

A critical examination of postnatal women's community team sport participation:
"Playing for team motherhood"

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ABSTRACT

Using a feminist lens, the purpose of this study is to understand the meanings and experiences of physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, I aimed to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. Applying a critical feminist narrative inquiry approach, three interviews were conducted with each of the six postnatal women participated in this study. Three salient narratives developed that best reflect my interpretation of participants' experiences: 1) Confronting the Challenges of Returning to Team Sport; 2) Relationships Aiding the Return to Team Sport; 3) Resistance and Empowerment Through Community Team Sport Participation. Moreover, these findings uncovered that gendered expectations of motherhood have a drastic impact on postnatal women's physically active leisure and lives. This study highlights the importance of creating equitable and inclusive policies, childcare, and programming that encourages postnatal women to return to community team sport without the pressures of intensive mothering hindering their participation.

Key Words: community, feminist, postnatal women, physically active leisure, resistance, team sport.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Taking time-out for leisure allows mothers to value themselves and challenge restrictions on personal freedom” (Currie, 2004, p. 238)

The benefits of participating in leisure are well documented in the literature. Participating in physically active leisure has proven to reduce stress and improve mental, physiological, and emotional functioning (Fullagar, 2013; Kim & Lee, 2016; Zuzanek et al., 1998). For women in particular, participation in physically active leisure is important as it fosters social interaction (Masberg & Eklund, 2018; Sirgy et al., 2017), identity construction (Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Green, 1998; McGannon et al., 2018; Palmer & Leberman, 2009), and opportunities to resistance dominant social ideologies such as gender roles (Du, 2008; Green, 1998; Shaw, 2001), pronatalism (Parry, 2005), and idealized motherhood (Spowart et al., 2008; Wearing, 1990).

Despite its importance, women regularly struggle to engage in meaningful physically active leisure experiences (Freysinger et al., 2013d; Henderson, 1993; Samdahl, 2013; Shaw, 1994). Historically, women’s engagement in physically active leisure has been constrained by sexist and gendered notions of women’s capabilities and roles (Freysinger et al., 2013a; Samdahl, 2013). While society has moved towards creating inclusive physically active leisure programming, gendered ideas surrounding who accesses leisure continues to inhibit women’s participation. Inhibitors to women’s physically active leisure experiences include imposing gender norms, roles, and stereotypes (Parry, 2013; Samdahl, 2013; Shultz, 2018), insinuated homophobia based on gendered sport expectations (Freysinger et al., 2013a), and questions of gendered leisure embodiment (Coffey, 2019; Fullagar et al., 2019). The noted challenges, and many others, increase the likelihood of declining leisure participation for women (Hausenblas & Downs, 2005; Parry, 2013; Samdahl, 2013).

Moreover, motherhood brings additional obstacles to women's physically active leisure access. Motherhood is a drastic transformation of body and lifestyle (Nelson, 2009), which further impedes women's physically active leisure participation (Sullivan, 2013). Research has shown that over 50% of women who were physically active before having children, are no longer meeting American national physical activity requirements (Hull et al., 2010; McIntyre & Rhodes, 2009).

It is clear, too, that decreasing levels of physically active leisure begin before the birth of the first child. Di Fabio et al., (2015) found that the majority of a pregnant women's day is spent in sedentary behaviour. Despite this behaviour, during pregnancy women rarely consider how their leisure participation might change with a new child (Sullivan, 2013). However, sedentary behaviour during pregnancy directly translates to decreased levels of physically active leisure participation post-partum (Blum et al., 2004). As such, postnatal women endure significant decreases in physically active leisure participation (e.g. Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Mailey et al., 2014; Rhodes et al., 2014; Spowart et al., 2008), and participation further declines with subsequent birth of more children (Evans et al., 2016).

A decrease in physically active leisure is problematic for postnatal women because they are at high risk of weight gain (Amorim et al., 2007; Gunderson & Abrams, 1999), as well as depression and anxiety (Dunford & Granger, 2017; O'Hara & Wisner, 2014), which may negatively affect their health as well as their child's (Demissie et al., 2011; Evenson et al., 2013; McIntyre & Rhodes, 2009). Consequently, engaging in physically active leisure may be one step towards improving the lives of postnatal women (Batey & Owton, 2014; Daley et al., 2012; Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Lloyd et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2017; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Understanding why there is a decrease in physically active leisure for postpartum women is

critical to increase the likelihood that they and their children maintain healthy lives (Batey & Owton, 2014; McGannon et al., 2018).

Indeed, understanding the reasons behind decreasing physically active leisure participation for mothers in relation to the gendered expectations of motherhood has been a topic of feminist leisure research throughout the past two decades. Although, research has focused on mothers' lives more broadly, and not specifically postnatal mothers, we can garner a sense of its significance. For example, Miller and Brown (2005) found that the ethic of care contributes to constraints surrounding postnatal physical activity and leisure participation. Participants felt that engaging in leisure was selfish, and that it "took away from the well-being of the family unit" (Miller & Brown, 2005, p.414). Brown et al. (2001) demonstrated that the responsibilities of childcare and housework caused large declines in leisure participation for mothers with young children. Furthermore, gender roles within family settings typically dictate parental responsibilities with the majority of care work falling on mothers, which in turn affects their leisure participation (Lloyd et al., 2019; Trussell & Shaw, 2007, 2012). Finally, intensive mothering ideologies set unrealistic expectations for mothers to put themselves and their leisure priorities aside to fully dedicate their money, time, and efforts to the success of their children (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). The above findings contribute to understanding why postnatal women experience decreased levels of physical activity. However, the above findings resulted from exploratory studies of women's leisure with older children. A critical examination of how gendered expectations of motherhood and social contexts effect postnatal physically active leisure is needed due to the transition that accompanies the birth of a new child (Brown et al., 2001; Currie, 2004; Evans et al., 2016; Palmer & Leberman, 2009).

At the same time, feminist researchers have uncovered mothers' narratives of empowerment, negotiation, and resistance to gendered expectations of motherhood that constrain their lives. For example, Darroch and Hillsburg's (2017) study of mothers who are elite runners found that engaging in physically active leisure while having children was empowering. It helped them feel like they were making good decisions as mothers as they negotiated gendered expectations surrounding motherhood and sport. Batey and Owton (2014) uncovered that mother's abilities to claim leisure time and space for themselves helped them feel in control of their schedule and their lives. Other studies (Miller & Brown, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2017) also emphasize the importance postnatal women place on freely choosing leisure experiences to feel empowered as they negotiated or resisted gendered expectations of motherhood. Notably, the mothers in the above studies had children ranging from under two to eleven years old. Darroch and Hillsburg (2017), Miller and Brown (2005) and O'Brien et al. (2017) looked at mothers with young children, meaning they could be from birth until school-aged, while Batey and Owton (2014) had participants with children aged an average of six years old. Therefore, none of the above participants focused on critically examining *postnatal* women's experiences of empowerment, negotiation, and resistance when returning to physically active leisure.

Despite extensive research on mothers' engagement in physically active leisure, a gap remains in the literature related to the types of activities postnatal women pursue. There have been numerous investigations into individual community exercise (Cramp & Bray, 2009, 2010; Currie, 2004, 2009; Daley et al., 2007; Di Fabio et al., 2015; Mailey & Hsu, 2017; Saligheh et al., 2016, 2017), as well as individual sport or a combination of individual and team sport participation in the same study (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2016; Martinez-Pascual et al., 2014; McGannon et al., 2018; Spowart et al., 2008, 2010). While this research has expanded

knowledge of postnatal women's physically active leisure experiences, little is known about postnatal women's experiences in community team sport.

Using community team sport as a context to critically examine postnatal women's physically active leisure is important; particularly because it is a time period that may be marked by depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Dunford & Granger, 2017; Saligheh et al., 2016, 2017; Teychenne & York, 2013). Batey and Owton's (2014) exploratory study of mothers who engage in team sport, with young and school-aged children, uncovered themes surrounding socialization, belonging, and community. Participants valued being part of a social environment, having the chance to cultivate friendships, and received identity affirmation as an athlete from teammates. These elements helped participants feel empowered as women, athletes and mothers. Further, Batey and Owton (2014) uncovered that participants decided to return to team sport, rather than individual sport, after having children because of the social benefits community team sport creates. They also found that participating in team sport offers benefits identical to those of studies researching individual sports and exercise. Batey and Owton (2014) revealed that engaging in team sport provides them with time away from being a mother, nurture their identity as an athlete, and experience feelings of control.

Missing from Batey and Owton's (2014) analysis however, are explorations of gendered expectations that motherhood places on women, and how these expectations influence empowerment, negotiation, and resistance through physically active leisure engagement. Incorporating stories of negotiation through community team sport are critical, because they demonstrate how women navigate gendered expectations of motherhood to access and justify participating in physically active leisure (McGannon et al., 2018; Miller & Brown, 2005; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Narratives of empowerment may be equally vital when examining postnatal

community team sport, because they demonstrate how women attain feelings of control and autonomy through participation (Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Green, 1998; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Lloyd et al., 2016; Miller & Brown, 2005). Finally, incorporating experiences of resistance towards gendered expectations of motherhood are essential, because they illustrate how women defy social expectations to participate in physically active leisure (Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990). Therefore, critically examining the physically active leisure experiences of postnatal women who engage in community team sport provides baseline knowledge that may inspire more inclusive policies and service provision for those who are invested in improving the leisure and lives of women.

Significance and Aim of the Study

Using a feminist lens, the purpose of this study is to understand the meanings and experiences of physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, it aims to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. My central research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) How do women's leisure experiences shift during the postnatal period?
- 2) What role does physically active leisure through community team sport play in the lives of postnatal women?
- 3) What role does community team sport have in supporting postnatal women's empowerment, reproduction and negotiation of, and resistance to gendered expectations of motherhood?

My research is qualitative in nature with a critical feminist lens. I used narrative inquiry to understand how participant's stories and experiences are shaped through social conditions (Pitre et al., 2013). Six participants were recruited for three, one-hour open-ended interviews to

gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences as postnatal women (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Conducting multiple semi-structured interviews is common practice in narrative inquiry so participants' stories can be constructed and then examined for further analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During data collection, I used Pitre et al.'s (2013) critical feminist narrative analysis to analyse participants' experiences and cultural surroundings.

Research surrounding physically active leisure and motherhood to date has mainly focused on motherhood in general, or mothers of young children (Batey & Owton, 2014; Brown et al., 2001; Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2016; Miller & Brown, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2017; Spowart et al., 2010). Instead, I focus exclusively on the postnatal period following pregnancy. The postnatal period is defined as women who are between six and 52 weeks post childbirth (Cramp & Brawley, 2009; Dunford & Granger, 2017). During this time, women are adjusting to their new lives and bodies (Nelson, 2009), while attempting to negotiate gendered expectations of motherhood (Lloyd et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2017). Understanding the physically active leisure experiences of postnatal women is important, because physically active leisure encompasses many significant contributors to postnatal well-being (Saligheh et al., 2016, 2017; Teychenne & York, 2013).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspective and Framework

“Come closer and you will see: feminism is for everybody”

(hooks, 2015, Introduction, Para. 8)

This chapter describes and explores past and present research related to feminism, motherhood, and physically active leisure. I open this chapter with a personal narrative to illustrate my relationship to this study, and why postnatal physically active leisure matters to me. I then review feminist concepts which guide the theoretical perspective of my study and how they align with leisure research. Afterwards, I examine the concepts of family, motherhood, and their various impacts on women’s leisure experiences. The final section reviews research on postnatal physically active leisure experiences and their connection to team sports.

Feminist Theory

The personal is political. Choosing to study the meaning and experiences of physically active leisure for postnatal women was shaped by my journey to becoming a feminist and was driven by a combination of my traditional Italian heritage, experiences as a female athlete, and undergraduate education. My first- and second-generation Italian-Canadian parents taught me from a young age that I could be whomever I wanted, choose any profession, and choose any partner that makes me happy. Yet, there was always an underlying expectation that I would become a mother. I come from a large Italian family that values family and traditional gender roles, with the understanding that I would want a family of my own. Even after kissing my first boy at five years old, jokes of wedding bells and babies were made. Not only am I expected to be a mother, I am expected to be a “good Italian mother” by putting my children’s needs before my own, always having food prepared for them, and training my (future) daughter to be a mother as well. Other parts of my life became secondary, while notions of intensive mothering were passed

down from my family, becoming a primary concern even before I had children (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017).

Societal notions of ethic of care were instilled in me, because if my overarching goal was to be a mother, then other parts of my life were secondary (Miller & Brown, 2005). Fortunately, my parents also prioritized physically active leisure, which led me to become the athlete I am today. Growing up, I played volleyball throughout high school and trained to be a college athlete. Once I reached college however, I collapsed under the stress of juggling school work, paid work, having a social life and boyfriend, and playing volleyball. Quitting the team was my only option because I felt pressure from my family to excel in school, keep my job, and have a boyfriend. Like many young adult women in post-secondary education, my physical activity level declined significantly (Towne et al., 2017). A lack of physically active leisure made me anxious and depressed. I took up smoking, drinking and drugs to cope, and barely graduated. After three years of turmoil, I rediscovered volleyball and rediscovered myself. I quit engaging in purple leisure (Sullivan & LeDrew, 2013) and completed my first year of university. Through playing volleyball, I had regained a part of my identity that was missing for a long time. This experience opened my eyes to the importance of physically active leisure participation and identity development. It inspired me to study leisure and advocate for the benefits of leisure participation.

I spent the next three years as an undergraduate student studying gender, leisure and sport participation, and motherhood, while becoming a competitive athlete. Although I learnt about feminist issues in sport, I felt uncomfortable identifying as a feminist. I believed labeling myself as a feminist was extremist, mostly because popular media through my youth portrayed feminists as angry man-haters, not considering that feminism was about equal rights (hooks, 2015). I felt

more comfortable situating myself as a humanist who valued the rights of individuals as autonomous beings (Austin & Crawford, 2001; Gannon & Davies, 2012).

Shortly after declaring myself a humanist in my second year as an undergraduate student, two events occurred simultaneously, culminating in what Jane O'Reilly popularized as a "click!" moment when I realized I was a feminist (Eisenstein, 2006). First, I learnt about androcentrism in leisure and sport during a pivotal lecture in my Foundations of Leisure in Canada course. My professor only used one slide to elaborate on male-centered leisure, but it stuck with me that so many leisure theories and activities are structured based on the male experience (Freysinger et al., 2013e). Then, I experienced sexism in sport when my male partner at the time and his male friends did not let me attend multiple beach volleyball practices with them because I was female. At the same time, I found it difficult to organize enough female players to practice regularly. Despite my issues finding people to practice with, he and the others would not let me join out of fear I would slow the practice down. This was the first time I was overtly aware of being excluded from the sport I love because of my sex, making me feel powerless.

The apex of these components of my life led me to question everything I knew about equality for women in leisure, sport, parenthood, and society. I began to see my oppression, the oppression of other women, the oppression of women athletes, mothers, coaches, and leaders. Instances of oppression surrounded me, and made me feel helpless. I wondered: "if I already have this much difficulty accessing physically active leisure as a woman without children, what will happen once I have them? Must I risk my mental, physical and emotional health by quitting volleyball once again to raise my child? Would that do more harm than good to myself and my family? Is my male partner expected to make the same sacrifices as me? Who is forcing me to make these unjust sacrifices?" These were issues I could not un-see; questions I had to ask. It

was at this moment that I realized that fighting for women's equality is necessary, eliminating the oppression of women is relevant to leisure, sport and motherhood, and I could engage in feminist practice through my academic training and research.

Defining feminism. Outlining the precise definition of feminist theory is difficult, because of the value it places on the subjective interpretations of feminists (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminism itself has many definitions, because it values the subjective meaning women place on their social contexts (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012). Parry et al. (2019) go as far as to state that there are “as many feminisms as there are feminists” (p. 2) because of their varying interpretations of power, empowerment, structure, society, ideologies, negotiation, and resistance (Parry, 2014). It is therefore important to consider the social and historical context of each feminist to understand their definition and point of view, which is one reason why I opened this section with a personal narrative.

For examples of contemporary definitions of feminism, Kirkley (2000), a nursing scholar, defines feminism as “the elimination of patriarchal social systems in which power, benefits, and burdens are unequally distributed” (p. 459). Meanwhile, O’Rilley (2008), a feminist motherhood researcher, describes feminism as:

Challenging and transforming [...] gender inequality in all of its manifestations: cultural, economic, political, philosophical, social, ideological, sexual, and so forth. Also, most feminisms seek to dismantle other hierarchical binary systems such as race (racism), sexuality (heterosexism), economics (classism), and ability (ableism). (p. 8).

Likewise, Parry and Fullagar (2013) used Snyder-Hall's (2010) definition of feminism when they reviewed contemporary feminist research, which describes feminism as “fundamentally about transforming patriarchal culture and society” (p. 256).

Although definitions on feminism vary, a constant throughout is the emancipation of women's oppression. Therefore, for this project I choose to adopt bell hook's (2015) definition of feminism because it resonates closest with me and centres on the emancipation of women. She defines feminism as: "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (Introduction, para. 4). I chose to use this definition, because it highlights oppression and sexism as main components to focus on when liberating women's rights. These concepts are valuable to me, because they are what sparked my feminist journey, as illustrated in my narrative.

Feminist theory and praxis incorporate the above principles of each definition and apply it to a research context. Historically, feminist theories began with a progressive separation from androcentric bias in positivist research, which focused solely on women (Freysinger et al., 2013b; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012). Early feminist research moved to simply incorporate women in generalized studies. Researchers then realised significant differences between the experiences of men and women, which sparked the beginning of feminist theory as its own practice (Freysinger et al., 2013b; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Modern engagement in feminist theory continues to involve questioning and challenging the illusion of inclusion of women in society (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminism uncovers and decenters the conversation from men to women and all marginalized groups, questioning empowerment and "knowledge claims by those who occupy privileged positions" (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 3). Further, it studies life context within the above power structures, and seeks to understand how the social location of people influences their perspective (Pitre et al., 2013). Feminist theory contributes to critical examinations of participant's narratives, as it uncovers discourses surrounding social justice, equity, and inclusion for a dominated or oppressed population (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Parry, 2014).

A salient concept to feminism is the consideration of the researcher in the research process (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Feminist researchers focus on deconstructing power relations, which means they involve themselves holistically in the research process through “collaborative and reflexive practices” (p. 180). As such, collaboration and equality between participants and researchers are central to feminist theory and praxis, because they minimize power dynamics within the researcher-participant relationship (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Therefore, to stay true to praxis, I opened this section with a narrative of myself and chose to expose my stories to readers, because participants’ stories will be exposed as well.

Feminism and leisure research. Feminist leisure research has sought to understand women’s leisure experiences since the late 1980’s (Freysinger et al., 2013b). Similar to the origins of feminist theory, early feminist leisure theorists recognized that simply grouping women into a male-dominated sample subsumed the leisure experiences of women (Freysinger et al., 2013b). Once this erasure was acknowledged, early feminist researchers began exploring the significant differences between women’s and men’s leisure experiences. For example, Wearing and Wearing (1988) recognized the importance of understanding women’s leisure beyond time or activity. They moved towards an inclusive understanding of “leisure experience”, defined by freedom of choice and intrinsic motivation, to understand women’s leisure because defining leisure by time or activity automatically constrained women’s leisure. A second example is Woodward et al. (1989) study of women’s leisure experiences, and the negotiation of gender roles required to participate. Researchers found that unlike men, women must compromise their leisure engagement based on their family’s income and access to safe transportation and childcare. The above studies and many others brought to light questions about power imbalances between men and women (Wearing & Wearing, 1988), women’s access to leisure (Woodward et

al., 1989), how gender roles altered leisure participation (Fasting & Sisjord, 1985; Henderson, 1993; Wearing, 1990; Wearing & Wearing, 1988), and what strategies women used to engage in leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1992; Shaw, 1994; Wearing, 1990).

