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Exploring (Semi) Professionalization in Women's Team Sport Through a Continuum of Care Lens

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Professional team male-dominated sports have been built on masculine values; however, these values are challenged by the increasing number of women athletes entering this workplace. In this research, we explore the suitability and gender appropriateness of existing management processes and practices through three women's professional and semiprofessional leagues. Drawing on a feminist perspective of continuum of care, players ($n = 36$) and organizational representatives ($n = 28$) were interviewed to gain insights into how athletes and organizations contend with their rapidly evolving workplaces. Framed around the values of affirmation, empowerment, and belonging, the continuum of care contrasts players' everyday experiences of care with how organizations administer care. The research contributes through application of the feminist continuum of care. We present considerations for the management of female professional athletes in ways that are careful and an alternative value system that is affirmative, inclusive, and empowering.

Keywords: women's professional sport, semi-professional, professionalization

Although many team sports have historically only supported men's professional competitions, this male dominance is being challenged with the advent of women's proleagues (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). The rapid and dramatic development of women's professional and semiprofessional competitions now provides career opportunities in several national leagues in different sports across the globe, albeit mainly in developed economies. In many of these countries, women's leagues coexist alongside their male counterparts and contribute to the sport's brand value and attractiveness to sponsors (Taylor et al., 2020). More recently, a growing body of work is starting to address the "surprisingly little research [that] has explored the operations of women's elite sports organizations" (Allison, 2016, p. 238).

With the growing professionalization of women's league competitions, international and national governing bodies and their associated member clubs are negotiating how to effectively manage and sustain this new workplace and ensure more equitable, inclusive, and supportive environments for women athletes. The experience of women athletes, as they enter professional and semiprofessional work that has previously been the domain of men, is developing as an area of inquiry (Bowes & Culvin, 2021; Culvin, 2021; Sadeghi et al., 2018). What is perhaps less visible in

recent research is whether gendered organizational practices impact athletes' experiences and how/whether these practices are being challenged by the entry of women into these organizations.

Our research builds on work grounded in feminist studies (Allison, 2016; Andersen & Loland, 2017; Culvin, 2021; Culvin et al., 2021; Musto et al., 2017; Pavlidis, 2020) to interrogate ideologies that govern women athletes in leagues emanating from male-controlled leagues. Although emerging approaches demonstrate that women athletes' involvement at a semi/professional level is a catalyst for recognizing rights (Andersen & Loland, 2017), our research suggests that conceptualizing an inclusive and empowering model of women's professional sport can uncover and assist organizations to meet the gendered needs of these athletes.

In this article, we explore how semi/professional women athletes experience workplace values and logics in sports traditionally considered as masculine. Masculine domination of sport, both on and off the field, privileges masculine physical superiority and prowess and marginalizes women (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010). In the context of professional sport, women are defined as "'Other,' with the difference commonly understood as inferiority" (Allison, 2016, p. 258). Extending on Acker's (1990, 1992) seminal work, Allison situates her examination of women's professional soccer in the context of masculine and "institutional logics," which she argues have focused on profit as a "central goal" (p. 246) over "social and cultural issues" (p. 247), including equalities for women. In a similar vein, our research is situated within Acker's (1990, 1992) work on the gendered organization, underpinned by the premise that both individuals and organizations "do gender." This framing provides a basis to listen to the stories of women athletes who are forging new gendered sport identities while, at the same time, challenging systemic gendering processes that create gendered advantages and disadvantages (Acker, 1992). More specifically, we locate our work in a feminist continuum of care, framed around the values of affirmation, empowerment, and belonging. The research aims to provide a contextualized understanding of gendering processes in women's professional team

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sport in Australian sports organizations and explores whether these workplaces, on and off the field, support and/or resist moves for greater gender equality.

We recognize that gender is nonbinary, and some athletes in the leagues examined may not identify as women. Our research context is competitions designated as "women's sport leagues" and their respective athletes and organizational personnel. For this article, we have chosen to use the binary terminology of women and men, male and female, for insights into how sports organizations remain deeply gendered along these lines through their designation of how their competitions are currently constructed. Despite recent tensions around transgender athletes, sports organizations' understanding of gender remains largely binary (Cooky & Dworkin, 2013). Furthermore, the masculine settings of these organizations are framed through gendered logics that "accommodate" women, "leaving existing gendered structures, practices, and values intact" (Pape, 2020, p. 82).

Context and Conceptual Approach

Women's professional sport leagues exist in many countries and include, for example, the Women's National Basketball Association and the National Women's Soccer League (United States), the Women's Super League (United Kingdom), the Allianz Frauen-Bundesliga (Germany), and the Swedish Damallsvenskan and Naisten Liiga (Finland) in football; Women's Indian Premier League (cricket); and recent entries in Australia, such as the Australian Football League—Women's (AFLW) and the National Rugby League Women's (NRLW) Premiership.

Women's professional leagues can create opportunities for positive societal change (Morgan & Taylor, 2017), promote gender inclusion (Nair & Eapen, 2021), support cultural diversity (Stronach et al., 2016), and provide inspirational female role models (Allison, 2016). Notably, Morgan (2019) found that organizations were motivated to be sponsors of the AFLW to promote gender equality at an organizational, industry, and broader societal levels. Women's leagues also potentially offer sites for disrupting traditional gender hierarchies (Joncheray et al., 2016; Pavlidis, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020; Willson et al., 2018) and contesting values inherent in the definition of sport by challenging the hegemonic masculine approaches to competition (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015).

Within the Australian context, most of the women's leagues are or have been extensions of the existing men's leagues, including the AFLW, National Rugby League Women's, Super W (rugby union, W-League [football]), Women's National Basketball League, and Women's Big Bash League (cricket) (Kunkel & Biscaia, 2020). The rise of professional leagues for women in these team sports, which have traditionally been contested primarily by men, such as football, rugby union, rugby league, Australian rules football, and cricket, has been met with a range of emotional responses, including anticipation, hope, concern, gratitude, and skepticism. These responses have been evoked through issues including the ongoing struggle of women's teams/leagues to obtain equal/equitable remuneration and treatment (Andersen & Loland, 2017; Fujak et al., 2021; Hendrick, 2016; Taylor et al., 2020), the tenuous and precarious nature (job security) of athlete's contracts (Pavlidis, 2020; Willson et al., 2018), and questions about the longer term sustainability of women's sport leagues (Allison, 2016). Doyle et al. (2021) also noted that in Australia the vast majority of women's teams compete under the same brand identity as their male counterparts, "consistent with how many European sport organizations position their women's teams" (p. 2) at the team level. This conflation of women's and men's domains can be problematic as "when women participate in sports, they continue to be constructed as different and evaluated by a masculine standard, which reinforces male dominance and renders women as less-than" (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015, p. 663). Our research is located within this changing Australian sport landscape.

