, emotions are positioned as the mediating force between Gestalt and cybernetic ideas about the self (Turner 2009). In this case, the former refers to individuals seeking consistency and congruence both in their cognitions of the self and in their cognitions about others' responses to the self (Turner 2009). In contrast, the latter addresses the ways in which individuals emit gestures that are consistent with the self, engage in role taking, actively interpret others' responses to these gestures, and, finally, make adjustments to their behaviour when the responses and feedback of others are inconsistent with their conceptions of the self (Stets and Trettevik 2014; Turner 2009). Within symbolic interactionist theorising, emotions such as anger, distress, pride, and shame are inextricably tied to an individual's efforts to confirm and sustain the image that they have of themselves (e.g., self-concept), as well as the specific identities that they occupy in their interactions with others (e.g., role identity; Bericat 2016; Stets and Turner 2014; Turner 2009). For example, guilt, shame and embarrassment are activated when individuals consider their actions to deviate from accepted norms, leading them to feel obliged to engage in corrective behaviours (Stets and Turner 2014; Turner 2009).

Dramaturgical theorisations of emotion, on the other hand, have their roots in the foundational scholarship of Goffman (1959, 1967) and Hochschild (1979, 1983). From Goffman's perspective, emotions such as shame and embarrassment are the products of inappropriate or unsuccessful presentation of the self to an audience. In order to avoid such emotional experiences, Goffman highlighted several ways in which individuals and groups might

strategically utilize cultural scripts (e.g., ideologies, norms, and values), expressive equipment (e.g., objects, props, and scenery), and dramaturgical techniques (e.g., circumspection, discipline, and loyalty) to productively manage and navigate their social encounters with others (Scott 2015; Turner 2009). In building upon Goffman's original insights, Hochschild (1979, 1983) developed the concept of an emotion culture. For Hochschild, emotional culture is composed of emotional ideologies (i.e., what are considered to be appropriate attitudes, feelings, and emotional responses) and the various ways in which these ideologies are manifest or made concrete in social life. The latter, she argued, consists of framing rules (i.e., what interpretations and meanings are to be found in a social situation), feeling rules (i.e., what emotions are to be felt, to what intensity, and their valence on a continuum of positive to negative), and display rules (i.e., which emotions are to be overtly expressed in a social situation or encounter) (Charmaz et al. 2019; Turner 2009). Importantly, her theorising has also illuminated the disjuncture between emotional cultures and the actual emotions that employees in service-driven occupations experience in capitalist societies. For example, she coined the term 'emotion work' to conceptualize the ways in which employees use impression management techniques (i.e., deep and surface acting) to manage their emotional demeanour (Charmaz et al. 2019; Hochschild 1983). For those interested in other sociological orientations, we recommend the following sources (Barbalet 2000; Burkitt 2014; Heaney 2019).

Theorisations of affect

Despite its fleeting and elusive nature, affect has, similarly to emotions, assumed a growing importance in recent social science research (Markula 2019; Probyn 2010). While definitions of affect vary considerably from one theoretical orientation to the next, one understanding of affect which is often foregrounded is that of affect as a 'force' or 'intensity'

that circulates within and amongst bodies (Coleman and Ringrose 2013; Markula 2019). This relational and networked understanding of affect as a fluctuating “capacity to affect and to be affected” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 257), at times increasing and at times decreasing depending on various material-discursive conditions, can be traced back to Baruch Spinoza in the 1600s.

Affect has also been central to recent theoretical developments (e.g., posthumanist and new materialist theorisations) which arguably take the concept of ‘relationality’ one step further by emphasising the affective capacities of all bodies — both human and non-human (Braidotti 2013). The novelty of new materialist theorisations is disputed and the terminology contentious and problematic — not the least because its claims to ‘newness’ neglects the insights of feminist, queer, critical race and disability scholarship and acts to displace and erase the contribution of Indigenous scholars who have long promoted the notion of nonhuman agency while critiquing dominant anthropocentric conceptualisations (Hokowhitu 2021; Thompkins 2016). Despite these more than valid critiques, new materialist and posthumanist theorisations do promote important, arguably more ‘ethical’ understandings of agency tied to the notion of ‘a more-than-human’ agentic assemblage (King 2020; Thorpe et al. 2021). They also offer important conceptual tools which usefully extend those deployed within interactionist and poststructuralist (Foucauldian) theorisations by simultaneously de-centering the human subject and foregrounding the entanglements of the affective, material, and discursive in the production of social life (Baxter 2020; Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018). As Thompkins (2016, 2) rightfully argued, “the timelessness of this concern for a species quickly headed towards and in fact already mired in ecological disaster and multiple-species genocide cannot be overstated”.