Along with understanding women's leisure experiences, feminist leisure researchers explored how women engaged in leisure despite gendered constraints. Concepts such as negotiation and resistance began to develop. Notably, Wearing (1990) found that women negotiated household responsibilities with their husbands in order to facilitate their leisure opportunities. These negotiations allowed women to resist gendered ideologies of motherhood, which granted them access to leisure opportunities. Another influential article from that era by Shaw (1994) looked at leisure frameworks to analyse women's leisure experiences. She approached analysing women's leisure from three lenses: 1) understanding constraints placed on leisure, 2) considering how elements of leisure themselves are constraining for women, and 3) approaching women's leisure as practices of resistance. She proposed that some women's leisure participation pushes against gendered expectations, while remaining constrained by them. These influential texts and others, such as Freysinger and Flannery (1992) and Henderson and Bialeschki's (1991) articles on resistance, negotiation, and empowerment in women's leisure participation, helped develop feminist leisure theory. These scholars called for feminist leisure research that "embodies the notions of personal choice, control, and self-determination" (Shaw, 1994, p.6).

Contemporary feminist leisure research continues to expand the field's understanding of women's leisure experiences, with the goal of creating equitable, meaningful leisure opportunities for all women (Freysinger et al., 2013b; Samdahl, 2013). While research continues to understand and critique women's leisure experiences, perceptions, and constraints (Dilley &

Scraton, 2010; Kim & Lee, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016; McKeown, 2015; McKeown & Parry, 2019; Spowart et al., 2008), a social justice framework is gradually becoming incorporated into feminist leisure research (Parry, 2014). Social justice extends to feminist praxis through the goal of wanting to change the world with research, rather than simply study and understand society (Freysinger et al., 2013f). Feminist social justice research is a fluid and evolving concept that is loosely defined as “envisioning and creating a society that is outside the bounds of patriarchy” (Parry, 2014, p. 350) with goals surrounding human rights, emancipation, and recognition of identity (Freysinger et al., 2013f; Parry, 2014). Past feminist leisure scholars however, have neglected to incorporate elements of active social justice practice into their work (Aitchison, 2013; Freysinger et al., 2013f; Parry, 2014). As such, there is a push from present feminist leisure researchers to incorporate elements of social justice into practice. Freysinger et al. (2013e) suggests that feminist leisure scholarship may result in “social change necessary for empowerment, equity, and social justice” (p. 552). They state that the work of leisure researchers should help people critically reflect on, and obtain, a better quality of life. Further, Parry (2014) recommends researchers use a politics of hope, transformative encounters, activism, and creative analytic practice when conducting and presenting research, and disseminating knowledge. She believes that feminist social justice research that creates either macro-level mobilization, or micro-level social change with a single person or community are both needed and can be achieved by leisure researchers.

Theorizing the Intersection of Gender, Leisure, and Sport

Despite the efforts of feminist leisure researchers in the past four decades, the negative impact of gender remains pervasive, with many tensions limiting the leisure participation and experiences of women (Samdahl, 2013). Girls, young adults, mothers, middle-aged women, and

older women continue to face social and cultural barriers that inhibit meaningful physically active leisure participation (Chow & Dong, 2013; Freysinger et al., 2013d; Kim & Lee, 2016; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Samdahl, 2013; Schmalz, 2013). The following section outlines Western societies' construction of gender, and how gendered expectations inhibit women's leisure and sport participation.

The construction of gender. Gender is socially constructed, reinforcing the reproduction of specific “masculine” or “feminine” behaviours (Connell, 2012; Freysinger et al., 2013c). Gender is also relational, in that everyday interactions reinforce the reproduction or resistance of these behaviours (Green, 1998; Shaw, 2001). Additionally, gender relations vary between cultures, societies, and time periods, therefore interpretations of what is “feminine” or “masculine” is ever-changing and are based on people's subjective interpretations of each concept (Freysinger et al., 2013c; Trussell, 2013). Connell (2012) also highlights the importance of understanding gender as a construction of social norms and influences, and personal constructions and interpretation of what gender means.

While gender serves as a site for personal expression, it is also a vessel for power and oppression over women. Historically, Western societies have viewed women as the “weaker” gender, whose roles centre around house work, childbirth and rearing, and remaining beautiful, dainty and fragile (Freysinger et al., 2013e; Parry, 2013; Wearing, 1990). Meanwhile, men's roles constitute providing for their family, protection, virility, and athleticism (Freysinger et al., 2013c; Wearing, 1990). The underlying tones of the above role assignments lead to positions of power and authority for men, while women are meant to serve men and produce and raise children (Parry, 2013; Wearing, 1990). In Western societies, patriarchy leads to the systemic oppression of women through androcentric political and social systems, which privilege and

normalize the experiences of men over women (Shaw, 2001). Therefore, women in Western society are subject to gendered social systems created for and run by men.

Women's leisure and sport. Gendered social systems are reflected in the leisure experiences of women, which may shape how, when, and what type of leisure they ought to participate in (Mansfield et al., 2018; Samdahl, 2013). While the above rules were more explicit and overtly reinforced in the early-to-mid twentieth century (Freysigner et al., 2013e), undertones of these systems still shape women's participation. For example, sport participation perpetuates gendered social systems, which inhibit women's participation. Fink (2016) argued that sport remains an overtly sexist industry, with acts of sexism "hidden in plain sight, [that are] so entwined in the fabric of sport that most do not even discern it" (p. 2). She acknowledged that other organizations and industries deal with more covert and subtle types of sexism that still impact workers and participants, but believed that sexism in sport manages to remain largely institutionalized. For example, girls and women are continuously fed gendered messages that dictate "appropriate or inappropriate gendered activity participation" even if access and availability to sports for women and girls has improved (Schmalz, 2013, p. 130).

Considering leisure, traditional definitions of leisure as time or activity constrain women's leisure participation because the creation of these definitions were based on men's experiences (Freysiger et al., 2013a, 2013c, 2013d). Defining leisure as time away from work is problematic for women, because gendered expectations of mothering often dictate that women engage in more unpaid work than men, thereby blurring the lines of what is considered leisure participation (Freysiger, et al., 2013a, 2013e; Wearing, 1990). Leisure as activity typically focuses on the type of activity people engage in, and how often (Freysigner et al., 2013c). This definition encourages determining which activities qualify as leisure, which has historically

excluded women's leisure experiences (Freysigner, 2013b; Parry, 2013). Additionally, Shaw (1994) contends that leisure activity itself can be constraining because

“the types of activities into which women and men are channelled, and the nature of certain types of free time activities function to perpetuate gender stereotypes and gender-based inequities, and thus to reinforce structured power relations within society” (p. 4).

Understanding leisure through these two lenses limits women's leisure participation, and subsumes their experiences into androcentric systems.

It is important to note, that the above reasons have guided me in moving away from time-bound language to focus on meaningful physically active leisure experiences instead (Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; McGannon et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2017; Parry et al., 2013b; Trussell & Shaw, 2007). I choose to use this language because focusing on leisure meaning is relative to the subjective experiences of women (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990). Whereas seeing leisure through “containers”, such as activity type, time, and settings, is imposing limits of gender constraints relevant to those elements (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992). As such, focusing on the subjective experiences of women allow me to analyse their experiences in social contexts (Shaw, 2001), and therefore in the context of community team sport and the larger social sphere. Doing so allows me to draw links “between leisure experiences and women's experiences of oppression or constraint arising out of their relationship to societal power relations and ideological factors” (Shaw, 2001, p. 191).

Two prevalent examples of how gender effects women's leisure participation are the implications of gender roles and pronatalist ideologies. Gender roles are a socially constructed phenomenon that dictate how members of society act based on the gender they present (Freysigner, et al., 2013c; Parry, 2013). Gender roles and sexist beliefs about women's bodies

influence women's physically active leisure participation by framing activities and sports as more feminine or masculine (Freysigner, et al., 2013e; Samdahl, 2013). They direct women towards activities that involve graceful body movement, such as swimming, dance, or gymnastics, and men towards competitive contact sports like football, hockey, and rugby (Samdahl, 2013). These messages not only continue to influence choice (Plaza et al., 2017; Schmalz, 2013; Trussell, 2013), but also influence how women experience and access physically active leisure participation (Francombe-Webb & Toffoletti, 2018). For example, Coffey's (2019) study of renegotiating gendered embodiment found that leisure practices act as sites for gendered messages about women's bodies to occur. Leisure also acts as a space to reinforce and reproduce gender roles. Green (1998) found that leisure spaces for women's leisure remain a site where "femininities and masculinities are 'made' and re-constructed" through discourse (p. 183). Women in the study used leisure spaces to discuss and mirror traditional aspects of femininity. As such, gender influences women's physically active leisure participation through pressures such as gender roles.

Closely aligned with gender roles, pronatalism also affects how women engage in leisure. Pronatalism is the belief that "a woman's social value is linked to conceiving and bearing children" (Parry, 2005, p. 134), meaning that motherhood becomes a women's primary social role. Research shows that pronatalist discourse surrounds women and is passed down generationally by parents and grandparents to children (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017). Pronatalist ideologies are delivered through media and political campaigns (Brown & Ferree, 2005) and offer medical "cures" to women having difficulty conceiving children through assisted reproduction (Warnes, 2019). As a result, many women feel pressured to become mothers, regardless if they are ready to or can physically bare children (McKeown & Parry, 2019; Reuter,

2019; Turnbull, Graham, & Taket, 2016; Ulrich & Weatherall, 2000; Warnes, 2019), and face social isolation if they cannot have children (Parry, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2016).

Intensive mothering. Aligned with gender roles and pronatalist ideologies, feminist research exploring the experiences of women's leisure participation have brought out narratives related to the dominant ideology of intensive mothering. It is clear that dominant discourses related to intensive mothering may change women's leisure experiences once they have children. Intensive mothering is a form of gendered expectations, which involves "acting in a prescribed way that others recognize as indicative of good parenting" (Butler, 2010, p. 247). It highlights the importance of providing the best possible conditions for a child to grow up to achieve being a "good parent" by societal standards (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Intensive mothering is gendered in that it dictates that mothers spend money, time, and energy to raise their children in the best possible way, otherwise they may not be considered "good parents" (Hays, 1996; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Central to this message is the ethic of care or self-sacrifice to help mothers reach the high standards of intensive mothering (Henderson et al., 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016).

This form of mothering pressures women to question the decisions they make as mothers, because it involves intense judgement and scrutiny by others on their choices as mothers (Butler, 2010; Janning & Scalise, 2015). However, the time, energy, and money spent on making and executing these decisions negatively impacts their leisure time. Decisions such as returning to work (Damaske, 2013; Murray, 2015; Trussell, 2015) and breastfeeding (Afflerback et al., 2013) are affected by an intensive mothering ideology. Damaske (2013) articulated that mothers returning to work after giving birth is already seen as a contradiction to gendered expectations, because women are considered primary caregivers of children. As such, intensive mothering contradicts women entering the workforce, but mothers who engage in paid work are still

expected to uphold the expectations of intensive mothering (Butler, 2010). This contradiction leaves little room for women to take time for self-care through physically active leisure.

Further, intensive mothering dictates how postnatal women should breastfeed their newborns (Afflerback et al., 2013; Hanser & Li, 2017). Breastfeeding is already a contentious topic that impacts women's leisure experiences (Chow & Dong, 2013; Grant, 2016). Although attitudes are slowly changing, women still face discrimination towards breastfeeding in public spaces, because breasts remain sexualized in Western society even when used to feed infants (Grant, 2016). Yet, leisure facilities continue to lack private spaces for breastfeeding, which ultimately deters nursing women from leisure participation (Chow & Dong, 2013).

While engaging in intensive motherhood strengthens one's image amongst other mothers in the larger community, it weakens mother's emotional and physical well-being (Elliott, Powell, & Brenton, 2015; Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Henderson et al., 2016), and their abilities to engage in meaningful leisure opportunities (O'Brien et al., 2017). Concerning emotional and physical well-being, emotional costs related to intensive mothering last throughout motherhood. Gunderson and Barrett's (2017) analysis of mothers of varying ages reported low scores of mental health, high levels of depressive symptoms, and high levels of negative moods. Further, because the concept of intensive mothering stems from primarily white, middle-class women (Butler, 2010; Hays, 1996), Elliott et al. (2015) uncovered that black, low-income, single mothers had to reduce pursuing their own interests to put their children's forward. Applying intensive mothering ideologies to their parenting practices increased their hardships, stressors and burdens, while blaming themselves for not being able to provide sufficiently for their children. In terms of leisure participation, O'Brien et al. (2017) studied mother with young children's leisure participation and uncovered that the workload required to engage in intensive

mothering left women feeling too exhausted to engage in leisure. Consequently, women blamed themselves for being too lazy to participate in leisure, rather than motherhood itself.

Reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and empowerment. Despite the above gendered expectations that alter or inhibit women's leisure participation, many manage to engage in physically active leisure on a regular basis. Feminist leisure and sport research has found that while engaging in physically active leisure, women may reproduce, negotiate, and resist gendered expectations of mothering as well as experience moments of empowerment. These four concepts and leisure participation are discussed in the following section.

Reproduction of gendered expectations is an aspect of leisure engagement that women may often experience. Shaw (2001) described reproduction through leisure in that women conform to societal gender norms and roles through participation. This concept is important to consider when looking at women's leisure, because it "further reproduces inequity in the relationships between men and women" (Du, 2008, p. 180). Green (1998) contended that leisure experiences can serve as sites of gender role reproduction, through discussion exchanged between leisure participants. Also, at times, reproduction of gendered expectations can be a form of self-preservation to avoid scrutiny from others. Mothers specifically face criticism from friends and family because intensive mothering is presently considered the norm of mothering (Henderson et al., 2016; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). McGannon and Schinke (2013) found that reproducing these norms in leisure experiences help assimilate women into social groups, rather than isolate them as "bad parents". Regardless, this practice further perpetuates stereotypes and oppresses women. As such, it is important to consider how gender expectations are reproduced in physically active leisure settings, and how they affect women's oppression.

Negotiation of gendered expectations also influences women's physically active leisure engagement. Leisure negotiation stems from navigating leisure constraints that inhibit people's participation (Samdahl, 2013). Women notably face more constraints to leisure participation than men, because of socially constructed gendered expectations that restrict or influence participation (Brown et al., 2001; Henderson, 1993; Saligeh et al., 2016; Samdahl, 2013; Shaw, 1994). Therefore, to overcome gendered constraints, women must negotiate the power imposed on them by others (Shaw, 2001). In doing so, women negotiate narratives of gendered expectations to engage in physically active leisure. For example McGannon et al. (2018) found that women had to negotiate meanings of their identities as mothers and competitive athletes, which allowed women to "juggle" both identities. Participants decided that being a mother contributed to their success as an athlete through improved sport performance, focus, and competitiveness. They also found that being an athlete enhanced their ability to be good mothers and role models for their children. Through this negotiation process, participants felt they could continue to support both their identities as mothers and athletes.

Another significant constraint mothers negotiate to engage in physically active leisure is time, because gender expectations dictate mothers as primary caregivers for children (Freysigner et al., 2013a, 2013d; Lloyd, et al., 2016; Miller & Brown, 2005). To illustrate, Spowart et al. (2008) found that all of their participants negotiated time out of their role as mothers to snowboard. Negotiation often involved communicating with their partner, and the discussion of childcare responsibilities. Therefore, negotiation plays a significant role in how women engage in physically active leisure. It is important to note however, that negotiation of gendered expectations is a concept that requires available resources to perform those negotiations (Brown

et al., 2001). That is, not all women have the social, economic, or cultural means to engage physically active leisure through negotiation.

It is clear, too, that engaging in leisure as resistance helps mothers resist gendered expectations that perpetuate oppression (Du, J., 2008; Lloyd et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2017; Shaw, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2012; Wearing, 1990). Shaw (2001) conceptualizes leisure as resistance as political practice, which serves to challenge society's oppressive values. She specifies resistance's ability to "spotlight the positive political repercussions of leisure, including individual empowerment, as well as social change based on equity, recognition of, and respect for disadvantaged populations" both as a collective and as individuals (Shaw, 2001, p.198). In this case, leisure can be used to resist gendered expectations that govern dominant cultural norms of women and motherhood. Resistance to these expectations allows women and mothers to engage in empowering leisure experiences (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Shaw, 2001).

Further, Wearing's (1990) study of new mothers observed that resistance does not have to be consciously enacted, instead any participation in leisure that resists gender roles surrounding motherhood is a form of resistance. Shaw (1994, 2001) mirrored this agreement, describing resistance as a conscious or subconscious engagement where "an individual is able to [...] negotiate, reduce, or remove the power exerted over her by others" (2001, p. 194), and a collective may alter discourse and views while diminishing the impression of gendered expectations. As an example, a study by Dilley and Scraton (2010) which looked at mothers who rock climb regularly, revealed that although they do not consciously engage in physically active leisure to resist gender roles, their mere involvement and negotiation of gendered expectations to participate can be seen as a form of resistance. As a second example, in a study on mothers participating in team sport, Batey and Owton (2014) found that feelings of guilt made it difficult

for them to participate in physically active leisure because they identified as mothers first, and athletes second. However, their participation regardless of guilt is an example of resistance to ethic of care. Hence, the very act of participating in physically active leisure may resist gendered expectations, intentional or not.

Finally, empowerment is a powerful concept that occurs when oppressed individuals feel they have power, self-determination, identity affirmation and freedom (Freysinger et al., 2013d; Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Green, 1998; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Shaw, 2001). Feminist leisure research has found that, in Western cultures, leisure experiences give women the opportunity to feel empowered (Freysinger et al., 2013d). As such, leisure experiences create spaces for the emancipation of women from gendered expectations. For instance, Litchfield and Dionigi's (2012) research on middle-aged and older women's sport found that resisting age and gender norms allowed participants to feel empowered and engage in the sport they enjoyed. Batey and Owton's (2014) study revealed that women enjoyed participating on a team with other women, because it enabled them to leave behind their identity as a mother for a moment to engage in physically active leisure with others as an athlete and woman. Further, Darroch and Hillsburg (2017) uncovered that mothers who are elite athletes turned pressures felt from the ethic of care into a chance for empowerment. In that, participants conceived that being an athlete helped them manage motherhood better, and helped them feel more positive about who they are.

Reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and empowerment are clear themes that permeate women's physically active leisure experiences (Green, 1998; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Samdahl, 2013; Shaw, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2012; Wearing, 1990). These themes uncover how gendered expectations shape, alter, improve, or hinder how, when, and why women engage in physically active leisure. These themes are important to consider when examining postnatal

physically active leisure, because of their ability to apply a critical lens to postnatal leisure experiences. This lens differs from previous studies looking at postnatal leisure which mainly examined leisure access (Abbasi & van den Akker, 2015; Cramp & Bray, 2011; Saligheh et al., 2016), the relationship between exercise and depression (Daley et al., 2007; Dunford & Granger, 2017; Saligheh et al., 2017; Teychenne & York, 2013) and child presence during leisure (Cramp & Bray, 2010). Only one study by Lloyd et al. (2016) has critically examined mother with young children's leisure experiences; yet, the study focused on mothers past the postnatal period and focused on leisure-time-physical activity in general, rather than meaningful physically active leisure or team sport.

Collectively resisting gendered expectations. Physically active leisure that is social has also helped women engage in meaningful leisure (Batey & Owton, 2014; Du, 2008; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Trussell, 2015). It allows women to build social and emotional support (Du, 2008; Trussell, 2015), foster meaningful relationships (Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Masberg & Eklund, 2018), create a sense of community (Batey & Owton, 2014; Boyle, 2010; Masberg & Eklund, 2018), and transition through pregnancy (Trussell, 2015). Notably, social leisure may be a vehicle to help provide women and mothers with a site for collective resistance to gender expectations placed on them.

