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Team mums: team sport experiences of athletic mothers

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3 Team Mums: Team sport experiences of athletic mothers

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Abstract

Maintaining involvement in sport and exercise activities is a challenge for mothers with young children. This study therefore qualitatively explores the experiences of 7 mothers who have managed to remain physically active in team sports exploring how the team environment might meet their psychological needs. We analyse the results through Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed to reveal the following themes: perceived benefits of sport, perceived benefits of being part of a team, needing time out from being a mother, social support and empowerment and self-determination. Feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness were interwoven to these themes thus demonstrating the applicability of SDT to this domain.

1 **Team Mums: Team sport experiences of athletic mothers**

2 Although research concerning sport's ability to promote physical and mental
3 health are mixed (Anderson, 2010; Deem & Gilroy, 1998; Eyley et al. 1997), sport has
4 been viewed as important for the psychological and social well-being of women in
5 today's world (Moustaka, Vlachopoulos, Kabitsis & Theodorakis, 2012; Cramp & Bray,
6 2007) with research demonstrating it to have emancipatory, empowering effects on
7 women's concepts of self (Allred, 2003; 2002; Roster, 2007) and mental health (Craike,
8 Coleman & Macmahon, 2010). However, adult women's choice of leisure /sporting
9 activity is oftentimes constrained by domestic responsibilities (Bond & Batey, 2005).
10 Hays (1998), suggests that working women not only retain responsibility of income, but
11 that they work a 'second-shift' (Hochschild & Machung, 2003) in which they retain more
12 than half the domestic responsibilities as well. Such an imbalance in heterosexual
13 domesticity indicates that some women might avoid playing team sports due to the rigid
14 time commitments involved, as compared to individual sporting/exercise pursuits which
15 offer greater flexibility.

16 Given that some research has identified additional positives associated with
17 playing team sports and being part of a social group such as maintaining a positive self
18 and social identity (Wann, 2006), it is unfortunate that some women may feel unable to
19 pursue involvement in activities that might meet different psychological needs to
20 individual ones. This feeling is further endorsed in research by Brown, Brown, Miller,
21 and Hansen (2001), which identified that 62% of women who were mothers would
22 actually prefer to exercise with friends due to the social experience it provided. This lends
23 support to Spink's (1995) earlier work which suggested that females also appear to have a
24 strong need for belonging; a need to feel connected to others within the sporting
25 environment.

1

2 A lack of leisure time and compromised leisure choice is supported by Australian
3 research detailing that women have less leisure time than men at *all* stages in life
4 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This report suggests this is exacerbated through
5 motherhood and the associated adoption of the ‘ethic of care’ (Tavares & Plotnikoff,
6 2008). Mothers are often left with little time for leisure of any type and typically forgo
7 such opportunities for self-improvement by deferring to other family members needs
8 above their own (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey,
9 2008). Unsurprisingly then women with young children are one of the population groups
10 least likely to be physically active (Brown & Trost, 2003; Marcus, Pinto, Simkin,
11 Audrain, & Taylor, 1994; Verhoef & Love, 1992). In an attempt to explain such trends,
12 Scott (2001) identified that many mothers seem to feel desperately pressed for time. They
13 often give up their own leisure and sleep to meet the demands of both employment and
14 family, thus experiencing overload and/or inter-role conflict (Shamir & Ruskin, 1983).

15 In our research with team sport mothers, we focus on the notion of sport as a
16 psychologically empowering force; but one that also increases inter-role conflict. Blinde,
17 Taub, and Han (1993) highlighted that sport participation can empower women at a
18 personal level. This, they argue, facilitates women to develop a positive, competent self;
19 as well as empowering them to gain control over their lives. Parsons and Betz (2001) add
20 to this discussion three empowering qualities that women have traditionally lacked which
21 they maintain can be rectified through sporting involvement: *bodily competence*,
22 *perceptions of a competent self*, and a *proactive approach to life*. Evidencing this,
23 Lindgren, Patriksson, and Fridlund (2002) found that female athletes felt empowered
24 through partaking in a self-strengthening programme. This, they suggested, was due to an
25 increase in feelings of self-confidence. Nonetheless, however desirable this idea of sport