One of the key debates or schisms in affect studies centers on the relationship between

affect and emotions partially discussed in this article (Knudsen and Stage 2015; Markula 2019). Proponents of affect as resolutely distinct from emotions (e.g., Manning 2010; Massumi 1995) have tended to draw on a Deleuzoguattarian (1987, 1994) theorisation of affect as a pre-discursive and pre-personal phenomenon that goes beyond and exceeds language. Some of the affordances of this theorisation of affect are its renewed focus on, and expanded understanding of relationality as well as its positioning of the body — no longer as object — but as ‘an event of becoming’ (Coffey 2013, 6). However, this articulation of affect as separate and distinct from emotions has also drawn criticisms from some feminist scholars (e.g., Wetherell 2013, 2015) who have argued that it promotes unhelpful dichotomies between the mind and the body and cognitive and autonomic processes. Instead Wetherell and other scholars (e.g., Ahmed 2014) have preferred an articulation of affect that does not draw such a sharp distinction between affect and emotions, arguing that this ‘softer’ distinction is a more pragmatically useful conceptualisation which avoids reinforcing mind/body and inside/outside dualisms. Whether one agrees in the validity of these critiques, (see for example Markula 2019, for an in-depth response to Wetherell), the distinction between these different affective strands is a critical one as it carries important methodological implications for researching and ‘tracing’ affect and emotions empirically (Knudsen and Stage 2015). Therefore, in researching emotions and affect within the context of sports work, it is important to be cognisant of some of these paradigmatic differences, tensions, and (in)compatibilities and their methodological implications. At the same time, in this paper we wish to encourage sports scholars to ‘work the edges’ both within and across paradigmatic boundaries as we believe along with others (e.g., Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018) that sports scholars who study emotions and affect are exceptionally well positioned to do so. In doing so we subscribe to Denzin’s (2010, 422) call for new paradigm dialogs which allows for,

amongst other things, “the incorporation of increasingly diverse standpoints, the subversion of dominant paradigms and the pursuit of progressive politics”. In the next section, we review existing literature addressing emotion and affect in sports work.

Researching emotion and affect in sports work: What do we know?

As previously mentioned, research into the emotional dimensions of sports work remains embryonic (Potrac et al. 2017b; Ref redacted, in press) with most studies continuing to depict sports work as a largely rational and dispassionate endeavour. As a result, the role of emotions in shaping sports workers’ learning and working experiences and the emotional management and labour associated with sports work are, by and large, poorly understood. Nevertheless, this gap in the literature is beginning to be addressed by a handful of scholars (e.g., Gale et al. 2019; Hickey and Roderick 2017; Magill et al. 2017; Potrac et al. 2012, 2017a; Stamp et al. 2021; Thompson et al. 2015) who have predominantly drawn on the ideas of interactionist and relational theorists to examine the emotional and micropolitical dimensions of sports work. For instance, in “Passion and paranoia: An embodied tale of emotion, identity, and pathos in sports coaching” Potrac and colleagues (2017a) examined the embodied and emotional experiences of a coach (also the lead author) within the context of an amateur women’s football team through the works of Burkitt (2014) and Scott (2015). In doing so, the authors emphasized the interconnections between emotion, identity, and embodied experience. Similarly, in “I found out the hard way: micropolitical workings in professional football”, Thompson and colleagues (2015) drew attention to the emotional management and labour involved in the micropolitical experiences of a fitness coach within a professional footballing context. Central to this body of work is a call for sport scholarship to recognise the role of emotions in shaping sport workers’ experiences, as well as for professional development frameworks (e.g., coach education and certification) to move away

from hyper-rationalistic and sanitised accounts to more adequately reflect the emotional dimensions and micropolitical realities of sports work.