Conceptual Approach

Following Jackson and Mazzei (2013), our conceptual approach plugged into and connected multiple texts, theories, feminist research methods, and our previous work to conceptualize continuum of care. Jackson and Mazzei (2013, p. 262, italics in original) argue that plugging theory into data is a "process" of deploying theory to think with and through the data, so that theory and data make and remake one another. In this process of remaking, we also situated our work within feminist agendas, both sport and organizational, that seek to critique the gendered power relations within organizations (Aitchison, 2005; Ferguson, 2017). These challenge the masculine assumptions and logics and address power inequalities to create "alternative value systems, emphasizing that organizations are situated in wider social systems and bear responsibility for social justice, equality, solidarity, and care for others" (Benschop, 2021, p. 2). At issue is how to conceptualize the value (and voices) of women and their labor within the workplace. This means moving beyond seeing women's professional sport in terms of its "return on investment" (Allison, 2016, p. 249, italics in original). A continuum of care perspective provides for the incorporation of how semi/professional women athletes and associated organizational employees (e.g., coaches and managers) feel about organizational care and provides a basis to "critique the complexities" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 261) of care.

Our conceptualization of a continuum of care is inspired by the work of feminist theorist Braidotti (2010, 2019, 2020), which takes a value-based approach to a feminist ethics. A continuum of care reframes masculine logics focused on traditional business model-based performance measurement expectations and, instead, places value on the labor of every person employed within an organization. This approach takes an ethical relation of interconnection through which organizations can work with their employees to mutually develop talent and create sustainable futures. Furthermore, we situate the continuum of care within a context of emotions and institutions. Zietsma and Toubiana (2018) argued that emotions "connect people to the institutional structures they inhabit and are part and parcel of the institutionalization process" (p. 429). Through seeking to understand emotions, we can consider how women professional athletes feel about the types of care provided by their employers. We can also begin to contemplate the "emotional energy, values, and emotional investment" (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018, p. 431) of those who operationalize organizational care and the women (as employees) athletes as they respond and react to this care through affirmation, empowerment, and cultures of belonging.

Affirmative ethics is focused on positive positioning (Braidotti, 2020), and in the case of women's sport, this translates to developing or unleashing employees' potential through organizational support in the form of salaries, contracts, and facilities. Empowerment in this ethic can be attained through developing capacities or capabilities. A capabilities approach focuses on what women are able to do and be, through opportunities and resources available, wherein the "material and institutional environment" must be prepared to enable functioning (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 238). In this context, caring can be empowering for its recipients as evidenced through providing professional competitions and career pathways. Empowerment can be connected to feelings such as "excitement, hope, and confidence" (Allison, 2016, p. 250).

Affirmation and empowerment can transform the negative into positive (Braidotti, 2010), and mapping the negative can uncover opportunities to "engage with the present in a productively oppositional and affirmative manner" (p. 42). This allows space for the creation of the "new and different" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 470).

The overturning of the negative and the creation of something new and different can also produce relations of belonging. Relations of belonging include the sense of ease one feels with the physical and social contexts in which one lives (Miller, 2002). The continuum of care suggests that a sense of belonging is produced through tangible relations of empowerment, such as fostering inclusive organizational practices. The continuum of care approach taken for this research is framed around the values of affirmation, empowerment, and the creation of cultures of belonging. Working between theory and data to explore "new connectives" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 264) can expand our thinking about the management of women's professional and semiprofessional sport.

Approach and Methodology

Letherby (2011) noted that there is "there is no such thing as a feminist method;" there is, however, a rich and diverse scholarship of feminist methodologies. Feminist tenets are applied to challenge normative assumptions targeting the reduction of gender inequalities across all spheres of life (e.g., Fonow & Cook, 2005; Harding, 2019; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Letherby, 2011; Sprague 2005). Distinguishing features of feminist research are noted as "a sensitivity to the significance of gender within society and a critical approach to the research process" (Letherby, 2011, p. 2), how women's experiences differ from men's, and recognizing the complexity and intersecting elements of these experiences (Harding, 2019).

Feminist research considers how women's voices can be represented (Fonow & Cook, 2005) while recognizing that methods such as interviews are "partial and incomplete" and are "always in a process of a retelling and remembering" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262). We were conscious of providing space for our interviewees to create narratives about their experiences, and in our analysis, we plugged theory into data. Through plugging in, we "put to work" the process of arranging and "fitting together" ideas and theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262). In this way, we also explored "the unspoken, the inaudible, the ignored" (Mazzei, 2003) to unmask and confront patriarchal institutional practices (Fonow & Cook, 2005). We interrogated sports organizations wherein feminist "issues . . . persist and are persistent" (Caudwell, 2011, p. 122) to unravel considerations germane to understanding and disrupting assiduous masculinized traditional conceptualizations of sports management. Critically, we connected our feminist approach to think through "particularity and specificity" of resonances or "hotspots" within the data (Ringrose & Renold, 2014, p. 776).

Framed within this feminist approach, our research involved three Australian professional and semiprofessional women's team sports. The criteria for selection were: (a) team sports, (b) with a national governing body that was operating a professional or semiprofessional women's national league, and (c) had a men's national professional competition. The research scope explored the collective (women professional athletes) and the organization (professional sport organizations) to inform theorizing at the collective and organizational levels. This study was located within a larger program of research exploring organizational approaches to professionalizing women's sport through conceptualizations of success, legitimacy, and sustainability. The research proposal and process were approved by three Australian university ethics committees (GU Ref No: 2019/283).

Sample and Data Collection

Sixty-four semistructured interviews were conducted. We utilized a purposive sampling method with participants recruited through the relevant national governing body, reaching out to contracted athletes, coaches, managers, and key organizational informants in each of the three sports that met our criteria. The athletes ($n = 36$) were from Sport A ($n = 17$), Sport B ($n = 13$), and Sport C ($n = 6$) with representation of at least one participant from each team in the league. Although some of these athletes were contracted for both their respective league and national team, our research focus was primarily on their league component and relationships with league-related organizations. The managers and coaches were from Sport A ($n = 12$), Sport B ($n = 8$), and Sport C ($n = 5$) with one key informant involved in the league's governance from each of the three sports. The nonathlete interviewees comprised 15 women and 10 men. We have identified the gender of these nonplaying participants throughout the analysis.