1 as a route to empowerment is, it may not be accessible for all women. Research involving
2 mothers has demonstrated that choice of physically activity is determined by the ethic of
3 care (Brown *et al*, 2001; Tavares & Plotnikoff, 2008). Bond and Batey (2005), identified
4 that mothers specifically chose running above other activities they had previously
5 enjoyed (including team sports), because of the flexible nature of the activity. In short, it
6 could be ‘fitted in’ with their roles as wives and mothers. Thus, mothers who continue to
7 play team sports are a unique group to study. This demographic of women poses
8 interesting questions about how they manage both the ethic of care they are expected to
9 provide their families and their personal desire for team sport competition. Accordingly,
10 in this research we use self-determination theory to explore, understand and interpret the
11 sport experiences of mothers.

12

13 *Self-determination theory*

14 Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002) is a macro-
15 level theory of motivation which contends that the degree to which individuals feel self-
16 determining in their actions and behaviours is dependent upon the degree to which the
17 environment meets their needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci,
18 2000). *Competence* refers to feeling effective within the social environment, and is
19 characterised by a sense of ability or of being proficient; *Autonomy* is characterised by an
20 internal locus of causality and refers to engaging in activities of one’s own choosing; and
21 *Relatedness* refers to feeling connected to others and having a sense of belonging (Deci &
22 Ryan, 2002). Research integrating SDT consistently demonstrates that if the environment
23 supports these three basic needs a range of psychological benefits occur (Ryan & Deci,
24 2000). However, if the environment is maladaptive, and attainment of these needs is
25 thwarted, ill-being prevails.

1 This paper contends that the psychological need fulfilment that mother's gain
2 from maintained involvement in team sports may be related to how the team sport
3 environment is perceived to nurture the satisfaction of these psychological needs.
4 However, researchers have yet to examine mother's experiences of playing team sports.
5 Given that very few mothers return to sport post children (Tavares & Plotnikoff, 2008;
6 Brown, Lee, Mishra, & Bauman, 2000) and even fewer choose team sports, eliciting their
7 understanding of those choices, the benefits they gain from these environments and their
8 motivations to adhere to such activities is of significance. Such information can help
9 researchers to identify the potential barriers women face in pursuing team sport activities
10 and disseminate advice to practitioners regarding how they can maximize participation by
11 reducing the challenges mother's face. It may also help providers by furnishing them with
12 knowledge about the additional psychological needs of mothers in team sport
13 environments.

14 **Method**

15 *Participants*

16 Seven mothers who played team sports (3 netball, 2 basketball, and 2 hockey)
17 were purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) and invited to participate in an interview.
18 Participants were approached through research contacts at local sports clubs and had
19 varying employment status (full-time=3, part-time=1, housewife/ mother=3), age
20 (mean=37.43, SD=4.65, range=14), and ability (local league up to national league). All
21 participants had between 1 and 4 children (mean=2.57, SD=1.27) of various ages
22 (mean=6.83, SD=4.08, range=11) and all but one were in a relationship. Pseudonyms are
23 used throughout to uphold anonymity.

24 *Measures and procedures*

1 Approval of the study was granted by the University Ethics Committee. All
2 participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form prior to the start
3 of the interview process detailing the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at
4 any time without being disadvantaged. The study used semi-structured interviews which
5 were conducted individually and face-to-face in a setting chosen by the participants in an
6 attempt to ensure they felt comfortable and relaxed in their surroundings. All interviews
7 were recorded and conducted in person by the second author. Each interview lasted
8 between 40-75 minutes.