While the emotional dimensions of sports work remain underexplored, conceptualisations of affect in sports work are even scarcer albeit increasingly taken up in the broader context of sport and physical cultures, Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018; Munro-Cook 2021; Newman et al. 2020; Pavlidis and Fullagar 2014; Pavlidis 2020; Roy 2014; Thorpe et al. 2021). Here a focus on affects has enabled sport scholars to challenge and disrupt various unifying discourses (for example, those which position the professionalisation of women's sport as a wholly positive and progressive phenomenon associated with women's empowerment; Pavlidis 2020). It has also enabled a productive re-centering of materiality and relationality in sports work (for example, Munro-Cook's (2021, 283) study of affect and materiality in the WNBA which set out to examine the circulation of affect within WNBA arenas and how "affective responses are deliberately designed and generated, as the built environment, production values, the crowd, and player's bodies work together to create an arena experience which can either help or hinder the physical capacities of WNBA players". Finally, a focus on affects has afforded sport scholars a productive space in which to rethink and experiment with research approaches resulting in both the 'reworking of traditional research methods' as well as 'inventive experiments' (Knudsen and Stage 2015). Some of these approaches have included returning to existing datasets to draw out previously underexplored material and affective dimensions of phenomena (for example, Clark's (2020) revisiting of her doctoral dataset through Baradian concepts to tap into the materiality and liveliness of the ballet body and its affective capacities) or the reworking of traditional fieldwork techniques such as participant observations and interviews in sporting contexts (for example, Baxter's (2020) methodological centering of the boxing gloves in her participant observations of

female boxers in the UK as a means to draw attention to the affective capacities of everyday objects and the deeply entangled and politicised relationship of bodies and objects). For other scholars, the turn to affect has involved a more radical departure from traditional qualitative research approaches (Lather and St Pierre 2013; MacLure 2013) including embracing the affordances of creative and arts-based research methodologies (Hickey-Moody 2013; Wood and Brown 2011). Importantly, the turn to affect has not only spurred a proliferation of reworked and inventive approaches to research data generation, it has also raised important considerations related to researcher subjectivity and positionality, research ethics, and modes of representation, amongst others (Fullagar 2020; King 2020) — in other words, it has encouraged scholars to question and reconsider the very foundations of their approach to knowledge production (Lather and St Pierre 2013; MacLure 2013). In the following final section of this manuscript, we outline what we consider to be four promising affective lines of inquiry to enrich our understanding of the affective dimensions of sports work.

Future research directions

The four broad research directions outlined below are by no means exhaustive and were chosen to illustrate how the pursuit of affective lines of inquiry from different paradigmatic and theoretical traditions could support sport scholars in developing a more nuanced understanding of sports work and the contemporary issues faced by sports workers. The first two research directions draw on a symbolic interactionist conceptualisation of emotions and extend theorising into the relationship between emotions, identity performance and emotional management in sports work. The final two interrelated research directions draw on poststructuralist, decolonial, and Indigenous feminist theorising to highlight how a focus on affect can extend theorising into processes of social reproduction and change as well as the development of more ethical sporting

practices.

Emotions and identity performance of sports workers

Although the concept of identity continues to be at the heart of much inquiry within the sociology of sport subdiscipline (e.g., Gale et al. 2019; Hickey and Roderick 2017; Joncheray et al. 2016; Jones 2006, among others), there has been little consideration of the ways in which emotions can act as markers of adequacy in identity performance (Serpe and Stryker 2011). That is, how emotions might tell individuals that their role performances are adequate or, indeed, inadequate (Serpe and Stryker, 2011). Potential avenues for developing such scholarship in the sociology of sport, as well as contributing to the wider examination of emotions through sport, include, then, critically exploring the connections between emotion and (a) negative/stigmatised identities, and (b) multiple identities, as well as (c) within and across social encounters (Ref redacted in press; Stets and Trettevik 2014). Similarly, taking inspiration from the interactionist work of Grills and Prus (2019), other related lines of inquiry include considering how sports workers emotionally experience the identity disruptive aspects of organisational life, such as a) status loss and being discredited, b) losing control over how one works, c) being reprimanded, dismissed, or made redundant, d) encountering restrictions on access to resources, projects or, indeed, other people, and e) relocation, redeployment or reassignment (inclusive of promotion, demotion, or being ‘moved sideways’).

Equally, Scott’s (2018, 2019) focus on the unmarked also offers fruitful avenues to examine connections between identity/role (non)performance and emotions. Specifically, her attention to the mundane and often unnoticed ‘non-features’ of everyday social life (including disidentification, inactions, non-performed roles, and people’s silences, absences or invisibility) may assist in the examination of connections between emotions (such as embarrassment) and

(non)actions such as politeness rituals (e.g., apologies or requests) or the use of subtle and understated gestures (e.g., averted eyes, turning away) in sports work. Moreover, Scott's concepts could provide a useful frame to investigations of emotions such as relief, regret, shame, and dread arising in, or associated with, decision avoidance and sport workers' reflections on the potential outcomes of alternative courses of action that are/were available to them in the doing of their dynamic work.