The semistructured interviews were facilitated through a focused, conversational, and two-way communication. The interview scope drew on literature, document analyses, and the results of a prior study conducted with another women's professional team sport (ref withheld—authors of this article). Women athletes were invited to explain their sport biographies and, as appropriate, their lived experiences of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity, societal considerations, team culture, meanings associated with having a professional team sport career, and perceptions (positive and negative) of workforce management by their sport club and league more broadly, including issues related to remuneration. This encapsulated their physical, sociocultural, and organizational experiences in professional team sport and their views on gender, difference, and diversity. The interviews with the coaches, managers, and key informants explored the same issues as the athletes and, in addition, examined the organizational policies and practices related to women athletes. In all interviews, we explored how gender is understood, underlying values and assumptions, and how these might relate to gendered practices. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and deidentified. Field notes and reflections were kept by each of the four researchers.

Approach to Analysis

Data collected were reviewed iteratively as we conducted the interviews. This process allowed us to reach negotiated interpretations and mappings of meanings as "meaning making emerges over time" (Ringrose & Renold, 2014, p. 773). These discussions guided subsequent NVivo coding activities, initially into themes, which were utilized to explore insights into the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis was a process that evolved through discussions between all authors. Our initial analytic forays were inspired by the work of Gilligan (1993) and the ethic of care. However, we found that an ethic of care concept and its subsequent development by Tronto (1998) was too restrictive and did not capture the complexity reflective of a continuum of care. We then spent time sitting and thinking with the data to identify resonances that Ringrose and Renold (2014, p. 777) framed as "hotspots" (p. 777). These were, again, discussed between the authors as we framed and reframed the analysis, probing data to map "hotspots."

Throughout this process, we refined our theoretical approach. Although topics that could be broadly considered as themes were initially identified as a way to develop insights, we moved beyond this form of analysis and began thinking with theory through the process of "plugging in" to the data. Through this process, we

wanted to see how things fit together and the connections between things and what is made in these connections (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). We also found utility in "plugging in" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262) to theory drawn from emotions and institutions (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018) and feminist theory (Braidotti, 2010).

We drew on our conceptual approach to guide this analytic process, making and unmaking connections, so that theory and data informed and "make one another" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 265, italics in original). In taking this approach we framed our analysis around *analytic questions* drawn from theoretical concepts. This allowed us to explore the "how" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 269) of the ways that organizations currently practice athlete care. In our mappings, we considered whether/how organizations were affirming and sustaining athletes' potential, what practices empowered athletes' capabilities, and how the organization produced cultures of belonging. Woven throughout these mappings were questions about how athletes "*feel about*" (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018, p. 429, italics in original) the types of care provided by the organization.

Findings and Discussion

Our mappings of "hotspots" (Ringrose & Renold, 2014) are connected to and analyzed through the three elements of a continuum of care: (a) affirming and sustaining potential, (b) empowering capabilities, and (c) cultures of belonging.

Affirming and Sustaining Potential

Salary structures, contracts, and provision of facilities were critical areas of provision and a way through which organizations could affirm and sustain athletes' potential along with providing an indication of the place of women in the organization's hierarchy of athletes and signposts of the recognition (or lack thereof) of their work. Some of the employing organizations and/or teams had commenced with actions to affirm women's position as professional athletes, although the degree to which recompense and support were viewed as adequate varied between sports. All three sports were, however, offering an affirmation of potential through a typically longer term optimism about pay and contract parity for women. Salary structures, contracts, and provision of facilities subsections are presented in the following three subsections.

Salaries

A lack of organizational affirmation was reflected in athletes' comments about low salaries, which provided little financial security. This aligned with research suggesting that women entering a professional football career in England were unprepared for the lived realities of a precarious reality but were, nevertheless, willing to accept these working conditions (Culvin, 2021). Athletes, coaches, and administrators all noted that current salary levels, although steadily improving, were still less than ideal and not on parity with men's. Athletes expressed their strongest opinions about the need to be provided with higher levels of payments and expectations that women should reach gender equality for salaries in the near future. An athlete/informant from Sport B, who was also involved with junior development, felt that her sport was not supporting her financially and expressed her frustration at what appeared to be an organization that paid lip service to gender parity in salaries: "[The sport is] not happy to pay you though . . . people are happy to push the profile of women in sport, they're not happy to cater for it in terms of pay for it." According to both coaches/managers and athletes, only one (Sport

A) provided what was viewed as an affirming and sustaining salary structure. As a coach manager noted, professional women athletes in Sport A now received a livable wage remuneration package, which assisted in athlete attraction and retention:

> I think the professional structure and the wage structure that [Sport A] put up is second to none in the country. We've got to keep promoting that . . . . And I think you can have a full-time, a really good full-time wage, playing for Australia, to be looked after, and travel the world, is a huge thing that we've got to keep promoting. (Sport A, Coach Manager 4—Male)

However, few athletes from Sport A shared the coach's opinion; Athlete 17 (Sport A) noted, "Obviously pay isn't quite where it . . . . It's heading in the right direction, but it probably isn't quite where it needs to be." In all three sports, the athletes felt that their current circumstances were precarious. Gendered uncertainty in relation to remuneration contributes significantly to precarity of women's position within professional sport (Culvin, 2021; Culvin et al., 2021; Pavlidis, 2020).

Administrators from the other two sports also stressed that they were taking a longer term perspective, suggesting that their sport would be in a position to offer a salary that more fully supported athletes in the future. For example, a manager indicated that "increasingly athletes might receive really good money to play [sport] and get supported well" (Sport B, Manager 3—Female). Although sport C introduced a minimum wage and annually increased the salaries paid to athletes, a senior executive still believed the sport had not achieved an acceptable salary level for athletes: "Success, to me, means . . . . The pay for the women is equal to the men's . . . . And if I'm honest, I think we're a very long way away from achieving those goals" (Director 1, Sport C—Male). An athlete from the same sport also indicated that the ultimate success of the women's league was equated with "pay rates similar to the men" (Sport C, Athlete 2). The current financial precarity of professional team sport for women contributes to positioning them as lesser than their male counterparts (Bowes & Culvin, 2021), as juxtaposed with affirmation.