9 To standardize the interview process an interview guide was constructed based
10 on existing research and on the second author's experiences of being an athletic team
11 mother. A guide was considered necessary to gain some uniformity but discussion of
12 areas outside the interview guide was not discouraged. The topics were broad and open-
13 ended and included sporting history, current sporting involvement, motivations for
14 playing team sports, the impact of motherhood on sport and social support.

15 ***Data analysis***

16 Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read and re-read as the second
17 author assumed the posture of indwelling (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This process
18 involves immersing oneself in the data in an attempt to understand the participants from
19 an empathetic rather than a sympathetic point of view. Given the flexible nature of the
20 interview guide some unforeseen themes emerged, and since relationships between
21 themes were also deemed important to explore, a flexible, inductive approach to data
22 analysis incorporating the constant comparative method was utilized (Glaser & Strauss,
23 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stages of data analysis then included using an initial
24 discovery sheet of recurring words, concepts and ideas that emerged from the data;
25 creating analytical memos; and the establishment of provisional coding categories and

1 higher order themes (see Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Transcripts were then re-
2 examined to establish whether other quotes fitted within the higher order theme (as sub-
3 themes) or whether a new category needed to be created. Once no new categories
4 emerged from the data it was assumed that analysis was complete. Explorations of
5 similarities and differences about the experiences of being an athletic team mother were
6 also sought across interviews.

7 A form of member checking was built into the data analysis whereby participants
8 were asked to read the transcripts of their interviews and to verify or contest their
9 accuracy prior to analysis beginning (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Additionally in order to
10 examine for research bias, the second author's interpretation of the data and thematic
11 analysis was reviewed, discussed and critiqued by the first author in a form of peer
12 debriefing (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Sparkes, 1998).

13 **Results**

14 Discussions with these mothers revealed the mechanisms by which mothers
15 judged sport participation as important. Analysis of our codes shows that there are five
16 significant themes which highlighted their experiences of being team mums: 1) perceived
17 benefits of sport; 2) perceived benefits of being part of a team; 3) needing time out from
18 being a mother; 4) social support; and 5) empowerment and self-determination.

19 ***Perceived benefits of sport***

20 The importance of participating in sport appeared to contribute to feelings of
21 increased physical and psychological well-being for those we interviewed. As Sophie
22 illustrated; "You come in feeling totally different...And also the fact that you've done
23 something, that's got your heart rate pumping. You know, psychologically, you feel a lot
24 healthier, don't you."

1 For Holly and others (n = 5) the antecedent to those feelings of psychological
2 well-being emanated from having time out of the house and away from their role as
3 mothers.

4 I think just being able to get away from it all does me the world of good mentally. Yeah...
5 mentally having a break, switching off, because I do switch off from all the jobs and
6 responsibilities, and that's a massive advantage.

7 Similarly Phoebe, whose child was very ill when she was born, indicated that returning to
8 netball allowed her the 'mental room' to temporarily escape having to think about
9 hospitals, babies and medicine. Whilst Laura simply stated that it allowed her to do
10 something that was not 'child involved.'

11 The cathartic benefits alluded to above are expressed more explicitly by Laura
12 who said that; "...there have been times in my life when going and hitting a hockey ball,
13 very hard was very important to me! It releases a lot of stress! ...You do go out there and
14 get a lot of aggression out." Sophie echoes these comments and referred to the release of
15 emotion and feeling physically and mentally 'refreshed.' Given that exercise has
16 repeatedly been linked to reductions in stress and anxiety (e.g. Craike et al. 2010; Taylor,
17 2000), with lifelong physical activity being identified as a determinant of well-being and
18 mental health for women (e.g., Brehm & Iannotta, 1998; Deem & Gilroy, 1998), it would
19 seem important that these mothers continue to exercise autonomy in creating space and
20 time to pursue their sporting endeavours in order to keep themselves psychologically
21 equipped for the demands of motherhood.