Attention to the emotional dynamics of sports work would also help to address a paucity of research on combinations of emotions and their temporal sequencing in mainstream sociology (Bericat 2016). Emotions rarely occur in isolation, and even those often assumed to be mutually exclusive can occur in complex blends (Jasper 2014). Recent research has highlighted how sport workers are enmeshed in webs of relations, both within and beyond their immediate sport organisation (Hall et al. 2021). Here, decisions and actions taken by a person to achieve certain beneficial ends in one context may inevitably result in negative consequences for those they are connected to in another. Thus, antagonistic pairs of emotions such as pride and shame can exist simultaneously (Jasper 2014). In pursuit of better understanding of the interconnected nature of thoughts, feeling and actions, future research could focus on the contributions of positive-negative emotion pairs to the complex resolution of dilemmas encountered in sports work.

Emotion management in sport work

While gaining increasing traction in the sociology of sport (e.g., Magill et al. 2017; Nelson et al. 2014; Potrac et al. 2017a, 2017b, among others), our understandings of emotional management in the doing of sports work remains underdeveloped (Roderick et al. 2017). As such, another avenue of potential research involves utilising both Hochschild's (1983) theorising alongside Bolton's (2005) expansion of Hochschild's ground-breaking thesis. Indeed, Bolton

argued that emotional labour entails more than capitalist organisations cajoling and coercing employees into displaying prescribed emotions and managing proscribed emotions in exchange for a wage. Rather than being passive, compliant, or “crippled actors” within organisations (48), she illustrated the ways in which employees are active and reflexive agents, who are, within constraints, capable of “making their own histories” (39). That is, they are able to “navigate, negotiate, and [sometimes] overcome [organisational] feeling rules that have the capacity to constrain employees” (Addison 2017, 12). For us, her typology of pecuniary, prescriptive, presentational and philanthropic emotion management has much to offer our subdiscipline. Equally, the dramaturgical theorising of Hochschild (1983), Rafaeli and Sutton (1989, 1991) and Thoits (1996) could help us to recognise and better consider how sports workers actively seek to positively and productively influence the emotions of others. For example, Thoits’ (1996) work on the use of group supportive acts and comforting techniques, as well as Hochschild’s (1983) insights into surface acting and deep acting techniques, may help us consider the ways in which sports workers seek to influence the thoughts, actions, and, importantly, feelings of other individuals and groups. Similarly, Grills and Prus (2019) identify a number of important lines for future work addressing the management of emotions in organisational life. Among others, these include examining how sports workers a) learn the emotional rules of organisational life, b) anticipate and respond to the emotional performances of others, and c) purposefully choose to breach emotional rules or take emotively attentive interactional risks (i.e., when, how, and for what reason?).

Finally, for us, the development, spread, and management of emotional pain and emotional toxicity represent fertile lines of future inquiry (Frost 2007; Ward and McMurray 2016). According to Frost (2007), emotional pain is an essential aspect of organisational life that

stems from a variety of sources. These include, but are not limited to, the unreasonable or excessive behaviours of stakeholders, the dishonest or manipulative acts of co-workers, the unrealistic expectations of superiors, disempowering and demotivating organisational policies, or the loss of a co-worker (e.g., through illness or redundancy) (Frost 2007; Ward and McMurray 2016). When left unchecked, such pain can “transform into something more sinister and arguably more dangerous: emotional toxicity” (Ward and McMurray 2016, 72). This refers to both the overt, dramatic or visible (e.g., large scale redundancy programs) ‘poisoning’ of individuals and organisations, as well as that which occurs in a slow, pervasive and invisible manner (e.g., the bureaucratic erosion of a worker’s enthusiasm over time). Left unabated, this toxicity can lead individuals to exit a particular role (be it paid employment or voluntary in nature) within an organisation. Alongside, exploring the development and impacts of emotional pain and toxicity in sporting organisations, there is also perhaps much to be gained from critically examining the work of what Ward and McMurray (2016) defined as ‘toxin handlers’. These are the individuals who, be it informally or formally, attempt to help mitigate, prevent and help process others’ emotional pain. Indeed, there is much to learn in terms of ‘who’ (e.g., managers, colleagues, superiors) performs these roles in sport organisations and, relatedly, what they do, when, how and why in their efforts to prevent emotional pain mutating into emotional toxicity. Equally, as well as the benefits derived for individuals and organisations from those performing this role, future inquiry could consider the consequences of these individuals’ exposure to the (negative) emotional states of others (Ward and McMurray 2016).