Shaw (2001) understood resistance as collective and individual. Individually, one can resist and affect others around them, making it collective, or a community of people can resist, and affect many, or one person. While the concept of resistance is not absolute, research posits that leisure experiences that are social serve as sites for women to resist societal gendered expectations with other women (Du, 2008; Green, 1998; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012). Green (1998) for example, studied women's friendships, and how women-only spaces presented

opportunities for resistance to gender stereotype roles and images. Talking and joking with other women in safe spaces allowed participants to comment on inequality in gender roles, and discuss the re-construction of identity and freedom that aging brings. Also, Litchfield and Dionigi (2012) found that middle-aged and older women on sports teams engaged in collective resistance by continuing to engage in sport together as they age, which contradicts traditional gender expectations. Further, middle-aged and older women's engagement in collective resistance to gendered norms lead to personal feelings of empowerment and a stronger sense of community. Accordingly, resistance through social leisure may be beneficial for women's empowerment, friendships, and survival in male-dominated spaces.

Postnatal women and community team sport. There are studies that evaluate negotiating constraints for athlete mothers who participate in sport (Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Martinez-Pascual et al., 2014; McGannon et al., 2018; Palmer & Leberman, 2009; Spowart et al., 2008, 2010). Yet, the above studies, and many others, only examine individual sport, or do not specify a difference between team or individual sport in their results. McGannon et al. (2018) for example, studied how women negotiate motherhood, and being a competitive recreational athlete. They depicted the process of negotiation for mothers' identities who compete at the community level. Their results describe in-depth tales of resistance to gender expectations of motherhood, yet there is no mention of specifically team sport, nor do they offer a critical analysis of mother's experiences. Further, two studies, Spowart et al. (2008) and Spowart et al. (2010), observed snowboarding and surfing mothers who used their sport participation to resist gendered expectations of motherhood. The simple act of participating in extreme sports as a mother is in itself an act of resistance to gender roles and intensive mothering. While the above findings model resistance

through sport, there is little mention of socialization, relationship building, or community which are key concepts often found in team sport (Batey & Owton, 2014).

Despite the gendered expectations of motherhood that surround physically active leisure participation, engaging in team sport may offer meaningful leisure experiences for postnatal women. First, returning to team sport after childbirth may help mothers regain their athlete identity rather than have to adjust to new ones. Women already go through a major identity shift when transitioning into motherhood, and then again with each subsequent child (Evans et al., 2016; McIntyre & Rhodes, 2009). Gendered expectations of motherhood should not dictate which physically active leisure activities postnatal women access. Next, there may be many social benefits to engaging in team sport that individual physically active leisure participation does not provide, such as social support, a sense of community, and avoiding isolation (Batey & Owton, 2014; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Parry et al., 2013b). Lastly, team sport may serve as contexts of empowerment, negotiation, and resistance to gendered expectations of motherhood, both collectively and individually (Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Masberg & Eklund, 2018; Shupe & Gagné, 2016).

Batey and Owton's (2014) study of team sport participation for mothers understood the constraints mothers negotiate in order to participate in team sport, as well as the benefits resulting from participation. Omitted from their study however, were ideas of empowerment, negotiation, and resistance to gendered expectations of motherhood through physically active leisure. Further, Shaw (2001) discussed individual and collective conscious and unconscious resistance, and team sport provides a potential platform for both collective and individual resistance to occur. Therefore, critically examining the experiences of mothers as team sport

athletes is crucial to understanding how they may be empowered, and how they may negotiate and resist gendered expectations of motherhood.

Equally important to consider is the possible exclusivity of team sport. A team is defined as a group of people who collaborate to achieve common goals (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). Teams have four specific qualities: a collective sense of identity, communication structures, precise roles, and social norms (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). Concerning sports teams, they meet on specific times and in specific locations to engage in sport regularly (Batey & Owton, 2014). The above characteristics may be convenient for some women, however they can easily reinforce exclusionary practices against individual team members. For example, Currie (2004) found that mothers find it difficult to make time in their busy schedule to engage in meaningful leisure. Attempting to coordinate a personal schedule with a league schedule may prevent some postnatal women from joining a team sport. Also, Batey and Owton (2014) and McGannon et al. (2018) uncovered that managing multiple identities, goals, and relationships was difficult with children. Therefore, it is possible the difficulties for postnatal women to engage in team sport may be difficult to overcome.

Summary

Postnatal physically active leisure engagement may help improve the lives of many women (Batey & Owton, 2014; Daley et al., 2012; Darroch & Hillsburg, 2017; Lloyd et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2017; Palmer & Leberman, 2009). Yet, participating in physically active leisure is difficult for many mothers (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; McGannon et al., 2018; McGannon & Schinke, 2013; Spowart et al., 2008). Historically, feminist and leisure research have evolved throughout the decades to better examine the lives and experiences of women (Freysinger et al., 2013b; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2012). Despite decades of research, oppressive

gendered systems continue to permeate sport and leisure contexts, affecting women's participation (Fink, 2016; Mansfield et al., 2018; Samdahl, 2013). As a result, contemporary feminist leisure research now works to integrate social justice frameworks involving emancipatory action to generate equity for women in leisure and sport spaces (Parry, 2014).

Conclusions from past and contemporary feminist leisure research has shown that the social construction of gender has worked to oppress the lives of women and men (Francombe-Webb & Toffoletti, 2018; Samdahl, 2013). Meaning, women have been subjected to societal gendered expectations when attempting to participate in physically active leisure. Expectations such as gender roles and pronatalism may affect women's leisure participation (Parry, 2005; Plaza et al., 2017; Samdahl, 2013; Trussell, 2013). As such, a prominent gendered expectation that greatly impacts mother's physically active leisure participation is intensive mothering (Henderson et al., 2016; Trussell, 2015; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). The expectations of intensive mothering such as self-sacrifice, judgement from others, decisions surrounding work and breastfeeding, and family organization are likely to negatively affect postnatal women's physically active leisure engagement. Although gendered expectations inhibit women's participation, feelings or actions of reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and empowerment have shown how women navigate and engage in meaningful physically active leisure (Green, 1998; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; Lloyd et al., 2016; Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990). In addition to the above findings, a critical element of leisure experiences for women are the social relationships they generate. These relationships can be crucial in providing postnatal women with social and emotional support, a sense of community, help with identity transition, and collective resistance to gendered expectations. Therefore, it may be imperative that postnatal women engage in physically active leisure, while navigating the gendered expectations of mothering.

Despite the extensive research citing the benefits of social leisure and team sport, feminist leisure scholars have yet to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood affect postnatal women returning to team sport. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the meanings and experiences of physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, it aims to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child.

Chapter 3: Research Design

“Narratives are [...] embedded within historical, structural, and ideological contexts, social discourses, and power relations”

(Pitre, Kushner, Raine, & Hegadoren, 2013, p. 118).

I chose narrative inquiry as my study’s guiding methodology. A study’s methodology is grounded in its epistemological direction, which considers the researcher’s world view (Jones et al., 2014). The methodology of a study dictates its direction, and influences many of the study’s research design choices (Jones et al., 2014). The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings and experiences of physically active leisure of postnatal women. Narrative inquiry will allow me to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. My central research questions are:

- 1) How do women’s leisure experiences shift during the postnatal period?
- 2) What role does physically active leisure through community team sport play in the lives of postnatal women?
- 3) What role does community team sport have in supporting postnatal women’s empowerment, reproduction and negotiation of, and resistance to gendered expectations of motherhood?

As such, guiding principles of narrative inquiry will be woven throughout this chapter. To begin, I provide an overview of narrative inquiry, then I outline my participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and data representation methods, and close this section with a description of how I ensure trustworthiness.

Narrative Inquiry

Narratives have existed since the beginning of human kind, through story telling practices (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), but in recent years have been reduced to a marginal research process (Papathomas, 2016). Now, research using narrative inquiry serves to illustrate the stories of people's lives and use them as analysis for the phenomenon under study (Clandinin, 2013). The holistic nature of a person's story is important to consider when engaging in narrative inquiry, because it honours a person's lived experiences rather than separates them into broken segments (Clandinin, 2013). Ordinary lived experiences are seen to be just as rich and exciting as unique lived experiences, because all experiences equal a person's life story (Clandinin, 2013). Personal narratives contain stories that are "actively composed with people artfully picking and choosing from what is experientially available to articulate their inner lives" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 46). In other words, how stories are constructed in narrative inquiry reflects a narrator's internal world and the social world in which they live (Josselson, 2011). Then, the stories presented to researchers can be interpreted through *what is told*, examining decisions to include or omit words to interpret thoughts, in a story or *how the story is told*, which looks at threads of discourses and conversations (Pitre et al., 2013).

Using narrative inquiry as a methodology for this project aligns well with the purpose of this study because it aims to understand meanings and experiences, while critically examining how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. As such, this study uses a feminist critical constructivist lenses to understand and critically examine participants' experiences. A constructivist lens will be used to unpack the meanings and experiences of women's physically active leisure. Constructivism connects with narrative inquiry strongly because it seeks to understand people's experiences

through their socially constructed stories, discourses, and conversations (Freysinger et al., 2013b).

Moreover, although traditionally narrative inquiry has been used by constructivists (Clandinin, 2013), research has shown how narrative inquiry is combined with many different epistemological beliefs due to the complex nature and history of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Roseik, 2007). For example, Pitre et al. (2013) created a framework which combines critical feminist theory, symbolic interactionism, and narrative inquiry to examine the holistic stories of participants. They utilize critical feminist theory to examine social conditions and forces outside of the participants' control to expose how gendered relations affect the lives of participants. The authors use symbolic interactionism to understand how actions, interactions, and thought are influenced by symbols and history. Finally, they also focus on narrative inquiry to evoke personal narratives from participants that describe not only what they are saying, but what they are saying about themselves as symbols, agents, and sources of power. This methodology "examines *what is told* within a story from a sociological perspective" (p. 119), exploring how narrators see themselves, their agency and acts of resistance, and sources of power and oppression which bring to light silenced, or taken-for-granted ideological conditions (Pitre et al., 2013). Thus, aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, I used Pitre et al.'s (2013) guiding principles of narrative inquiry for the research design.

Narrative inquiry merges well with critical feminism, because both frameworks encourage researchers to engage in ongoing reflective practice when conducting their study. Reflexivity is how a researcher "critically monitors and understands the role of the self in the research endeavour" (Daly, 2007, p. 188). Reflexivity monitors a researcher's positionality, world view, and power in relation to their research topic, and participants in their study. DeVault

and Gross (2012) incorporate reflections of power into reflexive practice in feminist research, to understand how relationships with participants are constructed and maintained during interviews and throughout the research process. Both feminists and narrative inquirers understand the importance of reflexivity when researching, because researchers engage in the co-creation of knowledge with participants, when conducting interviews, and analysing data (Cashman, 2012; DeVault & Gross, 2012). As such, Clandinin (2013) believes that narrative inquirers must continually reflect on their experiences during the research process with each inquiry. Therefore, I opened my theoretical perspectives and framework section with a personal narrative, reflecting on my perceptions surrounding gender, sport and leisure. This vignette will frame the rest of my study, and provide readers, participants, and myself with an understanding of how I affect and engage with this research project.

Considering data collection, the holistic stories of participants which illustrate their socially composed lives revealed acts of reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and/or empowerment that occurred when returning to community team sport post-childbirth. Data analysis equally revealed *what is told* in terms of a narrator's sociological perspectives, unveiling the influences of history, culture, and society on a participant's personal narrative (Pitre, et al., 2013). Therefore, emancipatory action for participants, other postnatal athletes, and women can begin with a study such as this one.

Participant Recruitment

The project's participants were six postnatal women who engaged in community team sport as physically active leisure prior to becoming pregnant, and who returned to playing a sport postnatally. Three participants resided in Ontario, two were Quebec residents, and one lived in Nova Scotia. Five of the participants were married in heterosexual relationships, while one

participant was a single mother. Three of the participants were new mothers and three of the participants had two or more children. All participants had given birth within a year before the first interview, which placed them in the “postnatal period” (Cramp & Brawley, 2009). I chose to recruit these participants because they provided information-rich cases related to the purpose of this study (Patton, 1990). Further participant demographics are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant Name	Age	Number and Age of Children	Sport	Profession	Maternity Leave Status
Sara	38	2 Children; 10 months and 2 years	Dodgeball	Office job	1-year maternity leave
Jennifer	29	1 child; 11 months	Hockey	Human Resources Manager	1-year maternity leave
Marie	30	3 children; 5 months, 2.5 years, 4 years	Volleyball	Stay at home mother	Ineligible
Celia	38	1 child; 3 months	Volleyball, Beach Volleyball, Tennis	Crown attorney	1-year maternity leave
Michelle	30	2 children; 5 months, 2.5 years	Volleyball, Beach Volleyball, Ultimate Frisbee	Physiotherapist	1-year maternity leave
Claire	34	1 child; 12 months old	Hockey	High-school teacher	Currently working; 6-month maternity leave

I utilized purposeful sampling and snowball sampling as recruitment methods for this study. Purposeful sampling is conducted to obtain information-rich cases that can contribute

ample knowledge central to the research's purpose (Patton, 1990). Additionally, snowball sampling involves asking present participants to help recruit participants through word of mouth by extending an invitation to cases similar to theirs, which is another way to recruit information-rich participants (Patton, 1990). These practices of participant recruitment align with narrative inquiry because narrative inquiry requires few participants, yet they all must yield deep knowledge and rich information surrounding the phenomenon being studied (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Squire, 2011).

To recruit participants, I relied heavily on social media to distribute a recruitment poster. The poster detailed an overview of the study and requirements for participation (see Appendix A). I contacted recreational community leisure service providers, who run team sport leagues for adults over eighteen, who allowed me to post the recruitment posters on their social media pages. I also asked friends who are members of private mothering groups on social media to share my recruitment poster with the group's members. Both the leisure service providers and members of mothering groups acted as gatekeepers to their community's members (Glesne, 2016). Once participants contacted me with the intent of participating in the study, I sent them an official Letter of Invitation (see Appendix B) to participate in the study. Further, participants were asked to sign a Letter of Consent (see Appendix C), to participate in the research process, and understood the benefits and risks that were involved (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014).

All participant interviews were conducted over the phone or over an online video call to adhere to Brock University's Coronavirus safety measures (Brock University, March 2020). Participants chose a time, date, and method of communication (e.g. by phone, over FaceTime, WhatsApp, or Skype) convenient for them to best ensure they were ready to talk and felt

comfortable expressing themselves. This practice additionally serves to deconstruct power relations between the participant and researcher by involving the participant in parts of the decision-making process, which aligns with feminist theory (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Additionally, allowing participants to choose a time, date, and location corresponds to narrative inquiry because the participant is letting the researcher into a part of their daily narrative (Clandinin, 2013).

Data Collection

Data collection began as soon as the first participant was available. I used email to communicate and contact participants to set up interview times and methods. Contact with the participant was encouraged throughout the research process, allowing for the building of relationships, consistent with a feminist study (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Therefore, if participants had any questions about the process, wanted to look at first drafts of data interpretation, or had any feedback about their experiences they were encouraged to share their perspectives with me.

The data collection strategies below align with a feminist theoretical perspective in that they focus on building a relationship with participants, gives room for reflexive practice, and empowers the participant to illustrate their truth (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Further, the data collection method was chosen to highlight and allow stories of struggle, agency, and social positioning that may emerge from participants (Pitre et al., 2013). The following section will describe how data was gathered for the study through interviews, field notes, and researcher reflective journals.

Semi-structured interviews. Three in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (see Appendix D for Interview Guides). All interviews were audio-

recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Conducting semi-structured interviews is common practice in narrative inquiry so participants stories can be constructed and then examined for further analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Semi-structured interviews are interviews with loose structural guidelines that allow the interviewer to guide the conversation in directions they desire based on the participant's responses (Bold, 2012). This method of interviewing was selected for this narrative inquiry study because it allows the researcher to adjust the line of questioning based on where they may find the narrative (Squire, 2008). Furthermore, the conversational tone of a semi-structured interview leaves room for rapport building, which is valuable in feminist research (Glesne, 2016).

I chose to conduct three interviews with each participant because the first two served in building rapport, which is crucial in feminist research to build a researcher-participant relationship (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). The third investigated complex personal issues concerning motherhood, leisure, and gendered expectations. Further, Saldaña (2015) endorses conducting three separate interviews with participants to create a profile for participants, cataloguing their narratives as a monologue "to read or listen to a person's valued perspective, uninterrupted" (p. 220).

The first interview was used to build rapport with participants, and gain an understanding of their physically active leisure, team sport participation, and experiences as a mother. Topics included discussing life as a mother, describing their past and present physically active leisure experiences, and making meaning of their team sport participation. This interview began to build a sense of trust with participants, allowing them to feel secure as a participant and invite them to share more as the interviews continue.

Next, the second interview was used to enhance the relationship between participants and myself, and reinforce notions of researcher-participant rapport (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Participants were asked to bring a meaningful photo or artifact to this interview to help elicit narratives surrounding the photo or artifact, and its connection to team sport and motherhood (Robinson, 2002). The topics touched upon physically active leisure more broadly, and team sport more specifically, and their journey through motherhood. For this interview, I asked them to reflect on the previous interview, the picture or artifact they brought, and its meaning in their life as a mother and an athlete. These questions allowed participants to direct their narrative surrounding the object they brought to the interview, and slowly construct an uninterrupted monologue (Saldaña, 2015).

The third interview touched upon more complex notions surrounding reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and empowerment through team sport, and how motherhood interacts with these four subjects. Rapport was developed by this interview, and participants were familiar with the interview process. I asked participants to reflect on the challenges they experienced related to motherhood and team sport. This interview contained elements of self-reflection, participants were given tools to challenge their relationship with gendered expectations of motherhood, and notions of power and oppression within society. As a result, the sum of interviews painted a participant portrait in miniature, offering a vulnerable and honest understanding of their “values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and experiences” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 215).

Notably, all interviews with all participants were conducted after the novel coronavirus quarantine regulations were implemented across Canadian provinces. Several recent studies examining the effects of the novel coronavirus on mothers and women have found that mental

health and social networks (Alon et al., 2020; Gausman & Langer, 2020; Molgora & Accordini, 2020) and leisure participation (Giles & Oncescu, 2020) are negatively impacted. Therefore, specific questions regarding the effects of the novel coronavirus were added to interview guides. This gave space for postnatal women to share their experiences regarding motherhood, community team sport and the pandemic, while preventing discussions about the pandemic from becoming central to all conversation.

Researcher reflective journal. I kept a reflective journal as a form of data collection, which served to capture my ongoing thoughts and impressions throughout the entire research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My reflective journals were integrated with the field notes I took before, during, and after interviews to create a holistic portrait of each interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I used this reflective journal to mark down my impressions, thoughts, concerns, and initial analysis ideas as they emerge after each interview and participant journal reading. I also used it as an analytic tool while analysing the stories of participants. Pitre et al. (2013) advise that critical narrative analysis requires researchers to reflect over several pages of writing as a part of the analysis process to understand participant's choices and experiences as social actors. My journal served as data for the study because it helped me analyse how knowledge was co-constructed between myself, participants, and the social worlds we reside in (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Data Analysis

Once interviews were audio-recorded, they were then transcribed verbatim, and stored on a password-protected computer to maintain participant confidentiality. Data was organized by participant, because I wanted to keep their narratives together since all documents containing their stories construct a “whole story” (Pitre et al., 2013). Fragmentation of data goes against

narrative inquiry practice because it separates the holistic story of the participants (Pitre et al., 2013). Therefore, I organized the data by participant (e.g. transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journals for one participant were stored together in a folder) rather than grouping the data sets together by data type (e.g. all of the participant transcripts in one folder, and the field notes in another).