Alongside the financial insecurity in their salaries, athletes also expressed a sense of frustration that they were not paid adequately to recompense the time they felt they had to invest to present a professional approach on and off the field. This aligned with Culvin's (2021) findings that women footballers had to prove themselves as legitimate professionals deserving of their professional status. Several athletes expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount they were being paid compared with the demands that they felt were required to perform at a professional level. When questioned about what the sport needed to do to retain talent, one athlete responded that an income that was commensurate with the time athletes invested would ensure that this occurred:

> Probably the income and making sure people are paid appropriately for the time and effort that they put in. Even though we're not professional, I think a lot of us, we do train as professional athletes, and even working on the side, we probably overwork ourselves a lot of the time. So, I think just getting a reflection on how much we try and how much we sacrifice for it. (Sport A, Athlete 13)

The level of remuneration in the domestic league impacted the ability of the competition to attract and retain talent:

> I think until it gets to the point where the financial side of it for domestic athletes increases, then there still will be that sort of

factor limiting some athletes in the competition in a way. It's … like a double-edged sword sort of thing. You've got athletes that are absolutely loving it being out there, but in the background have this financial burden at the same time. (Sport A, Athlete 1)

This sense of conflict left some athletes feeling as if there was an imbalance in power where athletes' emotional investment was being manipulated to overcome deficits in salaries, a tactic used by institutions as a means of control (Dejordy & Barrett, 2014).

There's a bit of an imbalance in power because no one was going to turn down the opportunity to become a professional [competition name] athlete, yet when things go pear shaped, "It's okay. We'll just pick someone else," because there's that many girls that want to do it. (Sport B, Informant 1—Female—and Athlete 1)

The interviewees spoke of conditions of precarity also being exacerbated through competition from other athletes who were more willing to endure financial uncertainty waiting to take their place. Pavlidis (2020) also noted that AFLW athletes felt that they were obliged to make sacrifices to play. This type of continual emotional investment can foster ongoing power imbalances as the women's work is "invisible and unaccounted" (Pavlidis, 2020, p. 5). We also argue that undervaluing women's labor also works to produce cultures of exclusion. Several athletes interviewed spoke about this type of work scope creep in which their physical and emotional investment was growing exponentially, and remuneration was not keeping pace. Although some athletes expressed dissatisfaction with their situation, most athletes were prepared to accept conditions of precarity and sacrifice. These results were similar to Fujak et al. (2021), who found that semiprofessional women rugby league athletes' expectations of acceptable employment conditions were increasing year on year.

Contracts

Although some athletes were contracted year-round for the leagues and national teams, the majority was contracted for the term of the typically (very) short league season, eliciting feelings that they were not in a very secure profession (Sport A, Athlete 16). The absence of longer term contracts also made it difficult for many athletes to plan their work and training regime. This was a more acute challenge if relocation to play was required: "[It] can be really difficult … because they have work obligations, and their life could be in a certain [different] state" (Sport C, Athlete 5).

The consensus among the administrators was that contracts for the semiprofessional and professional athletes were improving but were not yet at the affirming stage where ongoing support was provided that would build the athletes' potential. For example, in Sport A, interviewees observed that their sport had made significant progression toward full-time contracts. However, the contracts were also noted to be somewhat insecure as they were for 1-year duration only: "So those that are contracted essentially … they've been full-time. I say full-time, they get their contracts every year" (Sport A, Coach 2—Male).

Some athletes from Sport A had recently been able to sign multiyear National League contracts that provided "a little bit more security in your future" (Sport A, Athlete 4). Current access to longer contracts was by no means universal; however, even having the possibility of being offered a longer contract "gives them hope that okay, I will stay in the game, and it doesn't let them wonder, "Oh, is this worth playing again next year? Or is it worth trying

again next year?" (Sport B, Athlete 10). Narratives of hope for better workforce conditions are currently sustaining women's participation in the three sports. Pavlidis (2020) noted that hope comprises a complex range of pressures when thinking about how to make a women's competition a success. However, if this hope is not accompanied by affirming and sustaining actions to improve workplace provisions, it is likely that this goodwill to the organization will begin to dissipate (as per Fujak et al., 2021). Athlete disappointment and associated negative emotions can lead to feelings of disempowerment and exclusion, whereas improvements can positively impact well-being. Building up hope may tie athletes to the organization and may also contribute to a sense of helplessness (Wijaya & Heugens, 2018). As one athlete from Sport B (Athlete 5) commented, "[We were] told one thing and promised one thing, like of money or contracts for a couple of years and never seen anything."

The administrators also expressed a sense of hope and optimism that at some point extended contracts and better benefits would eventuate, offering a viable career for athletes. However, to date, few athletes have been afforded this opportunity:

I think we had maybe five athletes on two-year contracts coming across from last year to this year. This would be their second year, but most are on one. I think I saw the other day someone signed one of the female athletes in another club for three years, so I think it's definitely becoming more normalized to have multi-year contracts. (Sport C, Manager 1—Male)

Women's professional sports are "sites of contestation and hope" (Willson et al., 2018, p. 1715, italics in original). Our findings highlight the benefits of providing affirmative and sustaining salaries and contracts as the lack thereof undervalues women and their labor. Athletes' substantial emotional investment in their sport careers was evidenced through the promise of improved remuneration and contract conditions, creating hope for a better future. However, the reality of short-term contracts and slow progress on affirmative life sustaining salaries was interpreted by interviewees as a signpost that they were a long way from achieving equality. Culvin et al. (2021) noted that much work remains to ensure that parity in conditions reduce the gender inequalities that prevent women and men being valued equally within organizations. Although, in some cases, improvements in salaries were viewed as legitimizing women as paid professionals, from the perspective of the organizational respondents, these conditions were recognized as an area of gendered vulnerability.