22 Beyond the accomplishment of psychological well-being through temporarily
23 escaping care responsibilities four of our participants indicated that playing sport had
24 been a catalyst for more wholesale changes to their perceptions of self. Rachel explained
25 that:

1 ... It's made me confident again, outside bringing up children. I've never worked. I did train to be
2 a teacher but never worked, and you can feel that you've lost touch a bit if you're a Mum that
3 doesn't work. You can feel that you've lost touch a bit with a section of the outside world.

4 Holly said, "In general, netball makes me, kind of more rounded" and Rachel indicated
5 that:

6 I've really enjoyed getting to know people that haven't had kids, or who are never going to have
7 them. Just to be able to understand their world a bit. It's sort of broadening me. Which I find is
8 really useful, and I think it's going to be really useful for my kids because I'm not so cocooned.

9 Thus, team sport, for these mothers seems to provide an environment in which their
10 psychological needs are being met. The perceptions of competence some women gained
11 within the sport environment in terms of feeling more 'rounded' and 'confident' seems to
12 extend to other environments; thus empowering them to reap the benefits of their choice
13 to play sport in other aspects of their lives and supports previous research (Lindgren et al.
14 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

15 Additionally, the lack of relatedness some of the women claimed to feel as a result
16 of becoming mothers was also reclaimed through playing sport. This finding is
17 consistent with the work of Roster (2007), who would suggest that these women are
18 engaged in a process of reconstructing their self-identity through their engagement in
19 sport and are therefore becoming empowered. These women's experiences also resonate
20 with Blinde et al.'s (1993) work which demonstrated that involvement in sport can
21 facilitate the development of a more competent self and contribute to enhanced self-
22 actualisation.

23 *Perceived benefits of being part of a team*

24 All mothers in this study agreed that the social aspects of belonging to a team
25 were valuable to them. Six of the mothers spoke about the importance and enjoyment of
26 feeling part of a 'community' or a 'family' when spending time with their team mates.

1 Previous research (Brown et al., 2001; Spink, 2005), has indicated that mothers prefer to
2 exercise with friends, due to the social experience it provides. Findings from this
3 investigation support this, indicating that the mother's valued the sense of feeling
4 connected with their social environment. This provides support for the concept of
5 relatedness within SDT and lends credence to Spink's (1995) claim that females appear to
6 have a strong need for belonging and to feel connected to others within the sporting
7 environment. Catalina who had only recently returned to sport after childbirth explained:

8 It's really starting to feel kind of family-ish and it's starting to feel like these are my buddies, and
9 when I get there, there's one girl who always comes and gives me a great big cuddle when I get
10 there and it's just absolutely brilliant. And it's a really nice kind of family feeling and I always
11 really want to be there.

12 Some women also gained this feeling of relatedness through the pursuit of a common
13 team goal whereby as Laura explained, "everybody's trying to do their best for each
14 other."

15 The team environment also gave the women the opportunity to socialize and
16 create new friendships. Holly revealed that; "tomorrow night we've got a social, so
17 we're all going to go round to Kate's house to have a get together, which is nice
18 because you've made friends as well as playing your sport that you enjoy." In fact,
19 two of the participants chose to return to a team sport over an individual sport for this
20 very reason, as Laura explains:

21 I suppose I could have picked any of them to go back to, but the reason it was the hockey is
22 because it's more social. You basically get more out of it, more belonging to a community I
23 suppose and that sort of thing. There are lots of friends that I have, that I wouldn't have if I didn't
24 play hockey. That's the only way that I would ever have met them. It's very important to feel part
25 of a community.

26 Another important benefit of being part of a team sport related to the feedback

1 these mothers received. For example Holly said:

2 Being at home with Henry on your own during the day, there isn't generally anyone to say, 'oh
3 you've done that really well', or you know, 'look at that, that looks good' Whereas at netball, if
4 you have a good shooting session they'll say, 'Oh you did that really well today' you know. And
5 that kind of makes you feel good about yourself, doesn't it, and I think that's good in a team sport.