The method of data analysis I used to interpret the participant's stories is Pitre et al.'s (2013) double-hermeneutic narrative analysis for critical feminist narrative inquiry. Each interview was analysed before the following interview with the same participant. This process allowed me to personalize interview guides, strengthen the robustness of participant's stories, and adhere to the dialectical process of double-hermeneutic analysis (Pitre et al., 2013). Using a double-hermeneutic narrative analysis requires six readings of a participant's story. The first three readings used the hermeneutics of faith approach to closely examine *what* the participant was saying, as it considered participants "experts in their embodied experience" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 123).

Hermeneutics of faith analysis required three readings to establish storylines, nuances, and variations in each participant storyline (Pitre et al., 2013). Researchers using this approach "intend to re-present as faithfully as possible participants' subjective, social, and historical world. From a critical feminist perspective, to use a hermeneutics of faith also means that researchers will highlight social actors' stories of individual experiences of successes and challenges" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 123).

The first reading highlighted similar narrative threads within all the stories. Initial narrative threads throughout this reading such as "resistance" and "enduring the gendered expectations of motherhood" were revealed, and reflected larger categories within the study, or

particular dimensions evident to the study. They described interview conversations' main topics or focus as potentially similar and noticeable narrative threads. Pitre et al. (2013) use the example of conceptual understandings of important experiences or specific phenomena that are common throughout the multiple stories.

The second reading looked at the specific individual stories of participants and located them in a corresponding narrative thread, constructing how postnatal women saw themselves and understood their agency in the world (Pitre et al., 2013). During this reading, I began to understand how each participant's story fit within larger narrative threads. Participants' stories were also constructed in chronological order, then given a title "to name the focus of the revealed experience in response to the question 'what is this storyteller telling me through this story?'" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 127). Answering this question helped me configure the participant's stories to construct an image of how the narrator saw themselves and their agency. For example, topics such as "returning as resistance", "prioritizing the self" and "resisting as a team" became titles for participants' stories.

The third reading helped model storylines as they emerged from the text as key metaphors. Storylines became the experiences of participants that stand out because they are common, and significant to all participants (Pitre et al., 2013). I used this reading to help categorize narratives from the second reading into common themes that fit larger narratives from the first reading. To illustrate, re-reading participant's stories helped me connect topics that reoccurred in multiple stories, "relying on partner for childcare" and "family members watching children", to larger themes like "using social supports".

Once these three readings were executed, the next three readings used a hermeneutics of contextualization approach to understand the context, space, storied space, and structural and

ideological sites surrounding each participant (Pitre et al., 2013). The readings located participants' stories within a particular space that all participants share according to the phenomenon being investigated (Pitre et al., 2013). In this study's case, the storied space is motherhood and community team sport. During this phase of analysis, participants' narratives served to construct which conditions and forces develop participants' agency, voice, identity, and reflexivity.

The fourth reading looked at conditions imposed by the symbolic world according to the historical contexts of participants' experiences. This reading's goal was to outline how participants understood their agency given their historical context (Pitre et al., 2013). Pitre et al. (2013) note that "as experiences become contextualized within the constraints that storytellers describes as imposed within their family or social network environment, it becomes possible to highlight the tension between history and present circumstance" (p. 128). This led to a clearer interpretation of how limitations shaped participant's perceptions of themselves, choices, and decisions. For example, I noted how being new mothers contextualized three of the participants' illustrations of resistance differently than the three other participants who had more than one child.

The fifth reading examines the power of ideology and how it guides or constrains participant's agency and identity (Pitre et al., 2013). This reading highlighted how gendered expectations of motherhood were pervasive throughout participant's team sport participation. It brought to life narratives of challenges and reproduction surrounding gendered expectations. Pitre et al. (2013) illustrate this reading with an example of how participants describe themselves according to larger ideological forces that determine what is "good" or bad". For example,

participants calling themselves “good” or “bad” mothers, “good” or “bad” wives, or “good” or “bad” teammates.

Finally, the sixth reading explores “participants’ stories of their interactions with expert systems (e.g. health professionals, children’s teachers, social workers, the justice system), gendered practices, and political views (i.e. neoliberalist) that defines the rules, routines, and meta-narratives in a particular society” (Pitre, et al., 2013, p. 128). Researchers examine conditions that limit or enhance agency as participants interact with the above. Participant’s reflexivity is also dissected to learn how it helps them engage as agents, and it contextualizes their decisions to contest, resist, conform or liberate themselves from oppression (Pitre et al., 2013). I used this final reading to place participant’s narratives within broader literature and themes surrounding community, social interaction, team sport, and intensive mothering.

In line with Pitre et al.’s (2013) recommendations, I kept a reflexive journal throughout this process. This allowed for review of all the storylines that emerged, and reflection of my imposition of meaning or assumption on what is being accounted. As a feminist researcher, I acknowledge that my perspectives as a childless female athlete shaped how I interpreted the storylines that emerged from this reading (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). While the hermeneutics of faith is intended to “re-represent as faithfully as possible participants’ subjective, social and historical worlds” (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 123), feminist researchers believe that we can never truly be objective and interpret data without being present in the findings (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Therefore, instead of viewing my perspectives as assumptions, I recorded my perspectives and interpretations of participant’s stories to describe how my positionality affected my interpretation of the data.

Using a double-hermeneutic approach to analyse the study's data aligned well with this project's narrative inquiry methodology, and its feminist theoretical perspective. It was appropriate for narrative inquiry because it focused on the holistic stories and experiences of participants to understand their actions within the world they reside (Pitre, et al., 2013). Further, it aligned well with a critical feminist approach as it served to understand gendered power structures that reside within participants stories', and how it helped or hinders their agency and experience (Pitre, et al., 2013).

Data Representation

Data representation is important for qualitative researchers to consider, because it determines how readers react and interact with the study being presented (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Further, methods of presentation chosen differ according to whom the research is published for, where it will be published, and the tradition the researchers are working in (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). My goal when developing data representation for this study was to "convey experience, both subjective and objective", leading to the empowerment of unheard voices within sport (Rinehart, 2005, p.503). I wanted readers to understand postnatal women's experiences when returning to team sport, while evoking emotion from the reader's personal experiences with motherhood and/or community team sport. As such, representing data through narratives allows readers to empathize with stories being told (Rinehart, 2005) while co-constructing knowledge to create personal interpretations of the story (Parry, 2007; Petty & Trussell, 2018).

Consistent with narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), to maintain the integrity of participants' stories throughout the research process, I open the findings section by presenting the analyzed data in six individual stories. Each story depicts the six stages of analysis congruent

with double-hermeneutic narrative analysis by weaving narratives that emerged during data analysis throughout participants' stories (Pitre et al., 2013). Further, in remaining consistent with the principles surrounding hermeneutics of faith, the stories are constructed with verbatim passages from participants' interviews to stay as close to participant's voices as possible (Petty & Trussell, 2018; Pitre et al., 2013). Additionally, I must acknowledge that as a researcher, these stories emerged through my interpretations of participant data, as such "these representations are only of many possible interpretations" (Parry, 2007, p. 207). Generating stories through my researcher interpretation displays the voice of the researcher in the knowledge construction process, consistent with feminist research (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012).

The remainder of the findings chapter highlights three key themes that emerged from participants' stories: 1) "confronting the challenges of returning to team sport", 2) "relationships aiding in the return to team sport", and 3) "resistance and empowerment through community team sport participation". Using rich and thick description to reflect the findings and data analysis process aligns with Tracy's (2010) criteria for creating high quality qualitative research. I use rich and thick description to unpack my interpretation of participant's stories, while drawing from sections of their introductory stories as well as new quotes from participant interviews.

Ethical considerations. Additionally, the confidentiality and privacy of participants was protected when representing study data. According to the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014) confidentiality ensures that confidential information of participants will be kept private, and will not be included in knowledge

dissemination. Therefore, the information represented is anonymized and pseudonyms were given to each participant to ensure anonymity.

Trustworthiness. Qualitative studies value trustworthiness differently than quantitative studies due to the ontological and epistemological differences between the two forms of research (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Due to the social nature of my study, trustworthiness will focus closely on judging the quality of work rather than the “validity” of what is represented (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Narrative inquiry and feminist theory focus closely on the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants (Clandinin, 2013; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). Further, these two research practices acknowledge the importance of considering multiple world views to understand the lives of participants, and acknowledging that there is no “one truth” that constructs reality, but multiple truths that take place within the construction of knowledge (Clandinin, 2013; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012). As such, results of qualitative research are evaluated for their transferability to similar populations rather than their generalizability (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This study, therefore, will apply what Sparkes and Smith (2013) call the letting go perspective to ensure that the quality of my work is high, rather than evaluating the validity of the knowledge I have gathered.

According to Sparkes and Smith (2013), the letting go perspective judges work based on eight criteria. These criteria include the worthiness of the topic, the use of rich rigor to understand theoretical constructs, sincerity which evaluates the use of researcher-reflexivity, credibility through concrete detail and descriptive processes, resonance to move readers, its contribution to the field, ethical considerations for participants, and meaningful coherence to properly connect the literature, methodology, methods and knowledge dissemination. Tracy (2010) describes each criteria in further detail. She considers a worthy topic as relevant research

that is substantial, fascinating, expressive, or on trend with current issues. Tracy (2010) then describes rich rigor as abundant in complexity. It has thick and generous descriptions of the issues and demonstrates careful data collection and analysis. Next, she illustrates how sincerity requires vulnerability, honesty, self-reflexivity, data auditing, and transparency. Sincere research outlines how researcher's perspectives play a role in shaping the research. Then she moves on to explain credibility, which is marked by providing thick descriptions of data, crystallization of many data sources, and seeking input from participants themselves. After, Tracy (2010) explains how resonance is achieved through meaningfully affecting an audience with aesthetic merit and transferability. Further, she also describes how high quality work offers a significant contribution to extend knowledge in its field and inspires new discoveries in the reader. Next, ethically sound research considers both the safety of the participants and the researcher. Procedural ethics, situational ethics, relational ethics, and exiting ethics are all considered by solid qualitative researchers (Tracy, 2010). Finally, Tracy (2010) describes meaningful coherence as a study which "(a) achieved their stated purpose; (b) accomplished what it espouses to be about; (c) uses methods and representation practices that partner will with espoused theories and paradigms; and (d) attentively interconnects literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings" (p. 848). This project has been constructed to ensure that the above criteria meet the high standards used to evaluate feminist narrative inquiry.

Chapter 4: Findings

“The support makes you feel like part of a team, but not just team sport, part of team motherhood as well.” - Jennifer

Chapter four tells the stories of six postnatal women as they rejoin community team sport. I begin this chapter with an overview of the six women who participated in this study. Next, the six stories I constructed from participant interviews are told using verbatim passages from their interviews. These stories illustrate the nuanced meanings and experiences in relation to participants’ return to team sport.

I then critically unpack their experiences by highlighting three salient themes that were developed through my researcher interpretation of their stories. These themes illustrate the impact gendered expectations have on postnatal team sport participation using rich and thick description. While the three main themes transcend all of the women’s stories, each participant experienced them differently; thus, throughout this section of the findings, I draw the reader’s attention back to the stories to illustrate the nuances. I also present other participant quotes that were not highlighted in the mothers’ stories when relevant.

The three themes that are unpacked during my written interpretation are as follows: the first theme, “Confronting the Challenges of Returning to Team Sport”, describes the physical and emotional difficulties postnatal women face when returning to community team sport. The second theme, “Relationships Aiding the Return to Team Sport”, shows how postnatal women rely on close relationships with teammates, friends, family members, and partners to be able to return to team sport after childbirth. Lastly, the third theme, “Resistance and Empowerment Through Community Team Sport Participation”, highlights how postnatal women resist

gendered ideologies of motherhood through team sport engagement, and in turn, feel empowered.

Participant Profiles

Sara is a woman in her mid-thirties. She and her husband have two children aged three and 10 months old. She works an office job, however for the moment she is ten months into a full year of maternity leave. Sara enjoys playing recreational dodgeball on a co-ed team on Wednesday nights with her husband and friends year-round. They have been playing together on this team for about six years. She is also an avid runner, and enjoys going to the gym regularly to attend group classes while her children attend her gym's free childcare service.

Jennifer is a woman in her early thirties. She has an eleven-month-old child with her husband. They are both first-time parents. She is a human resources manager who has almost finished her year of maternity leave. Jennifer plays women's hockey on Sunday nights during the fall, winter, and spring. She has been playing hockey since she was five years old and used to play over three times per week before she gave birth. Now, she is comfortable playing once a week so she can spend time with her new baby.

Marie is a stay-at-home mother in her early thirties. She is a mother of three. Her children are four, two and a half, and 5 months old. Her husband takes care of their children every Tuesday night so she can go play in a women's indoor volleyball league during the fall, winter, and spring. She has been playing in this league for four years, having started after the birth of her first child. Marie also does at home workouts during her free time, and has recently started taking up running as well.

Celia is a single mother in her late thirties. She recently had her first child through in-vitro fertilization. Her baby is now three months old. Celia works as a crown attorney, and is four

months into her year of maternity leave. Before she was pregnant, she played several nights of co-ed and women's indoor volleyball during the fall, winter, and spring. Now, she has started playing co-ed and women's beach volleyball during the summer in leagues, tournaments, and casual days in the park with her friends. Celia also plays doubles tennis year-round, and has returned to playing after childbirth.

Michelle is in her mid-thirties. She and her partner have two children aged two and a half years old and five months old. She is five months into her year of maternity leave and works in the military as a physiotherapist. Before the birth of her most recent child, Michelle played indoor volleyball during the winter on a women's team and in co-ed tournaments. Recently, she has returned to women's and co-ed beach volleyball during the summer for casual games with her partner and their friends. She also played co-ed ultimate frisbee year-round before the birth of her most recent child but has not returned yet.

Claire is a high-school teacher in her mid-thirties with a twelve-month-old child. This is both her and her husband's first child. She and her husband had split their time on parental leave. Claire was off for the first six months, then her husband was off for the final six months of parental leave. Claire used to play women's ice-hockey year-round, several nights a week. Now she only plays one night per week with her women's team.

Stories of Motherhood

Sara's story. *My husband and I have been playing dodgeball together for six years or something like that. We hang out with most of the people on our team and there's another couple on the team we're very close to. We run with them, go out to dinner with them, and travel to races together. When we hang out, we usually talk about dodgeball and general stuff.*

We definitely talk about our kids a lot, 'cause we're all parents. One of my friends on our team got pregnant shortly after I gave birth the first time. So, when we played while we were pregnant, if we ever did something really good, like got someone out or caught a ball, we would yell "fetus power!!". It was really funny, but it's only allowed to be said when you're pregnant. It felt good having other people get excited for me and things like that or get excited for other people too when they do well.

Going back to dodgeball was easy. I could have gone back to playing in the fall if I wanted to. I chose not to partially because it was like the "6 weeks of no exercise" thing, but also... it's hard because I felt like I couldn't leave a baby sitter to put my oldest to bed and also deal with an infant that was that young. They're extremely unpredictable when they're under six months, particularly under three months. There have been a few times when my husband would go to dodgeball, and I would be home sitting on my eldest's floor with the baby laying on my lap while I'm trying to get him dressed for bed. But now, we get someone to come watch the kids while we play. Friends who live close by or my dad come to help out. We have a lot of good friends who don't have kids too, so it makes it easier because then we don't have to worry about them being busy with their own kids. The only tough part is if we're playing an early game. I have to make sure that supper's made and we're out the door at the right time, and my oldest is ready for bed.

I also tried going back to a stroller fit class. I stopped doing that because it was really difficult to have an infant and a toddler with me. The baby would be crying if she needed a bottle, or my toddler would yell "mama, mama I need a snack". I wish it was free for moms to workout, you could bring your kids, but there would also be people there to take care of them, if you couldn't or didn't want to.

Being a mom hasn't affected my team sport experience because they're not related at all, it's just the thing I do on Wednesday nights! It's funny, I'm a mom, I have two kids, I spend the whole day taking care of my children, but I don't feel like "mom" is an identity I have. Even when I got pregnant, a friend I play with asked "can you still play?" and I was like "I'm here, aren't I?". I never think about being a mom or a dodgeballer when I'm playing. My brain isn't focusing on those kinds of things.

I feel like I can play because I don't allow myself to accept some of the pressures that other people allow themselves to accept. For example, dodgeball probably has made me have more of a social life than other moms, because I definitely know some moms who don't do anything... I know some people who are like "oh my kid is three years old and they've never had a babysitter before", and I just can't relate to that. Plus, my husband and I want our children to see us work towards us enjoying our lives and not just them. So, we do stuff, you know activities for the children, but we also do things for ourselves, so they realize that they're not the only people in the family. A lot of people have mom guilt or whatever. So, I guess playing is just about not feeling guilty about wanting to do something for yourself, cause that's something you enjoy.

Jennifer's story. *I expected to stop hockey during my pregnancy. I found out at four weeks but wasn't ready to tell anybody yet. Instead, I told my teams that I couldn't play because I fell and hurt myself. People know you are pregnant anyway when you stop playing halfway through the season. The teams I had to leave congratulated me on my ankle injury when I returned to tell them I was pregnant. It also made it harder to draft for a team this year because captains were worried I would get pregnant halfway through the season and leave again.*

My husband was my main support when I returned to hockey. We both ended up playing on Sunday nights this season. I put it on him to figure it out if we played around the same time

because we had decided Sunday was my day before he signed up for his league. He committed, saying that it was his night to watch the baby. If there was a scheduling conflict, he would figure it out. He would reach out to his mom to help for those few nights where our games overlapped.

I signed up to play my next season while I was pregnant, with the intention of coming back right away. I hoped I wouldn't have to have a C-section that would push me a little further out. I wanted to return to hockey earlier than I did, but my husband was like you really should wait until you talk to your doctor. Nevertheless, after watching the first game of the season I was like yeah I'm gonna play now. So, the next game I left the baby at home and off I went!

It's hard balancing hockey and motherhood. You do feel guilt. Leaving your baby to do something for yourself. I'm not doing anything wrong by having a few hours a week to myself. I also felt guilt leaving him with my husband. I don't know why I felt like I was burdening him because I very much feel like the baby is my responsibility. Then I would feel annoyed about feeling guilty because he's a parent, not a babysitter. So, I just kept trying to put in my mind that I'm a better mom if I do this for myself, and my husband liked the time alone with our baby to build that relationship. I think in a perfect world, physical activity would be a normalized part of postnatal care, rather than a source of guilt.

Now, I connect more with the other mothers on the team. It's nice to be in a room full of moms because they're all at different stages of motherhood. There's a lot of knowledge and support in the dressing room. It's also nice to hear funny stories from other moms about motherhood. Some of the older ladies with sons tell me stories about things to come like cleaning pee off of floors for the rest of your life. The support makes you feel like part of a team, but not just team sport, part of team motherhood as well.

Coming back to hockey made me feel really empowered. I was getting a lot of kudos from the other moms being like “we can’t believe you’re back so early!”. Also just being on a team full of moms is pretty empowering as well. I also felt proud for coming back, and terribly out of shape. The most out of shape I have ever been in my life... But I was proud of myself for doing that and taking time for myself. Now, I usually stay in the dressing room for a little bit longer than normal after games. I would be the last or second to last person in there because I literally was cherishing those two and a half to three hours out of the house.

Plus, being younger in an all-women’s league has shown me that you can play hockey and be a mom. It wasn’t ever in my mind that I couldn’t do both. Seeing others do it helped relieve some of the pressures of motherhood. Also, it feels good to see them because they were breaking those typical gender roles and those pressures that we and society put on ourselves. I thought it was pretty awesome that they continued playing and I wanted to do that too!