Facilities

The majority of the athletes interviewed expressed a view that not only did the provision of proper facilities support their on-field performance but also that the quality of the facilities was an indicator of how the organization valued the women's league. Athletes commented on the poor grounds they played on, which impacted their performances and left them feeling undervalued. As one athlete commented, "I think sometimes we're not playing on the best quality ground, so sometimes that impacts on how good the game can look" (Sport A, Athlete 13). Sport B had similar issues with lack of access to facilities, particularly at club levels below the major league. The frustrations were experienced by athletes across all three sports and encapsulated in the following quote:

I think that access to facilities is huge, I think that teams and clubs should have more access to facilities. Like I see vacant grounds all around, really great resources and facilities that

could be used, and I don't understand why they're not used as a hub for teams. (Sport C, Athlete 4)

When sport administrators spoke about ensuring that athletes had access to facilities appropriate for professional athletes, the provision was often reduced to a cost-benefit or return on investment (Allison, 2016). Although appropriate facilities and professional standard playing venues for the women's leagues were additional markers of affirming and sustaining potential, one administrator suggested that operating the women's league for their sport and club required subsidy from revenue derived by the governing body:

> Millions and millions of dollars, you know, it's not profitable at the moment. It's an investment and the return on that investment pans out in a whole lot of different ways over the long term . . . we've invested in the infrastructure of the facilities that the athletes are participating at. (Sport A, Manager 1—Male)

However, from the athletes' perspective, interviewees from all three sports noted that this investment had not resulted in all competition venues having basic gender-specific facilities (e.g., change rooms). Although the situation was improving, there were still deficiencies, as one athlete observed:

> Sometimes when we play at grounds there's not a change room for the girls. Like say it's a double header with the men's, we'll be out in the back shed . . . not in a proper change room or facility. (Sport B, Athlete 5)

Facilities that are gender inappropriate or substandard undervalue and refute women's position and their labor as employees. In these instances, athletes' emotional investment in their sport was challenged when facilities were not available but reaffirmed through providing gender-appropriate facilities. The quality of facilities was a signpost for athletes in terms of how they felt they were being cared for in terms of workplace provisions. As Nussbaum (1999) argued, to develop capabilities, the environment must provide the resources, both material and institutional, to support the growth of capabilities. We also suggest that lack of provision of and access to quality facilities also produces cultures of exclusion.

Administrators from Sports B and C suggested that a deficit occurred in relation to both training and playing grounds. It was consistently stated that games could not be played at the same venues as men because "we've only got two change room and to have double headers you need at least four change rooms, the infrastructure needs to be better" (Sport C, Director 1—Male). The director also believed that the provision of gender-appropriate facilities contributed to cultures of belonging and vice versa. In other research, improving facilities has been identified as a way to break down gender barriers in women's involvement in male-dominated professional sports (Mooney et al., 2019).

Empowering Capabilities

Through empowering capabilities, we consider the support provided to the athletes as well as the competitions and pathways through which athletes' capabilities are developed. Interviewees noted the improvements in provision of support staff and services; however, they also highlighted that shortfalls remained across the three sports, and alongside the increased provision of support, there was a concomitant rise in expectations, both on and off the

field. Athletes and administrators highlighted that good-quality coaching support contributed to athletes feeling valued while also providing the fundamental skill development needed to meet ever-increasing performance expectations. The following two subsections "Support Staff and Services" and "Competitions and Pathways" reflect how these elements are either empowering or potentially disempowering if not provided at an expected level.

Support Staff and Services

Athletes experienced a feeling of disempowerment through lack of support in terms of coaching and in relation to the provision of support staff. As the league professionalized, so, too, did their performance expectations and pressures, often without accompanying forms of support. As an athlete from Sport A suggested:

> [It's] a lot to do with that support of the mental side of the game because, as I said, with the increased professionalization and expectation, comes more pressure. And that side of the game has changed really, really quickly. So, I think the support is good, but I also think it's got a little bit of catching up to do with, I don't want to say damage, but with what's happened in the last few years with the increase of that pressure. It probably just needs to catch up now to make sure that the athletes are feeling supported, have got what they need. (Sport A, Athlete 9)

This expanding list of expectations left athletes feeling as if they were taking on greater responsibilities without organizational support. This lack of organizational support resulted in athletes being unable to optimize their performance and "do and to be" their best (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 233) and further develop their capabilities.

Other athletes also spoke about potential damage to their health and well-being through not feeling adequately supported, indicating that the provision of support for on-field performance was central to empowering their capabilities. However, administrators and coaches suggested that sufficient athlete support was being provided and that with the provision of greater support comes with an expectation of associated professional athlete responsibilities, including on-field performance and off-field contributions. As one coach (Sport A, National Coach 2—Female) commented, "It's like, 'This is proper,' . . . . You're not just here for a good time. So, I think there's the responsibility there." Increased responsibilities, including pressure to succeed, were not only internally generated but also driven by the club/governing body, media, and the general public.

Access to other forms of care, such as physiotherapists, influenced athletes' feelings in relation to organizational support. Attention to athletes' welfare was an expectation: "The athlete development manager, psychologist, that sort of thing has become very important in our game and probably something that hasn't had a lot of staff involved with in the past" (Sport A, Athlete 4). Another athlete spoke about the importance of access to medical staff who were going to get athletes back on the pitch: "I think all of those little things really matter . . . particularly for someone who counts it as their job, your body . . . it is actually really important" (Sport A, Athlete 16). The lack of equitable access to support staff was highlighted in another sport as an issue. "We've got one physio, between 30 odd girls. So, to have the resources that they [men] have would be amazing" (Sport B, Athlete 4). Availability of support personnel was also an issue for athletes from Sport C, who often had to attend venues before training to access the limited personnel, an issue given that many athletes were time poor.

Empowering capabilities means ensuring that the organizational environment provides the resources necessary for functioning (Nussbaum, 1999) while also ensuring that a balance between winning and athlete welfare is maintained (Culvin, 2021). At an organizational level, perspectives differed, with administrators suggesting that all three sports were working, to varying degrees, toward empowering athlete's capabilities through their provision of support staff and services. One manager noted that the transition from amateur to semiprofessional status led the organization to improve the care and support it provided to athletes, and, in response, athletes took full advantage of the services offered:

> They were showing up on Saturdays . . . and if you were lucky enough you got picked in the [team name] and you'd go and play in a tournament for a week. Now, girls are in the gym three days a week, and they're doing conditioning and they're looking after their bodies. Their nutritional space is much better, they've got more opportunities to go to physio, and soft tissues and recovery centers. (Sport B, Manager 2—Male)

Although organizational interviewees largely felt that they were providing increased support, the athletes did not always see it this way. As women's professional sports grows, the threshold of acceptable levels of high-performance well-being support is likely to escalate. A pivotal aspect of a continuum of care is ensuring that athletes are adequately prepared to perform at their best. Athletes receiving increased performance support expressed feelings of inclusion and empowerment.