6 Catalina similarly explained; "It's a really nice feeling to get praise and to have other
7 people being enthusiastic about what you're doing." She added that she did not
8 experience this feedback in any other aspect of her life and explained that she felt
9 'wonderful' after a match as a result. For these women the team sport environment
10 appears to be providing them with positive feedback about their competence; they feel
11 effective, able and proficient, and this supports previous research (Allred, 2002; 2003;
12 Roster, 2007). It also supports Parsons and Betz's (2001) contention that the sporting
13 environment has the potential to nurture perceptions of both bodily competence and
14 perceptions of a competent self amongst women.

15 These examples give more credence to the importance of the concepts of
16 competence and relatedness within SDT for these women and may shed more light upon
17 what motivates women and mothers to play team sports. It also has implications for
18 researchers and practitioners who might need to further consider Burton-Nelson (1991)
19 and Roper's (2001) suggestion to integrate a model of women's sport that encompasses
20 the social experience and perhaps nurtures the psychological need for relatedness.

21 *Needing time out from being a mother*

22 Despite the positive effects of playing sport and being part of a team, there is an
23 emotional difficulty in doing so. This is because the mothers tried to uphold multiple,
24 time consuming, duties in their mothering narratives. The most prevalent uses of time
25 were the responsibilities of being a wife (or partner), a mother *and* a team member. And,

1 despite locating their team sport affiliation as their third priority, they nonetheless
2 highlighted the importance of participation. This, they suggest, is because it provided
3 them the opportunity to temporarily escape family responsibilities and reclaim some ‘me-
4 time.’ Thus, these women therefore empower themselves through a process of identified
5 regulation (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004; Roster, 2007); by attending to their minority
6 identity, occasionally, they empower and recharge their master identities. For example,
7 Laura said that hockey was, “Something for me, that’s not for them. I have my own times
8 that are mine.” Holly felt that netball was important in her life because:

9 Netball, that’s my time-out. That is my only time-out. That is the only real thing that I sort of do.

10 Apart from obviously, you know, spending time with John and Henry and stuff which is lovely. But
11 that’s, that’s my ‘me-time’ really.

12 Sophie added playing sport was, “some time where I can be me as opposed to Mummy.”

13 Such accounts correspond with work on women’s leisure that highlighted this time as a
14 valued opportunity to get away from family obligations and attain a sense of space and
15 self (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Freysinger & Flannery 1992; Roster, 2007).

16 However, we suggest that exercising such autonomy whilst also trying to uphold
17 the demands of being a partner, mother and player were sometimes problematic. In
18 particular, mothers cited their husbands’ work schedules as barriers to attending training
19 sessions. Phoebe suggested, “Sometimes I can’t get to training because Dave’s (husband)
20 got a meeting so I’m often late. Sometimes I miss it altogether.” Similarly, Holly
21 explained that:

22 I can’t go basically until John (husband) gets home from work. So if he’s late, then I’m late. If he
23 can’t get home until really late then I don’t go to netball, which I think is tough sometimes when
24 you really want to go. Last week John had his Christmas work do and it was also my last training
25 session before Christmas and I really wanted to go. Luckily my Mum came over, which was good.

1 Interestingly, when the environment looked like it might be maladaptive to meeting
2 Holly's psychological needs (i.e. John was late so training might have been missed) Holly
3 deemed her team sport experience to be important enough that she sought social support
4 to help her attend training. This suggests that nurturing their athletic identities is an
5 important psychological aspect to their total well being.

6 Illness, of course, serves as an example of a maladaptive environment, preventing
7 mothers from meeting their sporting needs. Where one might expect a mother—pressed
8 for time—to view illness as having the latent benefit of providing her with more time to
9 complete parenting duties, instead it normally led to feelings of frustration and
10 resentment. As Catalina illustrates:

11 I have had to miss training a couple of times and it really gets to me. And once it was because my
12 husband was ill, and I was unable to go to training and I was really mad. I didn't try to stop that
13 feeling and I was really quite *glaring* at him, you know 'Hmmm, I'm missing *hockey* for this!'
14 (Laughs) And he didn't seem ill enough for me to miss hockey training (laughs).