Marie’s story. *I love playing volleyball because it guarantees a night out! It’s just a nice relief to do something for myself. My husband puts the kids to bed while I play. He knows to never plan anything that night. Like no matter what, mom’s out of the house. Whether the kids were in bed or not, I’m like “see ya! Bye!”, out the door.*

Leaving for volleyball can be a bit of a rush. I gotta have dinner on the table so I can get out the door, I sound like such an old fashioned person, or try to squeeze bedtime in with the kids because that’s always nice. Even then, I’m excited to just get out of the house to go play! When I get in my car I just turn up the music so loud, and I listen to old school music from high school. I would never do that with my kids in the car. It’s like at night I’m not a mom, I’m going to play volleyball. I brought this up to my team one evening, and they were all like “I do that too!”. It gets us so pumped up.

My team is almost all around the same age. Most of us now are starting to have babies, so we have a pretty big team. We have about 18 children between all of us. So we actually had a really big struggle last season because I think 5 of us were off since we were pregnant. ... we had to get a bunch of subs in this year because so many of us were gone. Still, there is this overarching understanding that some moms can't always be there. There's no anger if someone must miss a game. We all kind of understand that sport's not the end all be all.

As a team, we talk a lot about different things like parenting suggestions, or potty training. It's nice to have people I can talk to about that but there are also girls on my team who are single with no kids. So we've made a conscious effort between moms to not just talk about diapers and laundry and stuff. So we just try to steer the conversation because it leaves them out of it and we don't want to always talk about that stuff either.

I feel no guilt towards playing volleyball because it makes me a better mom. It gives me my own time to unwind, relax, and get away from the kids. When I'm back I'm a little more... you know. I've had my time to step away from it. Maybe I would feel guilt if I was more hardcore about it and playing more often. Especially because my kids are sleeping anyway it's like it doesn't really matter that I'm out. The only thing is my husband needs to stay home for a couple hours and I don't need to feel guilty about that. Although, I can see how if my kids were awake and he was struggling with them, then I would feel more guilty.

Volleyball is when I pay attention to myself. When I joined the volleyball league I was using my old basketball shoes from high school which were about 10 or 12 years old. Then I sprained my ankle really badly. Before the next season, I went shopping by myself and got a nice pair of volleyball shoes. I decided to get the best ones that make me feel the best and I don't care if they cost twenty dollars more than the other ones. I also bought an ankle brace. It was like

taking care of myself by investing time and resources into not wanting to sprain my ankle again. It was a treat yourself moment. It wasn't like an event... I guess any time a mom gets time to get out of the house and go shopping by themselves is an event. So now those are my special shoes for my special night out.

Volleyball has always been my favorite sport. I'm a pretty good middle at 6'2" and being good at something makes you want to keep doing it. If I felt I was bringing my team down then I probably wouldn't love it that much. I feel like an asset to the team. Especially when I'm blocking or doing little hits. I can hit literally straight down in front of the net where it's basically impossible to get and it just makes me feel so good! I just love it. So when I do that it was like "yeah! That's awesome!" and everyone like cheers me on and are like "that was so good!"

Celia's story. *I stopped playing beach volleyball in June because I was on my 4th invitro attempt. I didn't want to compromise it or have any doubt that I might have caused a miscarriage. So, I stopped volleyball but continued playing coed doubles tennis in my second and third trimester. While I was off, I was really looking forward to going back to sport, because I'm not someone who likes to go to the gym or do home body weight exercises.*

I don't have a partner but I have a great support system. My parents were supportive of my project from day one. As soon as I told my mother the date that I was due she was like "okay! I'm retiring that day! I will be there if you want, if you need me. I'll be there for a whole month and everything". My sister is more present than I expected too. At first, she was saying she wouldn't change diapers and now she does. I would trust her to have the baby for a whole night. She even told me without asking that she wanted to borrow my baby for swimming lessons with her friend who also just gave birth. I'm like "go ahead!". I'll sleep in or play tennis because I

don't enjoy water sports. Also, as soon as she's 3 or 4 my sister will enrol her in ski lessons and take her. She'll be in charge of that, and I will be free to do something else.

My group of friends and I have a strong bond. We all know each other because of volleyball but what we have is bigger than volleyball. Just, most of our social activities are organized around playing team sport. They were all very happy and supportive to hear I was pregnant! They knew about my project to have a child on my own. We even hosted a party to choose the donor. It ended up being 25 of my closest friends and family. My friend put it best: "If I had a regular boyfriend, he would have been vetted by my friends anyway".

We have two setters on my women's team, which was a problem in the past. Now, it's an advantage to have two setters because we gave birth four months apart. Our whole team didn't play this year because four out of nine of us were pregnant. We knew that about 70% of our team was trying to get pregnant before the season started, so we didn't bother registering. Usually, that would mean the end of our team, but we're all volleyball players, we have been for years. All of us are still playing somewhere, including the ones who already have kids. So that's what we've seen modelled and I know we can still play. I've seen other couples with kids from my friends split their leisure nights up too. This way, kids see that their parents continue to have activities, and want to emulate them.

When I went back to tennis, we made sure we had one extra player come along to always have an extra person to watch our babies. They all know that we have kids, and people will share the duty to be off on the bench, and just move the stroller so they can continue sleeping. I was also cautious to have one more player for my return to volleyball to look after my baby. But even the other day our fifth player was late. We played and she was mostly asleep during the first set, so I didn't have to make any sacrifices.

As the children in our group grow, we just plan to adapt the set up of how we play sport. I remember seeing soccer registration in the park beside us as we played volleyball. I will always remember us, a group of adults in the sand playing a sport, and the other parents of the same age bringing their kids to soccer registration. I know at some point there will be a bit of both in our group but I think it will remain important for us as adults to have our moments together. We will make sure that weekends are not only about kids' activities. It's important for our mental and physical health, and the kids will have their time to practice sport too. But they'll follow us to tournaments and learn how to play on the sidelines. They will see that as adults you can continue to have an active life and they will be encouraged to live an active life also.

Claire's story. *I consider the girls I play hockey with some of my closest friends. Being able to play hockey or a team sport means a lot to me to meet other women, be part of a group, and make a network of friends who are interested in the same thing. I even felt like a part of the team while I was pregnant and not playing. I would go to games and stay in touch through WhatsApp team chat. I was there for the final against our rival team and got beers afterwards with everyone. That day, even if I wasn't playing with them, I felt very present and welcome. I still got to be a part of the team photo without my gear. Playing with our team is about getting out of the house and being able to have that friendship; it's more than just playing hockey.*

When I found out I was pregnant at five or six weeks, I obviously had to stop playing contact sports while knocked up. I had to fake an injury because I wasn't comfortable telling people I was pregnant yet. Older women in my league were like "we already know you're pregnant, you can just tell us", and I was like "I'm not pregnant". After I told them, I got a few questions from my team asking if I was coming back for the summer season. I was like no, my baby's due in June. Their response was "okay, we'll see you next fall!".

My husband convinced me to return to hockey. I was like maybe I should wait, take another season off, get used to being a mom. The season I couldn't play because I was pregnant was really tough. Not only because I couldn't play, but I was thinking about my body going through all these changes, having a kid and I was like "oh my god I ruined my life". He was like "no, you need to get back. You love playing hockey. You need that time for yourself at least once a week to just get out of the house and be something other than be a mom". We split whose parents take care of the baby each weekend we play. If something happens and both can't watch our son, my husband will not go to hockey to take care of him. Getting to hockey on Sundays can be tough, especially when I'm home with my kid. I feel like I have to sacrifice time with him. I could be making sure my son is at home having a nap in his own bedroom and doing those things.

I remember having a conversation upon my return with one woman and her daughter who were filling in on our team. They were like "oh my god you're playing hockey already? Didn't you just have a kid?" I'm like yeah, that was 3 months ago. The mom said that she didn't play for an entire year after having her daughter. There were also older women making comments about my return and my maternity leave. To them if I wasn't working then why would I play hockey? I think that just engaging in team sport itself is resisting the pressures of being a mom. I remember going home from that game being like "[husband], should I have taken more time off? I was cleared for sport, but should I have just waited to get back to hockey?". He was like: "No, you wanted to play, so you should just play". I think that there's a little bit of pressure when you're a mom, you're a mom first. You're a mom above everything else, and I think that's because there's this selflessness that women have that... You know that's what we do, we love our children more than anything in the world, and we'll do anything for them.

I felt empowered when people were like “holy shit you’re back playing?”, and I was like “Yeah! Fucking right I’m back playing!” I felt badass. Yes my body was destroyed but I’m back. People were really surprised that I had a baby in the middle of June and was back playing in the middle of September. I also felt empowered when I scored my first goal back after having a baby. It was with a new stick my husband bought me for Christmas because I never spend money on myself for hockey. He was like “you’re gonna score a goal today”, and I was like “yeah right, I play defence”. But I scored that game from the top, I friken sniped it! It was amazing, that moment was when I was like “okay, I hadn’t completely lost my ability”.

Michelle’s story. *I liked my year off with my first child. I was in the fittest shape of my life. I’m a physiotherapist in the military, and we need to take a fitness test every year. I need to take mine one week after my maternity leave ends, even if I experienced complications. That year, I scored gold, which is in the top 5th percentile! I’m not sure if I’ll do the same after my second mat leave. Maybe if my toddler goes back to his daycare. With two it’s a little more complicated.*

Returning to work was difficult. When you work with a child, you have less “me time”. That’s what it comes down to. You don’t have time to read your news in the morning or to go for a run after work. I can’t because now I have someone to go pick up at daycare. It takes planning and commitment to keep a high fitness level and keep training. Even if you like your sport. Every time I would go to volleyball at 8:00pm and finish at 11:00pm, I would be so tired because I got up the next day at 5:45am. I would question why I actually want to go. Once I got there it was nice, but every time I was like “oh my god I can’t believe I’m gonna go play now”. I would ask myself why I kept doing it because it was so demanding.

After each pregnancy, I wonder if I'm gonna be able to get back to where I was before. I want to be able to perform properly. I want to be able to jump and hit the ball or catch the frisbee, or run. I don't want to be sub-standard. I want to be able to perform the way I used to. Then as a woman, I want to make sure I'm back in shape and my belly is flat again. I feel pressure if my sex drive is low. It's as if you have to look and act like you've never had kids! But now you have two and your life is not the same. I think a lot of that is internal and societal. I put this pressure on myself to be back where I was after my first kid, in the fittest shape of my life. Plus, society is made up to make you feel like that. It's in the ads, the grocery store, everywhere! The pressure is insidious and has been piling up on women's backs for years.

There are also the pressures of motherhood. I mean any time you have kids you want to give them everything. You're always questioning yourself. Are you giving enough time? Are you present enough? It's never ending. You ask questions like am I good enough? When can I take time for myself? Am I gonna impact the kids because I want some time off? It's something you learn to live with. I always wonder if what I do is enough. I feel like a culprit if I take time off.

Team sport truly helps me resist the pressures of motherhood more than any other sport. It's something I do for myself, which is something you don't have much of when you have kids. I find that I can give out most of myself when I'm on a team, whereas alone I don't have that competition with myself. It's also social, so you get to see people, and you get out of your day-to-day pressures and routine. You can just be goofy with other people. It's just a good way to socialize and get the pressure out. You're just enjoying the moment and keeping sane. Team sport is also empowering when you play well, succeed at something difficult, and hear cheers from friends. It all ties into your doing something for yourself, you're happy, you feel good about

something that's not motherhood. You feel like you've succeeded in something that is for yourself, that has nothing to do with your kids.

The group I play volleyball with are always together. We are really close friends. We see each other on a weekly basis for dinner and go to cottages together. We all played beach volleyball recently and it made me feel so great. I was just about the same level cardio-wise as everyone, so I didn't feel bad. We brought our kids and our friends brought theirs. It's funny because now we have extra people around the court. We all took turns watching kids, which was great because I have them all the time. It gave me the opportunity to play which felt exhilarating. My family was there, I was playing a sport I love, it was perfect. It gave me freedom.

Theme #1: Confronting the Challenges of Returning to Team Sport

The first major theme “Confronting the Challenges of Returning to Team Sport” describes the physical and emotional difficulties postnatal women face when returning to team sport. All the women’s stories demonstrated that returning to team sport was important to them. Playing on a team meant they were more than “just a mom”. Participants were willing to confront challenges if it meant being able to play again. From the major theme, three sub-themes were developed: 1) returning with an unfamiliar body; 2) developing rituals and routines; and 3) reproducing gendered expectations of motherhood.

Returning with an unfamiliar body. All women in this study returned to the same team sport they played before giving birth. Those who had multiple children returned after the birth of each child. This demonstrates the strong connection participants felt to their sport. Not even childbirth could prevent them from playing. However, there was an adjustment period when participants adapted to their new postnatal bodies. For some, this meant being cautious about over-exertion when returning to physically active leisure, while others felt the need to rely on

medical advice to dictate when they could return to play. As illustrated in Sara's story, she felt like she could have returned to dodgeball after giving birth but she chose not to because of the "6 weeks of no exercise" rule stated by her doctor.

Other mothers, such as Celia expressed caution when returning to play a team sport. Celia returned to indoor volleyball after a few months but was away from beach volleyball for an entire year. As a first time mother, she was cautious about her return to sport after she gave birth to her child:

The first time outdoors is always a bit tougher on the legs and because I didn't play for the last year it was even tougher. I've played three times so far and I increased the amount of volleyball from one time to the other. I go really gradually because it's only been three months since giving birth. I don't want to go and jump because of my strength. I want to go baby steps. [...] I do have to be cautious when I play because I'm doing my exercises for the physiotherapy for the pelvic floor. I cannot go too fast into my old habits. Even though I don't jump high usually, I still use those muscles, so I really need to pace myself on the court.

Marie also attempted to return to physically active leisure. However, her experience was slightly different. She was eager to play volleyball after her pregnancy. Marie returned to playing volleyball four weeks after having her third child but was concerned that she neglected to listen to her body:

When my infant was about four weeks old, I played one game and then the pandemic happened. I started running again and doing a couple of workouts around then but I could tell my body was not happy. I think I dove in a little too hard, too fast, after having her. I decided to wait a little bit longer, just chill, give it another month.

Likewise, Jennifer felt off-balance in her new body when returning to hockey. As a new mother, she had never played hockey in a postnatal body, yet felt eager to play again. It took some time for her to adjust to the loss in weight and what it meant for her as a hockey player:

I wanted to go return to hockey earlier but my husband was like “you really should wait until you talk to your doctor”. The first game was a rude awakening, though! In the first couple of minutes on the ice I lost my balance and could not get back up for an embarrassing amount of time. I think I was adjusting to not having the front load of weight anymore. I was like “what’s going on, I thought it was going to be like riding a bike”. I was like “okay no I’m terrible now”.

The above stories illustrate the impact physical changes have on postnatal women who attempt to return to team sport. Safety and concern for physical health affected how they both engaged in and experienced team sport. That is, having a child altered their postnatal team sport experience.

Claire and Michelle’s stories also highlighted challenges related to their perceptions of personal performance. As she explained, Claire almost avoided returning to hockey for another season because she was concerned her body was not ready to go back on the ice, despite missing hockey during her pregnancy. She feared that she had ruined her life and her body by having a child. Michelle was also concerned about how she would return to playing team sport with her new body, or if she could even return to how she felt after giving birth to her first child. She worried about her performance levels, wanting to avoid being “sub-standard” when she played volleyball or ultimate frisbee again.

The above women clearly felt drawn to returning to their sport and some even wanted to return before they were medically cleared. Yet, navigating their postnatal bodies stopped many of them from returning when they desired or they returned in a more cautious and modified

manner. Further, the physical changes that accompany pregnancy were distressing for some of the postnatal mothers. There was clearly a physical adjustment period that came along with transitioning to a postpartum body while engaging in team sport.

Developing rituals and routines. Most of the study's participants developed routines and rituals to be able to meaningfully engage in team sport. These routines and rituals helped participants navigate the challenges that accompany being a postnatal woman while returning to team sport. They helped participants relinquish concerns about their children and postnatal bodies and allowed them to focus on playing.

Marie, Jennifer, and Claire all created rituals to help them navigate the responsibilities and pressures that accompany being a postnatal mother. As Marie's story demonstrates, every Tuesday night she drives to volleyball with nostalgic music turned up, something she would never do with her kids in the car. The ritual of listening to loud music on her way to volleyball helps her step away from the responsibilities she has as a postnatal mother and get excited to play. Similarly, both Jennifer and Claire had developed rituals of spending extra time conversing with their teammates before and after games. This ritual allowed them to challenge intensive mothering ideologies and spend time focusing on themselves as women and hockey players. Claire's story shows her team in the locker room actively avoids discussions about motherhood and tries to keep them focused on hockey. She enjoys a space where she does not feel judged as a parent. Meanwhile, Jennifer's story spoke of how she cherished her moments in her team's dressing room. It was a time for her to be with her team and be a hockey player and not a mother. These three rituals allowed postnatal women to confront gendered expectations that their lives should revolve around their child's happiness. In turn, they were able to engage in meaningful team sport participation without focusing on their responsibilities as postnatal mothers.

Conversely, Celia and Jennifer created routines that helped them navigate challenges related to their postnatal bodies. Specifically, both women would have to routinely use breast pumps to express their milk before or during sport. Celia only bottle fed her baby and needed to breast pump while she played beach volleyball for several hours. She created a routine that allowed her to breast pump between games to avoid playing while engorged:

I just also need to plan when to breast pump, so that's a bit more challenging. I can do it sitting at the park anyway. I just have my bag, my stuff, and a big t-shirt that I put on so it's no big deal.

Jennifer developed a routine before playing hockey that allowed her take care of her postnatal body, and to focus on playing:

Hockey was at any time between 2:15pm and 9:15pm, so I had to plan when and where I would feed my child before leaving. If the timing didn't work out, then my husband would bottle feed him and I would pump in the car while I drove to the arena. I had to keep on schedule so I would not be engorged while playing.

These two participants established routines that allowed them to overcome a physical challenge related to their postnatal body. Their routines supported them caring for their postnatal bodies' needs while being able to comfortably engage in sport. The above rituals and routines demonstrate how several participants managed to successfully navigate the challenges of returning to team sport as a postnatal woman. Participants were able to engage in meaningful team sport participation by creating rituals and routines that confronted gendered expectations as well as caring for their postnatal bodies.

Reproducing gendered expectations of motherhood. The majority of women's stories illustrated, to some degree, that they reproduced the gendered expectations of motherhood as

they re-engaged in team sport postnatally. That is, the women's stories related to their return to sport demonstrated the nuances that exist as women navigate resistance and conformity to gendered expectations of motherhood. While most participants expressed that team sport enables them to resist the gendered expectations of motherhood, their experiences and actions also illustrated stories of reproduction.

Many women shared accounts of guilt for taking time for themselves to play a team sport. They expressed guilt towards playing or questioned their need to participate in team sport so they could be present for their children. Michelle's story expressed feelings of self-doubt and guilt that accompany the pressures of motherhood. She also mentioned the necessity of learning to live with the expectations of being a mother and woman. These feelings are mirrored in Claire's story, when talking about how difficult it is to leave her child to go play hockey. She emphasizes that leaving feels like she is sacrificing time with him. As Jennifer's story highlights, she feels guilty for leaving her child with her husband because she sees herself as being primarily responsible for her child's well-being. Indeed, about half of the women in the study expressed overt feelings of guilt towards leaving their child to go play a team sport and take time for themselves. These feelings reinforce intensive mothering standards, implying that anything not done for one's child is considered selfish.