Athletes across all three sports indicated that access to good coaching was similarly crucial to their development and equated with feeling valued and empowered within the organization. Athletes also felt that more needed to be done in the area of high-quality coaching tailored to the needs of women. Although there was a range of experiences with coaching quality across the three sports, most athletes highlighted the importance of good coaching. "Making sure that the best coaches are involved. Talent attracts talent. Having coaches involved that people would like to play under . . . it just shows people that they're valued." (Sport A, Athlete 16). Administrators also agreed that having good coaches was an acknowledgement that athletes were valued but noted constraints in attracting high-quality coaches due to limited budgets, with the "women's coaches . . . paid a lot less than the men's" (Sport A, Coach/Manager 1—Male). Interviewees from Sport B noted that many of their league coaches were volunteers, and some felt that these volunteers were "great coaches" (Athlete 7); several athletes, coaches, and managers commented that their sport needed high-quality women coaches, particularly at the elite level, but "there is still a long way to go" (Sport A, Coach 2—Female) before women coaches became more visible and the norm.

Competitions and Pathways

Athletes across the three sports indicated that the gaps in pathways and lack of full-time leagues needed to be addressed by sports' governing bodies to better sustain and empower athlete potential. Many of the athletes felt that the short length of their respective competitions was inadequate in relation to their investment of time and emotional energy spent in training. Athletes expressed a desire for league seasons that were of sufficient length to align with skill development across the entire year: "So that's probably one of the biggest challenges is ensuring that there's enough [of a season] . . . [as we] are training effectively full-time, week in, week out to play six games" (Sport A, Athlete 15).

Some athletes not only expressed their disappointment about the short competitions but also suggested the need for more teams to ensure a strong competition.

> First off, we need to make the season longer . . . [the competition is] six weeks in total, that we train four months of the year for is hard. I think if we could double that, or maybe even get more teams into the competition, there would be more people wanting to play, more people wanting to be a part of it, which I think would be absolutely awesome. (Sport B, Athlete 8)

The emotional investment for such a short season was draining and led to one athlete questioning whether she would persist given the training requirements and then the lack of game time:

> So, if you're constantly not getting an opportunity to play, at some point you're probably going to go, "Is this worth my while?" I think that's more from a development perspective. (Sport A, Athlete 16)

Well-resourced talent development pathways, including opportunities to compete, are critical for athletes to develop their capabilities. Athletes' emotional investment in their sport was challenged by lack of competitions and pathways, leaving them feeling disempowered, their capabilities underdeveloped, and even considering leaving the sport.

Although administrators from all three sports spoke about how they were extending their competitions and pathways, thus providing a strong basis to develop and build athletes' capabilities, they also indicated that talent identification and development and pathways to professionalism are still maturing. In consequence, the three sports were negotiating how to attract and retain a sufficient number of talented female athletes to support the domestic leagues. Sport A administrators suggested that athlete pathways were well resourced, particularly at the state level. At the same time, these administrators acknowledged that women's athlete pathways were not anywhere the near the level of the men's game, which had spent the last "20 odd years" (Sport A, Coach, 2) building up its talent base. Administrators from the other two sports noted similar challenges related to attracting and retaining athletes. Nevertheless, several organizational personnel predicted an optimistic future:

> Success for us is that we have built a structure that is producing . . . squads of women around the country that are of a pretty strong standard. At the moment we don't have the athlete depth that we would like to have, so success is certainly creating a larger pool of athletes. (Sport B, Manager 3—Female)

From the athletes' perspective the current pathways were not necessarily preparing them for the pressure and intensity associated with elite competitions:

> With the men's, there's a youth [League] kind of team, so I think women's needs to be more than that. You go from [lower level competition] and then the next step is [League], which not necessarily many girls are going to make from the age of like 17 to [League] team. If there was an academy or a bridging kind of program, I think that would be very helpful. (Sport C, Athlete 3)

Similar gaps in development pathways also existed in Sport A, with concerns that young athletes (15–17 years) were having to step up into a professional league when, perhaps, they were not mature enough to cope with the pressures and intensity of the league.

They're having to pick girls who are 17 . . . to come and play . . . and there's no development in that middle piece, which we used to have, which we don't have anymore. (Sport A, Athlete 8)

These comments highlighted shortfalls in the provision of the support crucial to empowering athlete's capabilities, which left athletes feeling undervalued and disempowered. Although improvements in support were occurring, these were not always keeping up with increases in rising expectations of on-field performance. Providing more competition and pathway opportunities tailored to meet the needs of girls and women was seen as central to their professional development. Newland et al. (2020) argued that with the rise of women entering into athlete development pathways, more research is needed to understand how pathways can accommodate the differing needs of girls and women, including family planning. Pathways that fail to acknowledge gendered differences or continue to be populated by male coaches can work to create a culture of exclusion.

Cultures of Belonging

This focus captured how cultures of belonging were produced, or not, through the gendered sport's performance culture. Many athletes spoke about having to juggle and balance home caring roles, outside work commitments, and their playing careers as well as negotiating their emotional investment in sport. However, interviewees generally noted that the league/clubs were increasingly providing a more inclusive culture that attended to the gendered needs of women. Having more women in nontraditional roles, including in athlete pathways, along with providing safe inclusive workplaces that reflected equity facilitated a culture of belonging.

Many of the athletes interviewed felt that there were expectations that women should make the same (relative) time commitment as their male counterparts. This was particularly challenging for those who were on part-time contracts. Emotional investment emerged as a way to leverage athletes' feelings of belonging: "Well, do you want to be a part of it or not?" Who doesn't want to be a part of something that's developing into a semi-professional sport?" (Sport B, Athlete 12). This was particularly notable for athletes who had to juggle family responsibilities and their playing commitments:

I feel that women have a greater responsibility, you know? We [experience inequalities] because of personal things like those that are much older that have families, we commit ourselves to work because that's our source of income. We commit ourselves to . . . again, mainly that, work and family are our two priorities. (Sport B, Athlete 10)

In consequence, strain was placed on athletes through juggling multiple time conflicts and work and family commitments. For athletes who were managing work and competing in the league, timing of training sessions added to their balancing act. One athlete indicated that 4- to 5-hr training commitments occurred "smack bang in the day. So full-time work is quite tricky" (Sport A, Athlete 11). The structuring of contemporary sport workplaces continues to revolve around a masculine norm that is assumed to be "neutral and gender free" wherein men are available and unencumbered by caring and domestic arrangements (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008, p. 97). Tekavc et al. (2015) noted that elite male athletes are often able to balance sport with parenthood. For the women

athletes within the present study, the competing demands of caring and training left them having to continually negotiate clashing commitments and make sacrifices, which, in turn, created a culture of exclusion. Coaches from the same sport noted that athletes who did not need to balance work outside of sport with their playing commitments improved their skills more quickly than athletes who had to make compromises in the time they could commit to training and/or recovery. Coaches from Sport B also recognized the difficulties that many of their athletes had in juggling their work and training commitments.