15 Rosie echoed this sentiment:

16 When my daughter's not very well and I get a call on a Wednesday night before training from
17 nursery saying she's got a really high temperature I think, 'Oh no!'. Not oh no she's ill, but oh no, is
18 she going to improve so I can go to training tonight. Which is really selfish, but I get out once a
19 week to play, so that night's important to me.

20 Choosing to play sport when they could muster the time was, however,
21 complicated by the expectations of other players. The logistics of team sports (requiring a
22 certain number of players on each side) can lead other team members to place pressure on
23 their peers to attend practices and, most important, competitions. Team members without
24 children were less sensitive to the demands of the multiple roles and time demands of
25 motherhood. Sophie says:

1 They (team members without children) had very little idea. Oh you know, come out for a drink,
2 come out and do this. And you know... stay a bit longer for this. It's like well... well I really
3 ought to get back, because I said I'd be back so Dave could do his work.

4 Whilst such situations might be described as creating inter-role conflict in wanting to play
5 but not wanting to fail in their parenting or partner responsibilities (Shamir &
6 Ruskin, 1983), these situations challenge an individual's need to feel competent,
7 autonomous and related. We contend there is, in fact, a *crisis* of each of these basic
8 needs. For example, if Sophie chooses to feel more related to the team by staying for a
9 drink, she may jeopardize her relatedness with her husband and child – the crisis of
10 relatedness. Similarly, to feel effective in her team environment may mean jeopardizing
11 that feeling of effectiveness and proficiency in her home environment – the crisis of
12 competence. And whilst it may be argued that she can still engage in autonomy through
13 choosing what to do in such situations, it becomes a struggle to maintain feelings of
14 autonomy, competence and relatedness in *both* domains.

15 Nonetheless, this does not seem to stop some of the women from trying to do just
16 this. Phoebe explains, “I try to have tea early on a Tuesday (basketball training night), so
17 it's not too much of a bad day. So Dave (husband) comes back in and it's all done.” This
18 behavior would seem to indicate that this mother feels she has to exceed usual levels of
19 competence in the home environment in order to exercise the autonomy to choose to
20 spend time in another. This supports research by Tavares and Plotnikoff (2008) which
21 found that for mother's attempts to be physically active were compounded by societal
22 pressures to care for the needs of others. In line with Horton and Mack's (2000)
23 contention, it may be that mothers can activate different dimensions of the self at
24 different times. However, activating these dimensions may prevent women from

1 experiencing similar levels of autonomy and enjoyment that women without children and
2 men experience whilst playing sport. As Catalina explained:

3 If there's a match on, my husband has the kids, and that's a little bit more hectic when he's got all
4 3 of them. He's not very good and so I do worry a little bit more when I've got a hockey match.
5 So I'm trying to play and I'm wondering whether I should have left him

6 Such comments are pertinent to explore since such scenarios can provide the opportunity
7 for internal conflict to arise which has been identified as being dangerous in terms of
8 being an antecedent to dropout and can prevent involvement in sport altogether
9 (Markland & Vansteenkiste, 2007).

10 ***Social Support***

11 Tavares and Plotnikoff (2008) have shown that the ethic of care expected of
12 motherhood unfairly constrains women. Supporting this, all the women in this study were
13 the primary carers for their children; and as such appear to have bought into the ethic of
14 care. These mothers suggested that they have to compromise their own leisure time in
15 order to provide child care in light of their husband's work schedule. Because
16 motherhood served as their primary identity of importance, Holly and Rosie suggested
17 that they felt guilty when they perceived themselves to fall short of this ethic of care.
18 Holly explains; "I think it's really hard trying to organize stuff, and you want to ask other
19 people but you can feel guilty saying, 'Can you come over, cause I really want to go to
20 netball.'" And Rosie implies that missing her leisure time would not be a good enough
21 reason for her to ask her parents to baby sit when she explains:

22 In an emergency, my Mum and Dad would be here at the drop of a hat, you know. But they don't
23 baby sit regularly. My Dad works and my Mum works, um... and I don't want to ask them really
24 - not for basketball.