Affect and processes of social reproduction and change in sports work

Processes of social reproduction and social change have long been a central focus of sociological theorisations and investigations. These processes have been researched from

different paradigmatic stances (interpretivist, critical, poststructuralist, new materialist, etc.). Research carried out from a critical perspective has tended to gravitate towards the age-old debate of ‘structure vs. agency’, with the former often receiving more attention than the latter (Ashcraft 2017; Stark 2016). This body of research has been instrumental in drawing attention to the role of sport in the reproduction of various social inequalities through hegemonic power structures along the lines of gender, sexuality, race, social class, and (dis)ability. However, it has also been critiqued for reproducing essentialist and binary understandings of sport forms, sporting identities, and change strategies as either/or propositions (i.e., liberating or oppressive) (Fullagar et al. 2018; Markula and Pringle 2006).

In an effort to transcend various dualisms, poststructuralist approaches have focused on theorising power as dynamic, fluid, relational and tied to the circulation, negotiation, and alteration of discourses or ways of knowing (Markula and Pringle 2006) — thus positioning all individuals as inevitably implicated in the (re)production of discourses as well as active, albeit unequal, participants within relations of power-knowledge. While in many ways successful in disrupting various dualisms, poststructuralist and specifically Foucauldian investigations of sport and sports work have also been critiqued for (a) privileging analyses of processes of social reproduction and (b) overemphasising the discursive to the detriment of the affective and material dimensions of social life (Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018; Ringrose 2011; Thorpe et al. 2021).

As some researchers have argued (e.g., Coffey 2013; Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018; Hickey-Moody 2013), theories of affect and emotions offer new possibilities for research — both for asking new questions and for engaging new ‘methodological moves’ (Fullagar et al. 2021) to explore the complexities of our socio-material worlds. These possibilities have been embraced

by feminist/queer sport and physical culture researchers (Roy 2013; Thorpe et al. 2021) who have drawn on theories of affect and emotions to foreground the entanglements of the affective, material and discursive in the (re)production and disruption of gendered (and other) sporting subjectivities. Importantly, doing so has allowed feminist researchers to draw attention to the workings of power “that are often invisible and unheard, yet intensely “felt” in particular social contexts” (Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018, 459), as well as “address the affective texture of neoliberalism missed by most modes of criticism” (Ashcraft 2017, 47). We see these as particularly promising lines of inquiry for the study of sports work and for developing a more complex understanding of the role of affect in the reproduction of social inequalities. Specifically, we believe a focus on affect and emotions has much to offer our subdiscipline in terms of enhancing our understanding of sports workers’ experiences of marginalisation and exclusion which occur in increasingly subtle and nuanced ways through “materialising and territorialising emotional life” in support of a neoliberal individualising logic (Fullagar 2020, 186). A turn to affect and emotions could thus help sport scholars to develop a more nuanced understanding of minorities’ experiences of sports work and related implications for career progression, satisfaction, and longevity by drawing attention to how “embodied capacities are increased or decreased by the atmospheres of places and people” (Hickey-Moody 2013, 82).

Equally, a turn to affect has encouraged a productive shift in focus towards theorising social change processes (Ringrose 2011; Stark 2016). Amongst others, Deleuze’s (and Guattari’s) ontology of becoming and their suite of concepts (1987, 1988, 1994) have proved extremely useful in that respect and have been widely taken up by feminist theorists across disciplines (Coleman and Ringrose 2013; Markula 2019) — despite not being directly focused on gender relations. As Coffey (2013) argued, Deleuzian concepts enable the body to be