Other administrators felt that organizational practices of inclusion were being addressed through the introduction of policies that reflected women's needs for family leave.

[We need to] create policies, procedures, collective bargaining agreements, and MOUs that protect and allow for the growth of the female athletes that if we actually are moving towards some equality in the contracts in payments, in maternity leave and that includes leave for both. (Sport A, National Manager 3 —Male)

This quote suggests that there were intentions to value the women's game as well as reworking and revaluing women and their labor. However, these intentions for gender-inclusive policies in the future also ignore the current discrepancies and their impact on athletes. Taylor et al. (2020) found that childcare was increasingly a concern for women rugby league athletes who tried to balance family commitment with their playing career. Several athletes within the current study suggested they, too, juggled other employment and family commitments, as one noted: "Well girls have full time jobs. They have families, there's moms in our teams. It would be nice to just get a little bit of help I guess in that aspect" (Sport B, Athlete 5). Organizational practices and policies have traditionally been developed to cater for the needs of male athletes (Micelotta et al., 2018). Although we acknowledge that caring roles may be changing, gendered assumptions regarding childcare continue to position women as the primary caregivers for children (Piggot & Pike, 2020). Athlete conditions that mimic those provided to men do not cater for these gendered considerations, including time away to have children. Having to continually balance family, other employment, and training left athletes feeling that the organization was creating a culture of belonging.

Seeing more women in positions that were considered nontraditional, such as coaching, including having women coaches in development pathways, was noted by several athletes as a positive way to create a sense of belonging. One athlete commented, "Potentially having some female role models involved. I know most of my junior coaches were male . . . having some females involved in that pathway could be a good strategy to keep girls involved" (Sport A, Athlete 7). Appointing women coaches is a positive step toward creating more inclusive cultures of belonging as coaches can be pivotal in creating positive and supportive cultures (Fujak et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020; Toohey et al., 2018).

Administrators from all three sports referred to the creation of cultures of belonging through the implementation of strategies and practices to create a safe and welcoming environment for women. Equal coverage of women and men in annual reports, marketing collateral, and community events demonstrated organizational commitment to more inclusive cultures. Athletes acknowledged the latter as important but also stressed the criticality of explicit practices and changes in policies to promote equality. How the three organizations understood and then worked to create inclusive

cultures in the workplace varied. These actions were aimed at addressing issues in the organization's culture (from governing body to grassroots clubs) to ensure that they were gender appropriate and positive for women.

> It comes down to sort of the culture . . . . So, what does the sport need to do? It needs to create welcoming, safe, remunerated environments so that your talented athletes are choosing [this sport]. (Sport A, Informant 1—Female)

Clubs and the leagues have been working toward a better understanding of what makes a gender-friendly and welcoming organizational culture. Yet, some administrators also suggested that just having a women's league was seen as a strong indicator of the sport promoting gender equality, indicating that it "gives you that sense of equality right from the get-go" (Sport A, National Manager 3—Male). Cultures of belonging are more than simply having both women's and men's professional teams, yet gender equality and inclusion were interpreted by some administrators in this manner:

> I think it definitely reflects [sport]'s values of equality, teamwork, and the fact that we now have sort of equal opportunity in terms of playing for your state for men and women, whereas we didn't five, six years ago. So, I think that reflects [sport]'s values. (Sport B, Media Manager 1—Female)

This sense of value and equality was also reflected in an athlete's comment that suggested that a culture of belonging was created through the club's promotion of the women's team "alongside the men's . . . it gives you a sense of belonging" (Sport B, Athlete 10).

Cultures of belonging are critical to athletes feeling that their emotional investment and labor is valued as how and whether organizations value equality evokes emotional responses (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). Athletes felt excluded through organizational practices that did not recognize the gendered context of the many competing demands they juggled. Having a women's league did not by itself, as administrators suggested, reflect equality, and athletes indicated that more women in nontraditional roles would contribute to creating cultures of belonging. As the perceptions and experiences of athletes illustrate, organizations are still negotiating with how to best meet the gendered needs of women, such as ensuring their safety and well-being, reducing exploitation, provision of childcare, parental leave, carer considerations, and dual career aspirations. In the following section, we tie these mappings of hotspots together to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our research. We, then, proffer suggestions for aligning organizational values to reflect a continuum of care.

Theoretical/Practical Implications

The continuum of care has offered a conceptual approach that is both an analytic tool and a set of values through which professional and semiprofessional sports women can be cared for in ways that are affirming and empowering and foster cultures of belonging. Although we have examined the values separately, for example, our discussion of facilities was situated within the context of affirming and sustaining potential, equally, the lack of provision of facilities could act to produce feelings of exclusion and, hence, affect whether women felt that an organizational culture of belonging supported them. The significant power imbalances that occurred through the pressures that women felt to perform or

accept conditions of precarity could also be considered not only to be disempowering but also produce cultures of exclusion. How athletes felt about or in response to the types of care that the organization did or did not provide could work to disempower athletes and significantly reduce their capabilities as athletes. Thus, the values of care are interconnected and need to be considered in this light in terms of effecting change.

A continuum of care provides the opportunity to rethink the values through which professional and semiprofessional women athletes are managed within the context of gendered organizations in which masculine values are dominant. This includes troubling the power relations within these organizations to imagine better and more equitable worlds (Ferguson, 2017). We argue that this way of thinking about employment values women and their labor through affirming and sustaining their potential, and it empowers their capabilities and creates cultures of belonging. Within this frame, women are constituted as valuable workers, and their work is rewarded through practices of care that reflect values of equality. A continuum of care also responds to athletes' emotional investment in the organization (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018) through these values and is responsive to athletes' needs on and off the field and across the course of their playing career and beyond. It is not structured around a business logic of return on investment (Allison, 2016) and, instead, focuses on the three values as a way to enhance athletes' capabilities on and off the field. A value-based approach to athlete development also allows for organizations to experiment with other alternatives for enacting care through an approach that is focused on equity and is affirming and life sustaining. Linking values into emotions creates opportunities to reconsider the "ways in which institutions condition the experience of emotions and our understanding of what to value" (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018, p. 435). Valuing care and equity may allow institutions to reframe how they are defined, the goals they set in terms of equality, and the types of care they provide. We posit that women athletes are more likely to invest in positive ways in institutions that reflect values of care and equality, without which they can feel excluded.