25 For Catalina these feelings of guilt extended to her feeling guilty for asking her husband
26 to care for their children *while* she played hockey:

1 The games were tricky because I had to put a lot of pressure on him to look after the children...
2 and especially the baby... But um... he's... kind of come to terms with it now I think and
3 hopefully the next game won't be too taxing for him. So hopefully... hopefully, the next few
4 matches, it won't be quite as intense... as it has been (laughs). Like usually when I get home, you
5 know, it's mass confusion and he is kind of up on his stress levels and stuff like that. I would
6 come back and his stress level was so high, that he would just walk straight out of the house as
7 soon as I came back saying, 'I can't deal with this.'

8 These women's narratives provide ongoing support for an old concept. Namely, it seems
9 that these women's narratives support Chodorow's (1978) notion of the 'moral mother.'
10 Chodorow, defined this as a socially constructed, highly gendered, role of acceptable
11 behaviours for women. In order to deal with guilt of breaking the conscripts of the moral
12 mother the women we interviewed felt they needed to *exceed* usual levels of competence
13 in the home to exercise their autonomy outside of it. In this way they could adhere to
14 their perceptions of a good wife and mother. Thus, Catalina appears to feel guilty for
15 placing pressure on her husband to care for their children and worries when she has a
16 hockey match because the children might be a 'handful' for him.

17 Whilst it might not be accurate to view motherhood as a constraint to autonomy
18 for these mothers since they are all participating in team sports, it might be worth
19 considering that they experience a compromised autonomy and perhaps a decreased
20 perception of competence within the home as a result of pursuing their various sports.
21 Thus, although the sporting environment might be satisfying some aspects of their
22 psychological needs (bestowing upon them feelings of competence, autonomy and
23 relatedness) this experience may often be compromised by the complex inter
24 relationships of managing multiple roles, their views of what constitutes a moral mother
25 and how far they believe the ethic of care to be their sole responsibility.

1 However, there was not a monolithic motherhood narrative in this research. For
2 three mothers the ethic of care did not appear to prevent them from exercising the
3 autonomy to pursue their sporting interests free of compromise or guilt. Sophie spoke of
4 having an ex-husband who cared for their children whilst they played sport, or a husband
5 who also played sport and therefore understood the importance of his wife also having
6 equal opportunities to pursue this. Sophie explained:

7 My first husband wasn't a basketball player, and James is.... If I want to go out three or four times
8 a week playing basketball, it's no problem. So you haven't got somebody at home going, 'Oh
9 God!' You're out again!' It always helps, I think, to have a partner who's keen on sport, then they
10 can relate to the reasons why you want to go and play. If you haven't got someone who's sporty I
11 think they can become quite resentful with you out doing that.

12 ***Empowerment and self-determination***

13 The women demonstrated evidence of empowerment and self-determination when
14 they spoke about sport providing them with the 'me time' discussed previously. Creating
15 space for this time and exercising the right to have something for themselves outside of
16 their role as mother's was important to all the women. As Laura illustrated, 'Hockey is
17 what I've chosen to do, as mine, you know' and Rosie said; 'I have taken control of my
18 own diary so I would never put anything on training or game nights.' These experiences
19 are consistent with previous research indicating that claiming leisure time leads to
20 feelings of empowerment since the women were bringing about actual change and thus
21 felt in control (Chamberlain, 1999 [online]). This was especially true for Catalina who
22 explained that since she started playing hockey:

23 ...it's brought a whole new perspective on everything ... in the house. There are some limits that I
24 have, you know, especially with my husband going to the pub and things like that. And I've never
25 been too bothered about it before, but now I have got a limit and I have a reason to have a limit.
26 Now he's put me on his priority list whereas before it was always him who had priority... but now

1 he's happy to pass the baton and I think that's due to the hockey. So things have changed in the
2 house ... I've got a new place in the home and it's very comfortable and I'm a little bit more in
3 charge than I used to be (laughs).

