Introducing postqualitative inquiry in sport and exercise psychology

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Abstract

In recent years, qualitative research has gained popularity and legitimacy in sport and exercise psychology. However, this scientific discipline has not yet paid attention to postqualitative inquiry (PQI), despite the possibilities it offers for producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently. The present article is the first attempt to rectify this lack of attention by offering a brief and partial sketch of PQI in the context of sport and exercise psychology. To start with, three of the basic propositions that enable PQI are described. These are: adopt a posthumanist view of ontology and the subject; engage with poststructuralism (necessarily) and new materialism (possibly); and think *with* concepts. Potential reasons for turning to PQI are then highlighted. Following from this, some perils and horizons for PQI are identified and discussed. The article concludes by presenting several reflections and recommendations to facilitate a progressive introduction of PQI in sport and exercise psychology.

Keywords: paradigms; ontological turn; poststructuralism; posthumanism; new materialism; theory

Introduction

Psychology generally, and sport and exercise psychology specifically, have been dominated by positivist research paradigms and associated quantitative methods. As a counterbalance, there has been a rise of interpretative paradigms such as social constructionism that have led researchers to move towards qualitative methods. Notable progress has been made over the last three decades in the amount and quality of qualitative research that is being published in the field (McGannon et al., 2019; Poucher et al., 2019). Likewise, there is a growing recognition of the merits and usefulness of qualitative research on the part of researchers who predominately are quantitative orientated. Qualitative research, in short, has flourished, and it is gradually being established in sport and exercise psychology.

Lately, however, the assumptions and practices that characterise qualitative research have been challenged from within the social sciences. For example, one of the key concerns about current qualitative research is that it has become as predictive, recognisable, and calculable as (post)positivist social science. On this, St. Pierre argued:

> Qualitative methodology was invented in the 1970s and 1980s as a critique of positivist social science, but we've structured, formalized, and normalized it so that most studies look the same. The "process" is the same: identify a research question, design a study, interview, observe, analyze data, and write it up. We can just drop a researcher down into that pre-given process and they know what to do, and we can pretty much predict what will come out. (p. 16, in Guttorm, Hohti and Paakkari, 2015)

The problems with qualitative methodology as described above is that it limits our capacities to see/do research differently and, more importantly, that it has turned an unquestionable, brute orthodoxy. As Kumm and Berbary (2018) argued, 'we have come to be too preoccupied with the "how" of research that we have blinded ourselves to methodological process that preload, preauthorize, and predetermine knowledge production' (p. 73). When this is case, there is the danger that researchers produce qualitative studies without reading theoretically widely or much theory at all. Reading theory carefully is however an ethical imperative. As St. Pierre (2011) reflected, if we do not engage with theory 'we have nothing much to think with during analysis except normalized

discourses that seldom explain the way things are' (p. 454). And yet, theory is too often secondary or merely tokenistic in current qualitative research. To paraphrase Fullagar (2017), theory has become the elephant in the methodologically oriented room.

For St. Pierre (2014, 2020), a different but related limitation of qualitative research is that this cannot accommodate poststructuralism, postmodernism, and other post∗ theories. Given that post∗ theories reject systematicity and methodology, they are simply incompatible with qualitative research. Of further concern, post∗ theories trouble the humanist assumptions that shape most qualitative research, as these assumptions preserve hierarchical divisions and structures that have unintended, harmful consequences for people and the global environment (Berbary, 2017). Feminists, for example, have argued that the first term in humanist binaries such as culture-nature, mind-body, rational-irrational, subject-object is male and privileged and the second term is female and disadvantaged (St. Pierre, 2000). Likewise, critical disability scholars have argued that humanism has normalized a narrow version of humanness which excludes disabled people and other outsiders: refugees, trans, queer and black people, for example (Goodley et al., 2020). It is in the face of such ethical problems that St. Pierre et al. (2016) highlight the necessity of rethinking the nature of being and exploring different (more ethical) modes of existence. Such an exploration requires creative forms of thinking and imagining that, according to these authors, cannot happen within the conventional structures of qualitative methodology.