Jennifer's story also brings up an interesting point that many of the women in the study expressed. She feels reassured about engaging in team sport by telling herself "*I'm a better mom if I do this for myself*". Two other women in this study expressed the same sentiment. They justified taking time for themselves by feeling reassured that it would somehow benefit their children. As Marie expressed, "*I feel no guilt towards playing volleyball, because it makes me a better mom. It gives me my own time to unwind, relax, and get away from the kids*". Her feelings

of guilt were justified with the satisfaction of being a good mom. Likewise, Claire discussed needing time away from her husband and child so she can miss them when she returns to them. She sees taking time away from them as a chance to re-energize so she can stay in a good headspace with them:

I always feel good when I'm playing hockey, and leaving hockey, I'm always in a good headspace. Like I've had this break, I've had this time away. I heard from somewhere that you need time away from your husband and kids to miss them and want to come back. Moms who don't have time away to miss their family end up burning out so quickly. Having that pause, and having that opportunity to just miss their smile, and want to come home and want to re-engage, you get re-energized by that.

The above experiences highlight the pervasiveness of the gendered expectations of motherhood. Despite postnatal women using team sport as an escape from the pressures and responsibilities of motherhood, they were still present and reproduced through team sport participation. These women's feelings of guilt are created by reproducing intensive mothering ideals, meaning their participation is granted by reproducing the narrative of needing to be a "good mom".

Furthermore, Sara's story clearly highlights reproducing the gendered expectations of motherhood. Despite expressing feeling ready to return to dodgeball, she felt uncomfortable leaving both the young child and a toddler with a babysitter. Furthermore, when Sara returned to playing team sport with her husband, she looked after the childcare arrangements by asking her close friends or her father: *"I basically send out a text on Monday, and then just go through the group of people who will willingly babysit for us, and then just stop when I find somebody who can take care of them!"*

Sara's passage demonstrates the contradictions women face as mothers who play a team sport. It illustrates the gendered expectations of motherhood whether they want to play a team sport or chose not to. On one hand, the desire to engage is an act of resistance against the gendered expectations of motherhood. However, Sara's choice to stay home and take care of the children while her husband played reinforced the gendered expectations of motherhood while her husband engaged in their team sport. These expectations are further emphasized when she returns to team sport and must make childcare arrangements so both she and her husband can play.

Thus, the first major theme revealed the multiple challenges women face when returning to team sport postnatally. All women endured an adjustment period that allowed them to become familiar with their new postnatal bodies when returning to team sport. For some, that meant changing how they engaged in team sport, and others turned towards outside advice on how to rejoin (i.e. medical, partner, friends). Further, participants managed to negotiate past challenges that accompany rejoining team sport through creating rituals and routines. Rituals were created to alleviate the pressures of motherhood and create a sense of freedom. For other mothers rituals and routines allowed participants to comfortably engage in sport while caring for their postnatal bodies. Lastly, almost all postnatal women in this study engaged in the reproduction of gendered expectations of motherhood with their return to play. This final section highlighted the ever-present nature of gendered expectations that accompany motherhood.

Theme #2: Relationships Aiding the Return to Team Sport

The theme "Relationships Aiding the Return to Team Sport" reflects the importance of social relationships when postnatal women return to community team sport. The ability of the mothers to engage in community team sport depended on their relationships with their partners,

friends, and family. Furthermore, many participants were inspired to return to team sport by watching teammates and friends do so. The three sub-themes are discussed in this section: 1) creating a community of friends; 2) using social supports; and 3) looking to role models for inspiration.

Creating a community of friends. Every woman in this study expressed the importance of friendships that accompany playing a community team sport. For participants, engaging in team sport was more than simply being on a team with other players and winning. It involved creating a community centered on relationships with teammates as sources of support and friendship. For example, Jennifer's story illustrated that the bonds of motherhood intensified her relationship with her teammates. The support made her feel closer to her teammates not only because they were fellow hockey players, but fellow mothers as well.

Almost all women expressed how their close relationships with teammates extended beyond the sport itself. Marie, Celia, and Claire illustrate this concept through their teams' resilience as players leave and return to their teams. As Marie's story shows, her team had several players who often missed games during the season or leave because they are pregnant. Yet, her teammates understood because most of them had similar experiences, further bonding them together as friends and mothers rather than just teammates. Claire's team also understood when players took time off. Her story expressed feeling connected and like a part of the team even when she was away while pregnant. Likewise, Celia's story explained that her indoor volleyball team stopped playing for a season. They remained friends and planned to return to volleyball next year. The three women above demonstrated how despite leaving or separating from their team, participants continued to feel close with their teammates and a sense of belonging.

Other participants' stories describe how friendships with teammates transcend into other aspects of their lives. Both Sara and Michelle's stories, for example, illustrate how they often dine, travel, and do other sports with their teammates. As Marie explained, her team routinely organized post-game socials: *"After every game we take turns bringing snacks over to someone's house. It's fun to play a team sport because it doesn't feel like exercise and then you get to have snacks with your team"*. Celia's vignette also illustrates the important role of teammates as a community of friends outside of sport. She expressed how all her friends/teammates supported her journey to become single parent. She even threw a party with them to help her choose the sperm donor.

The relationships that all women in this study cultivated with their teammates demonstrate that playing a community team sport extends beyond participation and competition. It extends to experiences and significant moments inside and outside of the court or rink, that continues to strengthen their bonds as a team, as a community, as mothers, and as friends.

Using social supports. All participants shared stories of accessing team sport because of strong social support resources and personal relationships. These postnatal women would not be able to engage in team sport if they did not have the support of their partners, close friends or family members.

Four of the study's participants relied on their husbands for support while they engaged in team sport. Marie's story illustrated that she depends solely on her husband to access volleyball. He avoids making plans for Tuesday nights, allowing him to watch their children while she to plays. Similarly, Michelle made an arrangement with her partner for both times she returned to sport postnatally:

On weekdays, my partner and I take turns playing. We had a deal. I think my partner arranged it with me because I couldn't really play while I was pregnant. He gave me priority for whatever I wanted to do after I gave birth. He was like you can choose to play three night a week if you want!

They chose an equitable arrangement, so she could play as many nights per week as she wanted while he watched their children. Jennifer's story shows that she also made an arrangement with her husband prior to returning to hockey. He is now responsible for making childcare arrangements with his mother if both of their playing schedules overlap. For Claire, her story demonstrates that her husband encouraged her return to sport. Further, he offers extra support if their parents cannot watch their child when they play hockey. Thus, the above women relied heavily on support from their partners when returning to team sport post-childbirth. Their partners either looked after their children while they returned to team sport, or highly encouraged them to rejoin when feelings of doubt influenced their decisions.

Parents were also a major source of support for many women in the study. Many participants relied on their parents to look after their children while they played. For example, as a single parent Celia's story reflects how she needed to rely on her mother immensely for support during her first postnatal month. Michelle also received support from her parents when she and her partner played in volleyball tournaments together: *"On weekends we sometimes manage to do tournaments together while our parents take turns watching the kids"*. Sara's story further illustrated her receiving support from her father when she and her husband play dodgeball by asking him to babysit while they played. Additionally, Claire and Jennifer both relied on their parents to babysit their children when their husbands' hockey games were scheduled at the same time. Thus, several women relied heavily on support from parents to return to team sport post-

childbirth. Their parents were instrumental in helping most of them participate in team sport, either providing primary or occasional support while they played.

It was clear, too, that some women had to rely on other people for support by asking friends or other family members to watch their children as they played. For example, along with relying on her father, Sara asked close friends of hers without children to babysit when her father was unavailable. Furthermore, unlike the other participants who had a partner to depend on, Celia's story highlights her experience as a single mother and the need for an extremely strong and creative support system when accessing team sport. As such, she receives help from both her sister and her friends for childcare support. Celia's sister offers her more support than she expected to receive. Her sister plans to take Celia's child for swimming and skiing lessons so she can have time to herself. She also relies on the support of her friends/teammates as well. For example, upon returning to tennis and beach volleyball, she always ensures an extra player is invited to participate. This way, the player sitting off can look after her child while she plays.

Clearly, all the women's stories underscore the importance of the strong support system needed to access team sport. This finding is similar to Batey and Owton (2014) who reported that relying on social support was key in helping postnatal women with team sport engagement. In the present study however, only one woman was able to rely solely on support from her husband. The five other woman needed support from either a combination of their partners and family or close friends and family. Having multiple, reliable sources of support through close relationships with partners, family, friends, and in one case teammates was critical in ensuring their continued community team sport engagement.

Looking to role models for inspiration. The new mothers in this study expressed being inspired by other women who engage in team sport who had children. They saw them as role

models and understood through their actions that engaging in team sport postnatally was possible. These role models demonstrated that team sport participation can be a priority, and that postnatal women can prioritize their physically active leisure engagement. Jennifer's story describes her experience of being in a league surrounded by other women who returned to hockey after giving birth, which inspired her to return. Similarly, Celia explained how she looked to her friends and teammates who continued to play as they had children:

Friends of mine who are a couple have a seven-year-old but both parents continue to play volleyball and tennis. They don't play much during the week but are still involved during the weekend. Another set of my friends who are together and have two children continue to play volleyball with our friend group as well. In fact, I see most of the people in our friend group continue their activities.

Their persistence inspired Celia to think about the future and plan how she would like to remain actively involved. As she explained:

Continuing to play is gonna be feasible, but not in the same amount as before. If I want to, I think that I can manage two weekends a month of volleyball. During the week I know that my sister can cover maybe once a week for me but I don't want to overuse her. So, I will have to choose between one night of volleyball or one night of tennis.

Celia also expressed feeling inspired by watching other women outside of her friend group play in a beach volleyball tournament against her. She was inspired by their strategy to hire a babysitter to take care of their children while they played:

I played in a few local tournaments and we often played against two women that were older than us at the time. They must have been the age I am now! They were at the tournament with their three kids, playing two on two beach volleyball, and they were

good! The kids were not old enough to be by themselves, so the women hired a teenager to watch the kids while they played [...] I imagine in the future when I play a tournament with my friends, we can all bring our kids and hire a babysitter to watch them while we play. They can all come to the tournament, or stay at home while we have a day off.

Claire's story also demonstrates the effectiveness of watching teammates actively prioritize their team sport engagement. In her case, she was on a team with other mothers who continued to play hockey after having children and they were highly supportive of her postnatal return to hockey. Observing teammates, friends, and other women inspired participants to continue playing a community team sport after childbirth. This theme signifies the importance of being surrounded by positive role models who inspire resistance and the importance of caring for the self.

In sum, the three sub-themes above represent the significance social relationships play when returning to community team sport post-childbirth. All the women in this study were able to return to team sport largely because of the relationships both on and off their teams. Meaningful friendships developed on their teams acted as an anchor for them to return to team sport. This extended beyond playing on a team to creating and cultivating friendships and sources of support in other aspects of their lives. Next, participants' stories illustrated the importance of using social relationships for support to access community team sport. Participants may have struggled to engage in community team sport if they did not have a solid network of partners, family, friends, and teammates who could help take care of their children while they played. Lastly, new mothers in the study spoke of the power that accompanies watching friends and teammates as role models of inspiration. Watching them engage in self-care by taking time to access physically active leisure let them know it was possible to be more than a mother after having a child.

Theme #3: Resistance and Empowerment Through Community Team Sport Participation.

The theme “Resistance and Empowerment Through Community Team Sport Participation” demonstrates how postnatal women can engage in acts of resistance towards gendered expectations of mothering when participating in community team sport. Further, although in unique ways and to varying degrees, the postnatal women also shared stories of and empowerment once they returned to community team sport. The three sub-themes that were developed include: 1) resisting being like “other moms”; 2) resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood; 3) experiencing moment of empowerment.

Resisting being like “other moms”. While some participants looked to other mothers as role models, it was clear that some women returned to sport, in part, to resist the intensive mothering, child-centred ideology. That is, some participants expressed actively resisting intensive mothering practice and behaviours based on their observations of other women who reproduced the gendered expectations of motherhood. For example, as Claire mentions in her story, a substitute player described how she stopped playing hockey for one year after giving birth. Claire contrasted her story of return to sport against the substitute’s, emphasizing how proud she was to return to sport soon after childbirth, unlike this other woman. Sara’s story described a similar situation. She pointed out that many mothers in online forums are proud of never leaving their baby’s side. Conversely, Sara minimizes these women’s experiences by priding herself on resisting gendered expectations, and using baby sitters to watch her children while she played dodgeball.

Similarly, both Marie and Celia organized their schedules to counter what they observed (and judged) of their friends and the child-centred approach that negatively impacted their ability to participate in physically active leisure. To illustrate, Marie spoke highly of adhering to a strict

sleep schedule with her children, which allowed her to have them in bed before she left to play. Meanwhile, she had friends who operated on their child's natural sleep schedule, which she thinks inhibits their ability to function: "*I have friends who are still up with their four year old's six time a night. I'm like what are you doing? How can you even function?*". Celia's experience aligned with Marie's. She had a child after many of her friends and colleagues became parents. This timing gave her the ability to observe how her friends and colleague raised their children, allowing her to intentionally resist future gendered expectations when she had a child. As Celia experienced, one expectation was to have her child cared for by other people:

One of my friends is a single mother. She's a really good mother, she does everything by the book, but she really wanted to create a bond with her daughter. So much so that nobody else was allowed to pick her up. The baby is five or six months old, and has only been held by her mother and grandparents. I think she needs to chill out. [...] I want my baby to socialize and be able to go from one pair of arms to the next while I'm doing something else.

Celia also spoke about watching friends at work and explicitly stated that she did not want to reproduce or repeat their child-centred approach and it was important to her to take time for herself:

I do have some examples from friends at work that I do not want to reproduce or repeat. [...] After weekends they would come to work like "Ugh! It was a big weekend. [the kids] had hockey, and other classes and everything". I was single and free, and I was like "for my weekend, the only thing that I needed to care about was what I wanted to do for my leisure". So, I do want to keep having fun activities throughout the weekend that aren't just for my child.

Notably, this theme was similar to the previously described “looking to role models for inspiration” theme. Participants were influenced by other women to resist gendered expectations of mothering when engaging in team sport. However, this theme depicted how participants’ *critiques* of other women shaped their team sport experience.

Resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood. All women actively resisted the gendered expectations of motherhood in some way. That is, they used their team sport participation to resist what they interpreted as the gendered expectations of motherhood. For example, Sara and Marie both resisted embodying their identities as mothers by keeping the mother and athlete identity separate and unrelated. Marie’s story demonstrates her deliberately separating her identities as a mother and team sport player. Her story makes it clear that she is not a mother when she plays volleyball. Like Marie, Sara’s story creates separation of the mothering identity while playing. While she understands that she is a mother with two children, she explains that she does not think of herself as a mom while playing dodgeball.

Similarly, many of the women resist the gendered expectations of mothering that pressure them to always put their child’s needs first. They resisted this ideology by prioritizing their needs and actively engaging in the community team sport they love. Michelle’s story highlights this when she talks about team sport being something she does for herself, giving her a break in routine, while resisting the pressures of motherhood. Marie’s story further expresses the importance of taking time to herself to engage in community team sport. She alludes to rarely being away from her kids, with team sport granting her the opportunity to spend time and resources on herself rather than on her kids. As illustrated in Celia’s story, she also resists by prioritizing her own mental health as well as her children’s. She recognizes the benefits of continuing to engage in the leisure activity she loves after having a child. Yet, it was clear, too

the inherently contradictory nature of resistance. For example, while the above stories illustrate acts of resistance, Claire found it difficult to return to team sport and put herself first after becoming a mother. Her story depicts her struggle to return to team sport, and inherent struggles involved in actively resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood. Claire acknowledges that the mere act of engaging in team sport resists gendered ideologies, where she can focus on her own needs and interests first. However, she continued to doubt if she had taken enough time off from hockey, to settle into being a mother.

Some women, collectively resisted the gendered expectations of motherhood as a team during conversations before and after games. Some participants actively joked about or avoided discussing motherhood to resist the expectation that they must always be “good moms” with their children constantly at the forefront of their thoughts. Jennifer, for example, joked about motherhood with her teammates as they exchanged stories in the locker room after games. Experienced mothers would tell whimsical stories about raising boys to add comic relief to the advice they gave surrounding motherhood. Meanwhile, Claire and Marie’s teams actively avoided discussing motherhood because they had teammates who were not mothers. Claire expressed that it is rare for her team to bring up topics surrounding motherhood while they talk in the locker room after games:

Our team is a mix of moms who have older kids and young girls who are 25 and have no interest in having kids at all for a really long time. [...] Most of the time [our conversation] is hockey-related, and we catch each other up on our week. We’re talking about strategy, and complain about things that happened in games. I don’t think I’ve ever has a conversation with anyone about “what’s the best baby formula to use?” or “should we go lactose free?”. That’s not a conversation that I’ve ever had with women on my

team. They might actually look at me and be like “I don’t fucking know!”. It’s not like I went in my first game back and was like let me share my birth story with you all. I think that’s kinda nice. It’s a place where I don’t have to talk about that stuff, and I don’t have to be judged for like the way I’m raising my kid.

Marie’s story described that her team also avoids conversations surrounding motherhood. They avoid the topic because it is their night away from children and the team also has players who are not mothers. As such, they like to be inclusive and discuss topics that all players can contribute towards, rather than leave some teammates out of the conversation.

All of the postnatal women in this study actively engaged in resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood when playing a community team sport. Engaging in community team sport enabled resistance because it helped their mental health, encouraged them to be someone other than a mother, and allowed them to talk about life beyond motherhood.

Experiencing moments of empowerment. Almost all participants expressed feeling empowered or a sense of pride when they actively engaged in resistance towards the gendered expectations of motherhood. This sense of empowerment pushed women to resist even further, and helped them encourage their teammates to engage in acts of resistance as well. It helped build a sense of community among participants, and helped them grow stronger as a team and friends. To illustrate through Sara’s story, she and her teammate had a specific celebration for when they excelled in dodgeball while playing while pregnant. When a pregnant player thrives during a game they yell “*fetus power!*” together.

After giving birth, Celia, Claire and Jennifer all expressed feelings of empowerment when resisting gendered expectations of motherhood because of their return to team sport. Other women on their team or people around them commented on being back so early after having a

child. These comments made them feel empowered and in control of their identities as team sport players and women. As shown in Claire and Jennifer's stories, they felt empowered and a "badass" by returning to hockey soon after childbirth. Comments from their shocked teammates made them proud of themselves and their decision to return to hockey. Likewise, Celia further illustrated feeling empowered while engaging in resistance because of her return to team sport. She went back to playing doubles tennis with her friends two months after giving birth, and people on surrounding courts commented on her early return:

It was nice, being able to go back to playing tennis after 2 months and having a baby that is calm enough that allows us to play for the whole hour. Also, some people entering the court saw the stroller and would comment "oh it's young to be initiated into tennis!". I think that some people are not expecting a mom to come play tennis with a stroller so that's kind of nice too. It's not because I'm a new mom that I cannot engage in sport.

It was clear too, that the women felt empowered with their successful performances after their return to sport. Excelling at a team sport after having a child challenges the intensive mothering expectation that once women become mothers their success must be devoted towards their children's success (Lloyd et al., 2016). As shown in Claire's story, she felt empowered after scoring her first goal back since having a child, as she felt reassured that she had not lost her ability to perform in hockey. Michelle's story equally demonstrates feelings of empowerment when succeeding at team sport, because her performance relates to doing something for herself that has nothing to do with motherhood.

As such, postnatal women's feelings of empowerment stemmed from their ability to resist gendered expectations of motherhood while playing a team sport. Sara felt empowered by resisting the expectation that pregnant women must devote their time to enriching their child's

lives rather than play a team sport. Celia, Claire, and Jennifer all returned to team sport after giving birth which is an act of resistance itself. They all were empowered by this act of resistance and felt they influenced people's opinions on returning to sport after giving birth. Finally, Claire and Michelle not only managed to engage in team sport as postnatal women, but excel in it. This act of resistance challenged the expectation that postnatal women must solely focus on the success of their children rather than their own (Trussell & Shaw, 2012).