4 This finding supports previous research which has found that on returning to sport post-
5 children mothers have experienced an altered awareness of their position in the family
6 (Bond and Batey, 2005) and lends weight to Ryan and Deci's (2000) assertion that
7 benefits can be gained across life domains when psychological need satisfaction is met.

8 The nature of team sports also appeared to heighten the women's sense of control
9 because training and matches were played at the same time each week and could
10 therefore be planned for. As Holly explained, "on a Tuesday night or a Saturday morning
11 it's netball time. I just go. It doesn't matter if Henry (child) has just kicked off, or
12 something has happened – I leave!" The efficient time management strategies employed
13 by these women to enable them to play sport appeared to increase feelings of competence
14 which should be a catalyst for an enhanced sense of effectiveness, feeling of self-
15 determination and personal control (Fox, 2000; Lee, 2004, 2007). These findings are
16 contrary to those of Bond and Batey (2005) whose research found that women chose to
17 pursue running as a form of exercise because its flexible nature meant it could be fitted in
18 around other family members' leisure and work commitments. This may indicate that the
19 mothers in this study are prioritising their sports more and are exercising greater
20 autonomy and control. However, as previously noted three of the women would plan their
21 whole day around transferring their child to another's care a smooth one so as to
22 minimise the chances of their 'me time' being compromised.

23 So, whilst many of the women in this study are creating their own lives and
24 pursuing an identity outside of motherhood, it is unclear how far this expression of an
25 egalitarian ideology at work only represents a surface ideology (Scott, 2001). These

1 mothers do play team sports and are, in many respects, having their psychological need
2 satisfaction met, yet many still feel they have to plan their mother and wife duties quite
3 carefully in order to pursue their sporting activity. Thus, how far this represents real
4 empowerment remains debatable.

5 **Conclusions**

6 In this research investigating the relationships between team sport participation
7 and motherhood, we found SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002) helpful. Results
8 suggest that feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness underpinned a sporting
9 environment that was valued by the mothers and thus enhanced their feelings of self-
10 determination. Perceptions of competence were enhanced through their sport
11 involvement; and being a member of a sports team was particularly important because
12 these mothers gained enhanced feelings of relatedness, and a sense of belonging.

13 Feelings of self-determination appeared to be contingent upon the mother's
14 abilities to cope with managing their time out from their master identity. Whilst many of
15 the women spoke in terms that demonstrated their belief in their self-determined right to
16 play sport it might be argued that the mother's ability to feel wholly self-determined was
17 often jeopardized by the multiple identities they attempted to uphold. It proved almost
18 impossible for the mothers to feel competent, autonomous and related in both the home
19 and the sport domain simultaneously, due perhaps to their adherence to the ethic of care
20 and their perceptions of themselves as 'moral mothers'. Thus, these findings fit in with a
21 more recent body of research (Hays, 1998; Hoschfield, 2003) which indicates that
22 contemporary motherhood is fraught with cultural contradictions and an unequal
23 distribution of responsibility. Accordingly, this research contends that mothers who
24 engage in team sports often experienced a compromised autonomy. This is subtly
25 different to much of the research conducted with women (who are not mothers) in sport

1 which finds that when women play sport they demonstrate autonomy and are
2 subsequentially empowered.

3 Such results illustrate the additional complex interrelationships that need to be
4 explored when research is conducted with women who are mothers and those that are not.
5 They lend support to calls for a model of women's sport that encompasses the social
6 experience and nurtures the psychological need for relatedness. Additionally, given that
7 women with young children are one of the population groups least likely to be physically
8 active, such research should be of interest to sport and exercise practitioners who wish to
9 motivate mothers to change their sedentary lifestyles.

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11 **Word Count: 7,315**

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