It is fair to recognize that 'humanist qualitative researchers' themselves have addressed some of the abovementioned problems, especially the reduction of qualitative research to the technical execution method (e.g., Morse, 2020). However, their critical responses are deemed inadequate because they come from the same humanist ontological framework that generates the problems in the first place. The point is that something else, something new, different, and more radical needs to occupy this critical space. This 'something' has come to be known as postqualitative inquiry (PQI). Originally formulated by St. Pierre (2011), this term indicates 'an exigence, a sensibility, a desire, and an ongoing process, to work and research in a new, provocative, and relevant way' (Benozzo, 2020, p. 2). How should qualitative scholars within sport and exercise psychology respond to this seemingly new agenda? With the intention of inspiring an informed and judicious response, this paper provides a

concise overview of PQI and, as we progress, draw out its relevance for sport and exercise psychology.

Cautionary note

Reading this paper will not be enough to fully appreciate PQI. As St. Pierre, Jackson and Mazzei (2016) warned, we should not assume that reading an article or two, or even a book or two, is sufficient to grasp this intellectual movement -which is always in movement. There is always more to read. As such, our goal here is modest: to provide basic entry points for those who wish for a place to start. In this attempt, we perform some simplifications and omissions that we consider convenient to make the article reasonably graspable for sport and exercise psychology researchers – our main (but hopefully not only) audience. We encourage readers to take our introduction as partial, selective, and provisional, as opposed to categorical.

Enter postqualitative inquiry

At this initial stage of the paper, it seems logical to address the question 'what is PQI?' For St. Pierre (2019, 2020), though, this would be out of place. This question, she argued, assumes something already exists, that something *is*, is stable, and so can be identified and represented. PQI, however, is neither one thing nor an end in itself. According to St. Pierre (2020), PQI

> never exists, it never is. It must be invented, created differently each time, and one study called post qualitative will not look like another. The goal of post qualitative inquiry is not to systematically repeat a preexisting research process to produce a recognizable result but to experiment and create something new and different that might not be recognizable in existing structures of intelligibility. So I can't answer the question "what is post qualitative inquiry?" (p. 4)

This is not to say that PQI stands for anything and everything. For example, St. Pierre emphasized that PQI is *not* a research methodology. It does not rely on research designs like grounded theory and interpretive phenomenological analysis. It does not have a formalized, systematic research procedure that one can follow. There are no PQI practices, *except studying the philosophical ideas*

and propositions that enable it. In consonance with this point, our attention directs not to 'What PQI is' or 'What it means' but instead to three of the many propositions we think make possible an elementary (and partial) understanding of PQI. These are: engage with poststructuralism (necessarily) and new materialism (possibly); and think *with* concepts. Before explaining each, let us clarify two things. First, the propositions are intimately related and look at one another as if they were all mirrors: looking at one is looking at the others. This relatedness is not categorical, but we consider appropriate to establish it for this paper. Second, the content discussed in each proposition is about philosophy, and philosophy is not always as readable as perhaps is the content we are accustomed to read. Likely, as we found many times, there will be some ideas that readers might not fully understand as they encounter them for the first time. But why would we want to read what we already comprehend? We now proceed to explain each of the selected propositions that make PQI thinkable.

Adopt a posthumanist view of ontology and the subject

PQI is informed by the 'ontological turn' in the social sciences and humanities, which is a reaction to the 'linguistic/cultural' turn of the 90s (Spyrou, 2019). Plainly, this means that PQI shifts the focus of interest from language, discourse and representation to questions of ontology. Ontology concerns the premises one makes of the nature of reality and being, as well as the task of paying attention to how the elements of the world are connected. Either explicitly or implicitly, all forms of research carry particular ontological presuppositions which matter deeply.

On the one hand, most conventional qualitative research is underpinned by a humanist ontology, which separates object and subject and puts human subjects at the heart of any claims about being and reality. Here, the human subject is assumed to be stable, autonomous and disconnected from other entities (Nordstrom, 2013). He or she is

> separate from, superior to, and master of everything else in the world. The *cogito*, this exceptional human, has innate agency. All other forms of life, nonhuman, unconsciousness life, are inferior. And matter (things, objects) is inanimate, inert, passive, waiting to be acted upon; it is the object of his subject. (St. Pierre, Jackson & Mazzei, 2016, p. 102)

Of course, the notions of humanist ontology and the humanist subject are much more complex than presented here, but, most importantly for this article, we need to remember two basic points. First, that humanist ontology is dualist: it separates subjects and objects; and second, that it is anthropocentric: humanist subjects, their thinking, or their experiencing or meaning making, are the privileged starting point and centre of knowledge production. It is worth adding a third point. As Braidotti (2013) noted, the humanist subject 'is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied' (24). Outside these parameters, we find the category of the Human Other- the 'wrongness of being': the opposite of normative human ontology (Goodley et al., 2020). In short, while all people are humans, some are more valued and privileged than others.