In conclusion, engaging in community team sport allowed postnatal women to actively feel empowered by resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood. Team sport became a vessel for the women in this study to push against the boundaries of intensive mothering and gender roles. First, they observed other mothers' acts of reproduction of gendered expectations and chose to consciously avoid engaging in similar acts of reproduction. Rather, they modelled their actions to oppose what they observed. Then, all the study's participants engaged in acts of resistance (albeit in diverse ways) through playing team sport by choosing to temporarily identify as team sport players rather than mothers, by putting their needs before their child's, and by actively avoiding conversations about motherhood with other women and mothers. Lastly, almost all of the mothers felt empowered through these acts of resistance, allowing them to feel confident about their decision to engage in team sport, and secure in their identities as team sport players.

Summary

Chapter four's findings explored the journey postnatal women face when returning to team sport through three major themes: 1) confronting the challenges of returning to team sport, 2) relationships aiding the return to team sport, and 3) resistance and empowerment through community team sport participation. Firstly, participants expressed navigating several challenges

when returning to team sport. Playing a team sport with an unfamiliar body inhibited their ability to return to their team when they desired, or it forced them to modify their playing style.

Participants also adopted rituals and routines that allowed them to mitigate the challenges of being postnatal women while engaging in team sport. Some created team rituals, allowing them to focus purely on sport, others created routines to navigate breast pumping and play comfortably. A final challenge postnatal women faced was reproducing gendered expectations of motherhood. Almost all participants felt they needed to reproduce ideologies surrounding the gendered expectations to access and engage in team sport.

Next, the following major theme discussed how relationships aided postnatal women's return to team sport. Participants created a community of friends within their teams before, during, and after their pregnancy. All of the women had meaningful relationships with their teammates that lasted throughout their pregnancy and eased their return. Additionally, every postnatal woman relied on social supports to access team sport. Maintaining a strong support system that relied on partners, family, or friends for childcare was critical for all participants playing a team sport postnatally. Some participants also spoke of looking to role models for inspiration to encourage their return to team sport. Observing friends and teammates who were mothers engage in meaningful physically active leisure gave participants the courage to return to team sport postnatally.

The final major theme expressed how postnatal women experience resistance and empowerment through community team sport participation. Multiple women in the study chose to consciously resist being like "other moms" by playing community team sport. Observing mothers reproduce the gendered expectations of motherhood inspired their resistance. Moreover, all postnatal women in this study used team sport as a tool to resist the gendered expectations of

motherhood. Each participant consciously chose to engage in resistance by returning to team sport postnatally, and to prioritize their personal needs. Lastly, the majority of the participants expressed moments of empowerment while resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood. They felt empowered by engaging in community team sport as an act of resistance and by excelling at their sport after having given birth to a child.

Chapter 5: Discussion

“You feel like you’ve succeeded in something that is for yourself ... that has nothing to do with your kids.” – Michelle

In this chapter, I discuss how participants’ stories are grounded in current literature and unveil new understandings of postnatal women’s experiences of return to team sport. Following this, I consider the limitations that affected my research, future research considerations, and a brief discussion of this study’s contributions to the field and its practical implications. Chapter 5 then concludes with a personal reflection of my experience working with these six wonderful women, how my positionality may have shaped the findings, and reflections on my politics of hope for postnatal team sport participation.

Using a feminist lens, the purpose of this study was to understand the meanings and experiences of physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, I sought to critically examine how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. The three main themes that emerged from my interpretation of the data were: 1) Confronting the Challenges of Returning to Team Sport, 2) Relationships Aiding in the Return to Team Sport, and 3) Resistance and Empowerment Through Community Team Sport Participation. These three central themes illustrated the meanings and experiences of postnatal women as they returned to community team sport by highlighting how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their experience. I will now take up these themes by unpacking them in relation to my research questions.

Transforming Lives and Leisure Experiences

The findings from this study illustrated how changes caused by childbirth, changed how the women engaged in community team sport. The following section reviews this study’s

findings surrounding challenges to participation, routines and rituals, breast pumping, and identity.

Changing post-natal bodies created challenges for participants when returning to community team sport and affected both their physical abilities and social connections. This finding relates to Tekavc et al.'s (2020) research on elite Slovenian athletes transitioning to motherhood. They compared returning to sport after child-birth to returning after an injury, which caused them to drastically alter their postnatal participation and gradually ease back into training. Similarly, Sullivan (2013) uncovered that women do not anticipate the drastic physical transformation that accompanies motherhood, which in turn shifted their leisure participation experiences. Nelson (2009) argued that new mothers endure a transformation so profound that it has not only physical but also social consequences that only they can understand. Indeed, women in the present study felt deeper connections with teammates and their friends because they were now part of “team motherhood”.

The findings from this study offers a unique perspective of how multiple child births effect postnatal women’s participation in team sport. Two participants expressed enduring different physical and mental changes with the birth of each of their children, which in turn affected their team sport participation differently. Little research explores the physical and mental transformations that accompany multiple childbirths, and their subsequent alterations on postnatal women’s physically active leisure. To my knowledge, only Evans and Allen-Collinson's (2016) research specifically highlighted the leisure experiences of a mother with two young children, while they engaged in physically active leisure all together. It did not reflect mother’s leisure experiences without their children.

It was clear too, that routines and rituals were an important strategy for the women to re-engage in team sport postnatally. Creating routines and rituals allowed postnatal women to focus on playing their team sport while navigating challenges related to motherhood such as gendered pressures, mothering responsibilities, and breast pumping. This is consistent with Batey and Owton (2014) who uncovered that mothers routinely used team sport to “temporarily escape family responsibilities and reclaim some ‘me-time’” (p.33). Also, Lloyd et al. (2016) expressed the importance of mothers developing routines that permitted them to engage in leisure-time physical activity (LTPA). In their study, creating a regular routine and organizational ritual allowed mothers to plan their LTPA in advance and allow time for themselves. Therefore, creating rituals and routines is one mechanism to help postnatal women overcome their responsibilities as postnatal women, and enjoy team sport.

Furthermore, this study highlights the challenges women face with breast pumping while returning to team sport postnatally. Two participants had to use public spaces to breast pump before and during their participation. Little research highlights the experiences of postnatal women who negotiate playing a team sport and breast pumping. This finding contributes to the literature attempting to de-mystify breastfeeding and postnatal women’s needs when engaging in physically active leisure (Chow & Dong, 2013; Grant, 2016).

Although it was not a focus of this study, an underlying narrative of all participant’s stories was how their identities as mothers and athletes intersected. While some participants transitioned into new mothers, and others became mothers of multiple children, they all had to manage both their identities as mothers and community team sport participants through a significant life transition. To illustrate with examples from participants’ stories, Marie, Celia, and Sara managed their identities as mothers and team sport players by making specific times to

prioritize their team sport participation. Meanwhile, Michelle, Jennifer, and Claire all felt their identities as mothers negatively influence their identities as sport players. They expressed that their identities as mothers made them feel guilty to go play team sport and be athletes.

The topic of identity development for athletes who are mothers has received some attention in the sport and leisure literature. For example, Batey and Owton (2014) uncovered that team sport was used by mothers to exercise their identities as athletes. Doing so allowed them to balance their two identities and feel more rounded and confident in other aspects of their lives. McGannon et al.'s (2017) analysis of mother's recreational athlete identities online also found that mothers used sport to add a dimension to their identities, defining them as more than just mothers. Participants used running to empower themselves as athletes, rather than running to be better mothers or lose weight. Likewise, Palmer and Leberman's (2009) research determined that participants were empowered as athletes by negotiating both their identities as mothers and athletes. They viewed sport as an integral part of themselves, while believing it to have positive impacts on their identity as mothers. Further, McGannon et al. (2018) demonstrated that mother athletes attempted to "juggle" their many identities to uphold high training and motherhood standards. They point out that participants struggled to successfully balance these two identities, which were both accompanied by high expectations to achieve success on their own. As such, future research related to postnatal women and team sport with a focus on the (re)negotiation and management of multiple identities (i.e. mother, athlete, teammate) would be an area of further investigation.

Benefits of Belonging to a Community

Physically active leisure's role in postnatal women's lives helped them belong to a community of friends and supports during a time often accompanied by social isolation (Parry et

al., 2013a). The discussion that follows unpacks this study's findings surrounding community, social support, support as a single parent, and role models in relation to current leisure and sport literature.

A key finding to emerge from the study is the strong sense of community that accompanies team sport. Participants extended team sport beyond playing and competing together. They created powerful relationships with teammates that transcended sport and created bonds as mothers, friends, and as a community. This aligns with Masberg and Eklund's (2018) research on women's roller derby teams who found "the depth and scope of these relationships ranged from a friendship, a social circle, sisterhood, 'family', and team accomplishment. The feeling of belonging extended beyond the individual's team and the league" (p. 141). Additionally, Batey and Owton's (2014) findings highlighted that social aspects were a large benefit of being a team member. Similar to participants in this study, being on a team allowed mothers to create friendships, receive encouragement, and feel a sense of belonging. Litchfield and Dionigi (2012) also revealed similar insights when observing middle-aged and older women's team sport participation. Participants enjoyed the companionship of "like-minded women", creating a sense of community, shared identity, and security. This finding is congruent with the participants' stories in the present study, whereby several postnatal women enjoyed being a part of a community of women and mothers. This community allowed them to share stories, advice, and experiences, further strengthening their relationships as teammates and friends.

All postnatal women in this study shared stories of using social relationships to access team sport. They relied on partners, family, and friends for childcare to play their sport once a week. This finding supports Palmer and Leberman's (2009) research of elite athletes returning to

sport after childbirth. Participants relied heavily on “personal support networks” consisting of partners, friends, parents and extended family for childcare. McGannon et al. (2018) also found that mothers who are recreational athletes used their social networks to negotiate their multiple identities. Partners and spouses were co-parents, sharing childcare and housework so participants could engage in recreational sport (McGannon et al., 2018). Therefore, many mothers rely heavily on social relationships to access community team sport.

Unique to this study, however, was uncovering the complexities of being a single mother who participates in community team sport. Celia’s story as a single mother recounts the importance of receiving childcare support from both her sister, teammates, and friends to access leisure. While Irving and Giles's (2011) study of single women’s leisure found that the pressures of childcare were an inhibitory constraint to leisure, Celia shared no pressures surrounding childcare. Aligned with McGannon et al. (2018), Celia developed multifaceted strategies that allowed her to balance parenting and sport. Yet, while McGannon et al. (2018) refer to receiving emotional support from people who were not partners, Celia also relied on childcare from family members and social circles. Furthermore, Palmer and Leberman (2009) highlighted the importance of extensive social support for single mothers who are athletes. However, while they found that “friends were often the next option in terms of providing hands-on support” (p.248), Celia received equal support from both her sister and friends/teammates. These findings further reinforce the complex support systems single mothers require when compared to mothers with supportive partners.

Within this study, a significant finding uncovered that postnatal women use role models as inspiration for returning to team sport. Being surrounded by mothers who had returned to team sport encouraged participants to do the same sport postnatally. Similarly, McGannon et al.

(2017) found that mothers who ran and were a part of an online running community for mothers served as “advocates”. They were role models and support for other mothers in their community. Specific to this study, several women were inspired by observing other postnatal women’s physically active leisure participation. Jennifer, Celia, and Claire were all inspired by friends, teammates, and women in their leagues who had all returned to team sport as mothers.

Postnatal Team Sport as Inherently Contradictory

The following several paragraphs discuss this projects’ findings in relation to reproduction, resistance, and empowerment. Leisure as resistance is always complex and in a state of becoming, as theorized by Shaw (2001). Leisure’s political nature allows it to be a platform for women to resist traditional gender roles (Shaw, 2001; Wearing, 1990). Yet, leisure can also easily serve as a space to reproduce them with other leisure participants (Du, 2008; Green, 1998). Therefore, women engaging in team sport are constantly negotiating between resistance and reproduction of gendered expectations. As illustrated in participant’s stories, there is no “perfect” way to resist gender roles while engaging in leisure, because engagement often also involves the reproduction of gender roles.

This study found that resistance is closely related to positive feelings of empowerment and the reproduction of gendered expectations. For example, three of the study’s participants returned to team sport postnatally because they were inspired by observing other women’s acts of resistance. Observing teammates, friends, and other women inspired participants to continue playing a community team sport after childbirth, which in itself is an act of resistance.

Continuing to play counters the intensive mothering expectation that mothers should put the needs of their children before their own (Hays, 1996; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). This expectation requires that they remain primary caregiver and in the presence of their child, attending to their

every need to be the “perfect mother” (Henderson et al., 2016). Jennifer, Celia, and Claire were encouraged to resist these ideals by participating in team sport after giving birth because of the support and examples of other women resisting before them. As such, this supports Shaw’s (2001) assertion that resistance is both an individual and collective act. The women individually resisted the gendered expectations of motherhood, yet were inspired through others, resulting in unintentional collective resistance (Shaw, 2001).

As such, a central theme from this study emphasized postnatal women’s belief that simply playing a team sport postnatally was an act of resistance. Participants resisted the gendered expectations of intensive mothering that dictate they must always identify as mothers, they need to put their child’s needs before their own, and that good mothers spend all of their time, resources, and thoughts on their children (Lloyd et al., 2016). This finding relates to Litchfield and Dionigi's (2012) discovery that middle-aged and older women who engaged in team sport actively resist gendered notions of aging. The present study has shed light on a new phenomenon: that postnatal women actively choose to resist gendered expectations of motherhood by engaging in postnatal team sport. This finding builds upon Lloyd et al.'s (2016) and O’Brien et al.'s (2017) work that reflect on mothers using LTPA as resistance to ideologies of motherhood.

Further, postnatal women in this study felt empowered when they actively resisted the gendered expectations of motherhood by engaging in team sport. Feelings of empowerment demonstrated that resisting the gendered expectations of motherhood help postnatal women feel they are competent women and athletes, not only competent mothers. The current finding builds upon Batey and Owton’s (2014) research suggesting that empowerment is a component of mother’s team sport participation. Further, McGannon et al. (2018) uncovered that recreational

mothers success at sports performance goals “fuelled their motivation and competitive identities” (p.47). Thus, leading to their empowerment as athletes. The present study affirms that postnatal women feel empowered when they engage in team sport, and adds that a component of feeling empowered stems from resisting gendered expectations of motherhood while playing.

While the above findings demonstrate the positive sides of resistance, the following highlights the complexities that surrounds resistance. One major finding illustrated the reproduction of gendered expectations of motherhood when attempting to engage in team sport. Many studies explore concepts like “ethic of care” (Batey & Owton, 2014; Lloyd et al., 2016) and guilt (McGannon et al., 2018; O’Brien et al., 2017; Palmer & Leberman, 2009) in relation to engaging in sport and leisure. However, little to no research looks at needing to engage in the reproduction of gender roles to be able to participate in team sport, which then grants them a space for resistance. In this study, postnatal women who engaged in team sport felt guilt and self-doubt before they left their children to engage in team sport. They also felt they had to conform to traditional gender roles to leave their homes to play a team sport (e.g. make dinner for everyone). Further, although some women may appear to resist gendered ideals by participating in team sport, they also reproduced them by justifying their participation to be a “better mother”, rather than for their own self-care. This illustrates the pervasiveness of gendered expectations of motherhood throughout team sport participation for postnatal women. It is present when women can access team sport, it causes feelings of guilt and self-doubt when attempting to engage in team sport, and it permeates positive thoughts about the self. As such, the challenges of motherhood and its weight seems nearly inescapable as they are commonly produced in leisure spaces (Green, 1998).

Another significant finding discussed how participants actively resisted being like “other moms” by engaging in team sport. Several stories highlight how participants actively engaged in leisure as resistance by observing others conform to gendered expectations of mothering (Shaw, 2001). The above finding highlights the complexities of resisting dominant gender ideologies. Moreover, participants actively engaged in leisure as an act of resistance by observing others (Shaw, 2001). By observing and listening to others’ acts of reproduction, they were further encouraged to engage in acts of resistance and actively participate in team sport postnatally. These women would not be able to participate in team sport if they engaged in reproducing the gendered expectations of motherhood that they had heard and observed. However, this form of resistance involved judging other women for their choices as mothers, ultimately discounting their experiences which may exclude them from team sport participation (Pavlidis, 2013). Resistance in this case stems from putting other women down, rather than picking them up, which contradicts the central definition of feminism (hooks, 2015). Meaning, while this form of resistance benefits some women, but not all, it also illustrates the complexities of this phenomenon.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study addressed gaps in research related to postnatal community team sport participation, it has limitations and areas inspiring further exploration. First, all the participants in this study returned to team sport postnatally. It did not capture the experiences of postnatal women who played a community team sport, then stopped playing because of childbirth. This limitation may have occurred because of my recruitment methods. Advertising the poster on community team sport social media pages could have drawn current players, rather than past ones. Future research should focus on the experiences of postnatal women who do not return to

team sport, and examine how gendered expectations of motherhood have influenced their lack of team sport engagement. Poster distribution should specifically target this audience.

Another limitation of this study was that participants did not list socio-economic status as a challenge to leisure participation. Indeed, five participants were members of dual-income household, and the single parent had a high-earning profession (crown attorney). Therefore, financial privilege framed the participants' stories. Leisure and sport literature would benefit from future research seeking to hear the stories of postnatal women from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds returning to team sport.

A third limitation of this study was its' lack of participants who identified as a part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. All participants in this study who had partners were in heteronormative relationships. Additionally, no participants identified as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Further understanding of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in relation to parental team sport participation during the early stages of childhood is critical in understanding how gendered expectations of parenthood impact all parents who play a team sport. Another limitation of this study is that it did not represent racial diversity. All participants were Caucasian. Future studies should attempt to include a more ethnically diverse sample, to better represent the diversity of mothers experiences. Subsequent research surrounding early childhood parenting and team sport participation may refer to Watson and Scraton's (2013) work on integrating intersectionality into leisure research.

A final limitation was that data for this study was gathered from April-July 2020, during the first wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic in Canada (Brock University, 2020).

Conducting a study during this time impacted my data collection process. All participants who had begun playing a team sport after childbirth had stopped because of regulations related to the

pandemic. However, two participants who had initially not resumed team sport participation at the first interview had resumed playing by their third interviews. All interviews were conducted over video call or the phone, none were in-person, ultimately affecting the rapport building process with participants. Interview guides were strategically constructed to acknowledge topics surrounding the pandemic separately from questions relating to the main purpose statement and research questions. Future research could explore the pandemic's effects on postnatal team sport participation, while considering the gendered nature of the pandemic.

Practical Implications

My intent for this study was to encourage readers to empathize with the challenges postnatal women face and understand how they could better facilitate accessible participation for this population. With regards to practical implications, I have several suggestions based on my conversations with postnatal women returning to team sport. The following points are intended to serve as stepping stones to creating inclusive policies. Further research of diverse parents is necessary to provide more concrete recommendations.

All participants faced challenges related to childcare responsibilities when returning to team sport. As primary caregivers, they were faced with the burden of finding acceptable childcare to access team sport. This finding suggests the need for accessible childcare facilities at community team sport leagues, which may allow postnatal women to play without having to manage childcare. If team sport leagues lack the capacity to provide services, public policy can supplement this need through financial aid programs for postnatal women to receive childcare help while engaging in physically active leisure. Further, some postnatal women in the study felt guilty leaving their child with their partners or external caregivers. Leisure and sport research

should expand on the gendered stigmas related to using childcare as support to access physically active leisure.

A second suggested practical implication relates to the general social pressures postnatal women face pertaining to parenting and leisure. Almost all participants expressed feelings of guilt and selfishness when making time for themselves to engage in team sport. Leisure service providers may consider encouraging the participation of postnatal women by conducting a needs assessment to better understand and accommodate them. Furthermore, I encourage community team sport league managers, governmental bodies, and health care organizations to support postnatal physically active leisure participation through marketing initiatives that break stigmas and show that they can take time for themselves.