Concluding Thoughts: Changing Values, Affirming the Positive

This research poses the question of how Australian sport organizations can draw on a value-based approach to care for women who enter into male-dominated workplaces. Woven into our inquiry is the disconnect between the often deeply gendered masculine sport values underpinning the care currently provided by the organizations and the undermining of the emotional investment made by the women athletes. However, pushed by the entry of more women into these gendered workplaces via the establishment of women's professional sport leagues, the three organizations involved were beginning to make changes. They were responding, to varying degrees, to caring for women athletes. As Braidotti (2010, p. 50) wrote, shifts occur creating movement that "makes all the difference to the patterns of repetition of negative emotions." How athletes felt in response to the lack of care they were being provided produced a range of negative emotions, which worked to produce cultures of exclusion. Paying attention to the positives, and how organizations were affirming athletes in ways that held possibilities for developing their capabilities and potential, could, perhaps, prevent the repeat practices that generate negative emotions. Reframing organizational values by placing more value on women's labor within these workplaces, this, in turn, suggests that the

values of masculine workplaces might also be reframed to produce more inclusive cultures of belonging. Affirming athletes through livable salaries and contracts would also allow athletes to feel that their emotional and physical investment is justified and rewarded and that they are a valued part of the organization. Hope would, then, perhaps, offer more possibilities as a "collective social project" (Braidotti, 2010, p. 53) with athletes and organizations working together from a position of shared values. These shared values may open up broader possibilities for reframing negative and offensive comments around women's entry into what had previously been male-only domains.

Creating competitions and talent pathways that affirm and value women's position within sports organizations could be an avenue for positive change. Although development pathways were on offer for women, they were limited and did not account for women's family and caring needs, and parental leave was partially available in only two of the sports we investigated. With women still positioned as the primary caregivers within the family (Piggott & Pike, 2020), pathways that mirror those on offer to men are not necessarily the answer Newland et al., 2020). These may not provide women with suitable support that allows them to fully develop their capabilities or create opportunities that empower them to reach their potential. Pathways populated with a greater number of women coaches and/or men who have expertise in coaching women can also foster and develop more inclusive cultures of belonging, which may allay some of the athletes' expressed feelings of exclusion. The inclusion of more female coaches could also be one way to reflect values of affirmation, empowerment, and belonging, altering the gendered dynamic within organizations, and produce more affirmative cultures of belonging.

Cultures of belonging can also be nurtured through women feeling valued and their emotional investment reflected in equitable organizational practices. Inequalities can produce cultures of exclusion as women feel less valued and, yet, continue to express hopes for equality. Hope is also a strong emotional investment that may, over time, diminish when not recognized or realized. Pavlidis (2020) argued that hope for success in pay and equality can draw women toward signing up to play for sport leagues by offering possibilities that are never realized. However, there are limits to emotional investment (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018), and within the current context, some of the staff tasked with caring for athletes did not acknowledge this or were constrained in their actions by current organizational practices. Reframing these relations of hope and equality to produce cultures of belonging is clearly a challenging undertaking. Nevertheless, it can be actioned through tangible and practical steps and through employing values of affirmation, empowerment, and belonging to guide practice.

We suggest that future research might use a continuum of care in different settings, particularly other male-dominated workplaces where masculine values underpin organizational practices. As we have argued, the values embedded in a continuum of care can act as a guide and an analytic tool to extend organizational practices by attending to and recognizing the emotional investment that employees have in the organizations in which they are employed. The values can also be used to explore the types of emotional investment that define organizations, positive and negative, to make employees visible and then find ways to negate the power relations within institutions. Consideration might also be given to other effects of power and might include an exploration of how emotional investment is used by organizations to either manipulate or disempower employees or, more positively, how emotions lead to solidarity, using a continuum of care lens to consider how

organizations can be better places in which to work. As Zietsma and Toubiana (2018, p. 434) noted, "Emotions are intimately tied to the institutional, affecting investment, agency, moral values, sense of self, and connections to others."

The values of a continuum of care may be also deployed to design a before and after intervention that attempts to change institutional values. This might include examining how changing the values of an organization affects employees across all levels, from managers through to the employees they manage, from permanent to casual staff. There is potential here to also include the two other components of Zietsma and Toubiana's (2018) research agenda, the constitutive and the energetic, to further explore the complex arrangements of emotions and institutions. For example, the energetic might consider how persistent inequalities may act to deplete energy generated through institutional dynamics and, in turn, affect how the values of a continuum of care are enacted. As Zietsma and Toubiana (2018, p. 435) argued, these elements are embedded in institutions and "impact the ways certain people, practices, and ideas are evaluated." This, in turn, offers further possibilities for opening up broader research agendas, such as an exploration of how the values of the continuum of care might challenge the logics in institutions to reshape them toward social justice and equity. Similarly, an intersectional approach would also allow a continuum of care to be broadened to explore multiplicities and "unfamiliar insights" (Ferguson, 2017, p. 273) to generate new thinking regardless of the social division of the athlete.

This research is a snapshot of a rapidly evolving and, yet, at times, static sports environment. COVID-19 has impacted women's status, pay, and opportunities for advancement in the workplace (Carli, 2020), and these impacts have also been felt in women's professional and semiprofessional sports (Bowes et al., 2021). As Bowes et al. (2021, p. 457) further noted, "Research into professional women's sport continues to highlight both competing discourses of growth but constraint, or progress but inequality." The short-term nature of the current research is an acknowledged limitation. The limited response we had from both athletes and administrators in Sport C did not, perhaps, allow us to fully explore and contrast the experiences of women across the three sports. Interviewing participants in the lead up to and during COVID-19, when the women's professional leagues were in hiatus and in a period of change, meant that our study was more of a reflection on the pre-COVID situation and work conditions. We also note that a longitudinal view might contribute to better understanding the competing discourses highlighted by Bowes et al. (2021). Approaches, such as a continuum of a care, can be seen as a way to challenge and change how women athletes are cared for by the organizations in which they are embedded.

Acknowledgments

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