rethought outside of various dualisms (e.g., subject/object; mind/body; masculine/feminine, reason/emotion, etc.) as a process of connections and continuous becoming. Importantly, Deleuzian becomings do not necessarily imply newness, ‘they also involve the recreation of the mundane, the ordinary, the same’ (Coleman 2009, quoted in Coffey 2013, 12). In the case of gendered and other embodiments, Deleuzian becomings therefore also include those which connect with and repeat normative embodiments. However, the difference in Deleuzian informed analyses of gender and other relations (e.g., racialised, sexed, classed, etc.) is that the focus shifts away from gender as a structure and the body as an effect of gender towards what bodies can do, how they connect with gender and other relations, and how they affect and are affected within various social relations. This is an important and productive shift for feminist theorising which we believe has much to offer our subdiscipline. Specifically, attention to the liveliness of the body as a material and affective force ‘formed but not determined by the relations or forces with which it connects or engages’ (Coffey 2019, 77) enables sport scholars to analyse the configuration of gender and other relations within sports work as a temporary and dynamic assemblage which connects bodies (both human and non-human), discourses, norms, affects and practices in particular ways which are neither fixed nor permanent. Such a shift therefore also makes possible a focus on how gender and other relations might be assembled *differently*, in more ethical ways, as we discuss in the final section of this paper.

Affect and ethical relations and practices in sports work and sports work research

For many scholars, the turn to affect is motivated by a shared desire to theorise difference and how it is produced (Dernikos et al. 2020). As previously mentioned, it is also tied to theoretical developments which foreground an ethics of care which involves ‘cultivating the ability to notice and respond to the world — of human and non-human agents — in its

unfolding' (Thorpe et al. 2021, 371). This de-centering of the human subject has also raised important new questions around what it means to carry out ethical research and how to account for researcher positionality amongst other considerations (Fullagar 2020; King 2020). As such we argue that the study of affect as it connects with both Indigenous (e.g., Barnes et al. 2017; Million 2009; Thompkins 2016) and new materialist and posthumanist theorisations (e.g., Newman et al. 2020; Thorpe et al. 2021) is, in many ways, uniquely positioned to support new lines of inquiry into ethical relations and practices in sports work contexts. In fact, affect theory has already been mobilised to do just that in other non-sport related contexts (e.g., teaching and learning; Ashcraft 2017; Charteris et al. 2019). While we share Hemmings' (2005) cautionary view that it is important to not overstate the potential of affective scholarship to address issues of power, we nonetheless subscribe to the view that "difference is effectively agentic *when, and because, it is affective*" (Ashcraft 2018, 615, *emphasis ours*). Therefore, to not contend with affect and its role in enabling or foreclosing what it is possible to think, do, be, and become in the context of sports work would we argue be seriously amiss.

So how might theorising sports work and sports work research as 'affective encounters' (Charteris et al. 2019) help promote more ethical relations and practices within these contexts? As a starting point we believe, along with other scholars (e.g., Fullagar and Pavlidis 2018; Zembylas 2013) that a turn to affect theory promotes a critical attunement and heightened sensitivity to the increasingly subtle ways in which social inequalities and unethical relations of power-knowledge are reproduced and materialized within various social contexts. As such it provides important grounding both from which to critique and to initiate social change within sporting contexts. Equally, a turn to affect (as it connects with Indigenous, decolonial and new materialist, posthumanist theorising) has enabled scholars to promote an expanded understanding

of relationality which emphasises the *intra*-activity of all bodies — both human and non-human. The resulting dissolving of the notion of an autonomous, self-contained, individual subject exercising agency and its substitution for the notion of ‘agentic assemblage’ (Bennett 2010) therefore once again provides an important platform from which to rethink what it means to relate to both human and non-human others in ethical ways within sporting contexts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to bring together in conversation select theorisations of affect and emotions to highlight how these might be productively drawn upon to advance our understanding of sports work on the one hand and promote the development of more ethical sports work practices on the other. In doing so, we sought to take up Denzin’s (2010) call for ‘new paradigm dialogs’ by highlighting how different paradigmatic stances can help us to ‘know’ about emotions and affect in sports work differently. Specifically, in this paper we have argued that different theorisations of emotions and affect can offer important insights respectively into the identity performances and emotion management of sport workers and processes of social reproduction and change in sporting contexts. We purport that re-centralising emotions and affects within sport and physical activity research can not only lead to the development of more effective but also more ethical sports work practices by promoting a critical attunement to the “constantly evolving process of possible ways of having freedom to think and know in multiple ways and thus also to change the current social order” (Markula 2019, 130). While scholars are increasingly recognising the need to focus on theorising the relationship between affect, ethics and praxis in sporting and physical activity contexts (e.g., King 2020; Thorpe et al. 2021), we argue that there remains much scope for furthering such critical lines of inquiry within our subdiscipline.

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