Personal Reflection: A Politics of Hope

In mirroring how this thesis was opened, I close this study with a personal reflection. This concluding section reflects on how these six women changed my perspectives on motherhood and sport, on how my positionality shaped the findings and helped me grow as a researcher, and a description of my politics of hope for the future of postnatal team sport participation.

I would like to begin this section with an enormous thank you to the six generous women who graciously gave over three hours of time during the early months of COVID-19 to make this project a reality. Their openness, honesty, and enthusiasm were humbling. During our three months of correspondence, I became quite close with many of the participants. Speaking with them over three interviews brought out their passion for sport, their children, and desire to resist the gendered expectations of motherhood. As a competitive athlete, I was excited to hear about their drive to continue playing a team sport after giving birth. The first personal reflection of my

thesis revealed my insecurities about interrupting my team sport participation to have children. These women showed me that, despite the ever-present narrative of intensive mothering, they were able to resist it and make time for themselves and the sport they are passionate about. They all helped me realize that having a child did not change their love for their sport – in fact, it may have deepened it.

Our conversations also showed me that motherhood is still something to look forward to. I feared motherhood when I began this study. Spending countless hours researching how childbirth and having young children impacted women's leisure time and physical activity participation made me afraid of motherhood. I believed that once I had a child, I would constantly feel incredible amounts of pressure and guilt from intensive mothering ideals. It was an uncomfortable feeling, because, as mentioned earlier, I was excited to become a mother for at least twenty-five years of my life. Listening to the vastly different experiences of these women revealed that while feelings of guilt are probably inevitable, they are not constant. Each of these women experienced mothering differently; yet it did not stop them from participating in their favorite sport. The help of strong support systems, communities of friends and teammates, and sheer willpower to continue playing did not hold back their physically active leisure participation. I understand that there will be a lot of negotiations, tensions, and transitions that will occur, but motherhood is less intimidating now that I have heard the success stories that, in part, define these women's lives.

Getting to know these six women narratives further revealed to me that resistance to gendered expectations is a non-linear and subjective process. Going into this project, I felt pressure to constantly and actively push against gender roles, societal expectations, and oppression. My work in gender and sexual violence education constantly surrounds me with

conversations and examples of intense activism, which often pressures me to feel as if my lack of overt activism is doing more damage than good. I anticipated this feeling to spill into my experience as a mother athlete. Acts of overt resistance would become a necessary burden to be able to continue playing the sport I love while fighting against oppression. These women reminded me that the mere presence of women in sport is an act of resistance. Being a woman and mother who plays a team sport will always have its struggles. There will be moments of pain, guilt, and doubt, but resistance and empowerment will also be present. Our conversations helped me realize that I do not need to feel a constant pressure to actively fight and push against oppression, because it is inherent in the activities I love to do.

With regard to my personal influence on the findings, my understanding and interpretation of these women's stories changed as I got to know them. As I just demonstrated, I began this research project with anxieties about motherhood and being an athlete. Therefore, it was extremely difficult to analyse their first set of interviews with a non-judgemental lens. It was difficult to avoid judging participants for their decisions as mothers, such as prioritizing their child's needs before their own, not asking their partners for more support, or having a child in the first place. Upon reflection, I realized that during my initial phase of analysis, I was putting other women down for decisions that were ultimately tied to societal gendered expectations. I was judging mothers for their parenting decisions even before becoming a mother myself. I became aware that rather than criticizing women for the decisions they made, I should be praising them for continuing to play sport and resist in their own ways. After this realization, I went back and re-read my initial analysis of the first interviews, changing some of the observations I had made.

I then began to develop close relationships with participants during our second and third interviews. I began to relate to them more as women and athletes once I stopped thinking of them as *mothers* who are also women and athletes. We exchanged many stories about our respective sports. We spoke about our partners and their involvement in our lives. I expressed to some participants my fears of becoming a mother, and they shared stories with me about struggles and triumphs during their return to team sport. After our conversations, I could see myself even adopting some parenting strategies and tips they recommended to me. I was grateful for how close we became. However, I became concerned that our relationship also began to affect my critical interpretation of what we spoke about. The more I related to them, the more difficult it was to critically analyse their interviews. I found it difficult to apply a critical lens to a conversation that felt so personal. Thankfully, my supervisor helped me focus as a “critical friend” during our bi-weekly conversations. Our conversations reminded me that I am not being critical of these women’s lives and decisions, I am criticizing the oppressive systems they live and operate in. I felt that I had grown as a person and a researcher by the end of the data collection and analysis process. I learnt how to juggle building meaningful rapport and relationships with participants, while not feeling guilty about applying a critical lens to our conversations.

Finally, working with these six women helped me shape a new politics of hope. Denzin (2000) described a politics of hope as a critique of how things are and a vision for how things could be. Parry (2014) applies this concept to feminist leisure research by expanding its definition to include “envisioning and creating a society that is outside the bounds of the patriarchy” (p. 350). Questioning society’s gendered expectations and limitations in sport and leisure by visualizing an ideal future therefore becomes a form of enacting social justice and emancipating women from the bounds of gendered expectations (Parry, 2014).

Before beginning this research project, my vision for the future focused primarily on the eradication of sexism in sport as a whole. It strove for equal pay for female professional athletes, inclusive spaces for women in recreational sport settings, programming and free childcare for postnatal women at community centres, and the abolition of gender roles. After meeting these six incredible women, I would like to add more components to my politics of hope of postnatal women's sport. I envision an equitable future for postnatal team sport participation that includes government policies subsidizing postnatal childcare for leisure participation, allowing women to rely less on social relationships for childcare support. It makes space for postnatal women to care for their children and bodies by destigmatizing public breast feeding and pumping. An equitable future for postnatal women's team sport includes less judgement from friends and teammates, and more collective care and support for all participants to be able to play at their best. An equitable future values women's community team sport participation as much, or more, than professional athletes' participation. It understands that those operating at the community level have less resources, and therefore deserve more support. Lastly, an equitable future is intersectional. It considers the specific needs of postnatal women from culturally diverse communities, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, disabled women, women from low-income families, and other marginalized populations. In doing so, I believe that governmental policies should heavily support their participation and postnatal return to team sport. This way, all postnatal women have equitable access and opportunities to engaging in team sport.

In sum, this project has given me the opportunity to not only critically examine participants' lives, but my own life as well. It challenged me to question my own beliefs and attitudes surrounding motherhood, sport, and sexism. As a result, I have grown as an athlete, activist, researcher, and woman. It has shown me that the fight against sexism is far from over,

and it has given me strength to continue resisting for myself, these women, and the future of sport and leisure.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Poster



Participants Needed!

For research on women, motherhood and sport

We are looking for **women who currently play or used to play a team sport, with at least one child under one year old**, to volunteer for a study to understand postnatal women's meanings and experiences of community team sport.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Talia Ritondo, Master's Student
Department of Recreation and Leisure
Brock University
Email: tr18ej@brocku.ca



Appendix B: Letter of Invitation

Letter of Invitation

November 29, 2019

Title of Study: A Critical Examination of Postnatal Women's Participation in Community Team Sport

Student Principal Investigator: Talia Ritondo, Master's Candidate, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Dawn Trussell, Associate Professor, Department of Sport Management, Brock University

I, Talia Ritondo, Master's Student, from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled A Critical Examination of Postnatal Women's Participation in Community Team Sport.

The purpose of this research project is to understand the meanings and experiences of the physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, it will critically examine how the gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child. Should you choose to participate, you will be invited to participate in three separate one-on-one interviews with the student principle investigator (Talia Ritondo). Each interview is estimated to last **1 hour** and will be scheduled one to two weeks apart from each other. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The interviews will take place at a time, date, and location of your choice. .

Participation will take approximately **3 hours** total of your time.

Women's physically active leisure participation decreases significantly when they become mothers, and continue to increase with the subsequent birth of each child. Therefore, understanding what impacts their physically active leisure participation is critical to helping women return to leisure after giving birth. By examining postnatal women's community team sport, strategies can be recommended to policy makers and leisure service providers on how to implement inclusive programming that ensures women's leisure participation.

This research project is federally funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) scholarship, and the Ontario Graduate Studies Scholarship.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Talia Ritondo, M.A. student
Department of Recreation and Leisure
Brock University
tr18ej@brocku.ca

Dr. Dawn Trussell, Associate Professor
Department of Sport Management
Brock University
905-688-5550 ext. 4580; dtrussell@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board
[insert ethics file number].

Appendix C: Letter of Consent

Informed Consent- Participant

November 29, 2019

Project Title: A Critical Examination of Postnatal Women's Participation in Community Team Sport

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Dawn Trussell, Associate Professor

Department of Sport Management

Brock University

(905) 688-5550 Ext. 4580; dtrussell@brocku.ca

Student Principal Investigator (SPI):

Talia Ritondo, Master's Student

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

Brock University

tr18ej@brocku.ca

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings and experiences of the physically active leisure of postnatal women. Specifically, it will critically examine how the gendered expectations of motherhood impact their participation in community team sport after the birth of a child.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in three separate one-on-one interviews with the student principle investigator (Talia Ritondo). Each interview is estimated to last **1 hour** and will be scheduled two weeks apart from each other in accordance with your availability. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The interviews will take place at a time, date, and location of your choice.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Women's physically active leisure participation decreases significantly when they become mothers, and continue to increase with the subsequent birth of each child. Therefore, understanding what impacts their physically active leisure participation is critical to helping women return to leisure after giving birth. By examining postnatal women's community team sport, strategies can be recommended to policy makers and leisure service providers on how to implement inclusive programming that ensures women's leisure participation.

There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.

While conducting the study and data collection, pseudonyms will be assigned. Upon collection of the data and during analysis (i.e., interview transcripts), the identifying data will be removed, and the pseudonyms assigned will be used. Your signed consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet in the student principle investigator's office. For any release of the findings (i.e., conference presentations, reports, scholarly publications), all assigned pseudonyms will be used, instead of the original names/any identifying information. Any data files with identifying information will be password protected and only accessible by the student principle investigator and the faculty supervisor.

All stored data (i.e. interview transcripts, data analysis files) will be accessible by the student principle investigator and the faculty supervisor. The data will be stored on a password-protected cloud server for only research team members to access. Data files with identifying information will be stored in a password-protected cloud and only accessible by the members of the research team. The data with non-identifying information will be stored in a password-protected cloud server. Identifying data will be destroyed at the completion of the study. Un-identifying data such as interview transcripts with pseudonyms will be kept five years prior to the study.

Access to this data will be restricted to the student principle investigator and the faculty supervisor.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Talia Ritondo or Dr. Dawn Trussell using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University [19-228 - TRUSSELL]. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

This study is federally funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) scholarship, and the Ontario Graduate Studies scholarship.

Appendix D: Interview 1 Guide- Motherhood, Physically Active Leisure, Team Sport

The intention of this interview is to build rapport with participants, and to understand the presence of motherhood and physically active leisure in their lives. The topics will focus on participants' transition to motherhood, their physically active leisure before pregnancy, during pregnancy, and now, and their team sport involvement, and what it means to them. Participants will be asked to give examples throughout the interview to illustrate and elaborate on their stories.

Topics:

1. Tell me what life is like as a mother before the pandemic announcement.
 - Probes: Daily routine? Do you work as well? Housework? Family? Social life?
 - Follow up: Tell me what life is like as a mother before since pandemic announcement.
2. Describe how you prepared for the birth of your child.
 - Probes: Cutting down/increasing leisure time? Work? Physical preparation? Reading about motherhood? Technology use? Advice from friends or family?
3. What was your physically active leisure like before you became a mother?
 - Probes: What activities did you do? How often? Why did you first join them? How did you access them? Was your social life incorporated with them?
 - Probe if they have other children: What was your leisure like before the birth of your most recent child?
4. What was your physically active leisure like during pregnancy?
 - Probes: How did it change from your previous physically active leisure? What activities did you remove or start? Were there challenges you expected or did not expect?
5. Tell me what your physically active leisure was like after the birth of your child up until the pandemic announcement.
 - Probes: What activities did you do? Describe how you joined them after giving birth? How did you first become interested in this type of physically active leisure? How did you access your physically active leisure? What supports did you rely on to engage in physically active leisure? How did it feel to balance your physically active leisure with motherhood?
6. Tell me what you physically active leisure is like during the pandemic.
 - Probes: What activities do you do? How did you first become interested in this type of physically active leisure? What supports do you rely on to engage in physically active leisure? How does it feel to balance your physically active leisure with motherhood?
7. Paint me a picture of a typical day when you went out to play your sport.
 - Probes: Who was involved? Where did you go? What preparation did you do? How did you get there and back?
8. Describe how physically active leisure and your social life are connected.
 - Probes: Does it help or hinder your social life? Have you gained any friendships from it?
9. What did it feel like to be a member of a team before the baby came along?

- Probes: What elements of being part of a team do you most enjoy? What elements do you least enjoy? Tell me about your team's reaction when you told them you were pregnant.

If participant played a team sport until the pandemic

10. Tell me what role team sports played in your life after the birth of your child up until the pandemic?

- Probes: What unique challenges has the birth of the baby created? Why do you continue to play? What meaning/benefits does it have for you?
- Follow up: Do you miss playing your team sport now that there is a pandemic? Why?
 - i. Probe: Have you found a replacement for it?

11. How did motherhood affect your team sport experience overall? And, how did team sport influence your experience as a mother?

If participant stopped playing a team sport before or once child was born

10. What propelled your decision to stop playing a team sport?

- Probes: What elements of motherhood contributed to this decision? What elements outside of motherhood contributed to this decision? If you did not have a child or children, would you still be playing? Why?

11. If you wanted to return to team sport, what would help you join and continue to participate?

- Probes: What support would you need from your partner, friends, or family? In an ideal world, how would you split up your time between childcare and participation? Can you think of a league/team format that would help accommodate your needs?

Interview 2 Guide- Picture or Artifact Discussion

The intention of this interview is to continue to build rapport with participants, and to explore the meaning of the photo or artifact they bring in. The focus of this interview's topics is to reflect on the previous interview and the participant's physically active leisure since then, and to discuss the meaning behind the picture or artifact the participant brought. Participants will be asked to give examples throughout the interview to illustrate and elaborate on their stories.

Topics:

1. Tell me what you thought after our last interview.
 - Probes: Do you have any questions? Was it what you expected? Would you like to add something that you thought about afterwards?
2. What has your physically active leisure been like since we first spoke?
 - Probes: Has it been the same? Are there differences? Have you noticed anything new about it?

For Pictures:

3. Tell me about this photo.
 - Probes: What is happening in the picture? Who is in the picture? Where was it taken? When was it taken? What happened before the picture was taken? What happened after the picture was taken? Did you share it on social media?
4. What inspired you to bring in this picture today?
5. What does this picture mean to you?
 - Probe: What is its' importance? What was your role in this picture? What was your role on the team you played for?
6. How does this picture reflect your experiences as a participant in team sport?
7. How does this picture reflect your experiences as a mother?
8. How does this picture make you feel when you see it?
 - Probes: Do you feel happy, sad, nostalgic, guilty?
9. What memories does this picture bring back when you look at it?
 - Probes: Memories of people, physically active leisure, your past self, your children, your teammates, your partner.

For Artifacts:

3. What's your item's story?
 - Probes: Where does it come from? Who gave it to you/did you get it yourself? What purpose does it serve? Do you still use it? Did you share it on social media?
4. What inspired you to bring in this item today?
5. What does this item mean to you?
 - Probe: What is its' importance?
6. How does this item connect your life to team sport?
7. How does this item connect your life to motherhood?
8. How does this item make you feel when you see it/touch it/smell it?
 - Probes: Do you feel happy, sad, nostalgic, guilty?
9. What memories does this item bring back when you look at it?

- Probes: Memories of people, physically active leisure, your past self, your children, your teammates, your partner.

Interview 3 Guide- Critical Examination of Motherhood and Team Sport

The intention of this interview is to critically examine participant's lives in relation to motherhood and team sport. The interview's topics focus on unpacking their role as mothers within the family, how gendered expectations of motherhood impact their roles as mothers, and their physically active leisure participation. The topics also seek to uncover themes of reproduction, negotiation, resistance and empowerment during participant's team sport participation. Participants will be asked to give examples throughout the interview to illustrate and elaborate on their stories.

Topics:

1. Tell me what you thought after our last interview.
 - Probes: Do you have any questions? Was it what you expected? Would you like to add something that you thought about afterwards?
2. What has your physically active leisure been like since we first spoke?
 - Probes: Has it been the same? Are there differences? Have you noticed anything new about it?
3. Tell me about your relationship with your partner (if any) and its' effect on your physically active leisure after the birth of your child **until** the pandemic.
 - Probes: Does it enhance or hinder your leisure participation? What is their leisure like compared to yours? How has their leisure changed since the birth of your child? How do traditional gender roles affect your relationship and family dynamic?
4. Tell me about your relationship with your partner (if any) and its' effect on your physically active leisure **during** the pandemic.
 - Probes: Does it enhance or hinder your physically active leisure participation? What is their physically active leisure like compared to yours? How has their leisure changed since the birth of your child? How do traditional gender roles affect your relationship and family dynamic?
 - Follow up: Have you ever played a team sport with your partner?
 - If yes: Tell me what that experiences was like.
 - If no: What do you think it would be like to play on the same team as them?
 - Probes: Did they ever come out to watch you play? Do they still come out to watch you with kids? Have you noticed a change since you have given birth?
5. What pressures do you feel as a mother of a child under one?
 - Probes: Where do you think these pressures come from? Are there people who put these pressures upon you?
 -

If participant played a team sport until the pandemic

6. How did playing a team sport after the birth of your child until the pandemic affect the pressures you feel as a mother?
 - Probes: How did team sport alleviate these pressures? How did it enhance these pressures? Are there other team who are members mothers as well? Do you feel your teammates support your sport participation as a mother? What do you often talk to them about?

7. Tell me about how you have negotiated elements of motherhood in order to participate in community team sport.
 - Probes: Did you expect to have to negotiate these elements at all? Is motherhood what you expected it to be?
8. How did engaging in team sport help you resist the pressures motherhood brings?
 - Probes: What does pushing back against these pressures feel like? Is it difficult or easy to do? Do your team members resist pressures that motherhood or womanhood brings? Do other team members help you engage in resistance?
9. Describe a time when you felt empowered as an athlete and mother while you were playing a team sport.
 - Probes: How did that event make you feel? Have you felt like that again? What does empowerment mean to you?

If participant stopped playing a team sport before or once child was born

5. Tell me how you think the pressures motherhood places on you are connected to your present physically active leisure participation.
 - Probes: Give me an example of what pressures you feel that stop you from playing a team sport? How did childbirth inhibit your return to team sport? What aspects of being a mom altered how engage in leisure?
6. Describe how you have negotiated elements of motherhood in order to participate in physically active leisure.
 - Probes: Did you expect to have to negotiate these elements at all? What are some pressures of motherhood that you have been unable to negotiate or shift in order to return to team sport? Did you expect these elements to inhibit your team sport participation? Is mother what you expected it to be?
7. What are some pressures of motherhood that your physically active leisure helps you resist?
 - Probes: Do you think you would be able to resist them differently if you still played a team sport? Would there be others to resist if you played a team sport? What does pushing back against these pressures feel like? Do you know other mothers who resist the pressures of motherhood through leisure/team sport participation? Do they help you engage in resistance?
8. Describe a time when physically active leisure has helped you feel empowered?
 - Probes: How did that event make you feel? How might you think those feelings of empowerment would be different if you still played a community team sport? What does empowerment mean to you?

Final general questions

10. In an ideal world, what would physically active leisure look like for postnatal women?
11. What advice would you give to recreation programmers who organize team sport leagues so they could help you engage in team sport the way you want to?
12. What advice would you give for pregnant women who want to play team sport after childbirth?