In contrast to conventional qualitative research, PQI adopts a posthumanist (as opposed to humanist) view of ontology, from which the very notion of the human subject itself is called into question. In PQI, there is no longer a humanist subject situated above the nonhuman. Instead, there is a posthumanist subject, inextricably connected to and made through multiple others, including other people but also animals, tools, technologies, ideas, and myriad entities of diverse orders of existence. The notion of the posthuman subject is nicely encapsulated by Mol (2008) in her philosophical reflection on eating an apple:

> Take: I eat an apple. Is the agency in the I or in the apple? I eat, for sure, but without apples before long there would be no "I" left. And it is even more complicated. For how to separate us out to begin with, the apple and me? One moment this may be possible: here is the apple, there I am. But a little later (bite, chew, swallow) I have become (made out of) apple; while the apple is (a part of) me. (p. 30)

Among the multiple issues this quote allows to think about, the takeaway point is that the distinction between subjects and objects, and between the material and the social, ceases to exist. That is, we cannot longer assume that humans are separate from the other elements of which the world is made up. This does not necessarily suggest an abandonment of the category of the human. However, it definitely suggests an abandonment of the humanist assumption that knowing (human) subjects act and passive (nonhuman) objects are simply used. As Pickering (1995) put this, 'the human actors are

still there but now inextricably entangled with the non-human' (p. 26). At this point, it is important to clarify that to be entangled does not simply mean to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities. More significantly, it means to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence, wrote Barad (2007), 'is not an individual affair' (p. ix). We are entangled. We are always already overlapping with other bodies and the environment. Taylor et al. (2019) help us seeing this idea through the example of a person carrying a bag: 'The bag is a prosthesis of the body and the body is equally a prosthesis of the bag—that is, bags are a kind of superposition in which body and bag mutually extend each other'. Bags 'constitute us as a form of bagspecies: A new sort of "we." (p. 18). Later, we will see how the idea of entanglement has implications for how we think and do sport and exercise psychology. For now, it is enough to translate the image of a person carrying a bag into the world of sport, for example, by thinking of a tennis player carrying a racket, or a coach holding a coaching blackboard. Think of both the person and the implement as operating as a whole. This fragmented thought will be completed and turn more meaningful through the next proposition.

Engage with poststructuralism (necessarily) and new materialism (possibly)

PQI entails using poststructuralism to refuse humanism and to open up what seems 'natural' to other possibilities (St. Pierre, 2000). PQI can then extend and amend poststructuralism with materialist theories (Mayes, 2019). For example, PQI can connect with new materialism, which Davies (2018) describes as an 'evolutionary extension of postructural thought' (p. 113). Although some authors have treated PQI and new materialism as synonyms, these approaches are not one and the same. Moreover, they do not necessarily depend on each other. For example, PQI can connect with new empiricist, affective and other vantage points that, like new materialism, also use a philosophy of immanence (see St. Pierre, 2019; St. Pierre et al., 2016). Despite PQI not requiring an engagement with new materialism, such engagement is possible, potentially fruitful and, from our perspective, especially interesting. Through considering new materialism, we can show some important gestures of PQI and link the first and third of our suggested propositions. Let us, then, momentarily focus on this approach.

The first thing we can say about new materialism is that is different from other forms of materialism, including the historical materialism of Marxism, 20th-century material feminisms and critical realism. New materialism does though retain key benefits from social constructionist epistemologies, such as the ability to question normalized discourses or labels. At the same time, it points the finger at these epistemologies for privileging the importance of discourse and neglecting material and non-human forces. This accusation of neglect has not felt fair for some qualitative researchers. That is because they accept there is a material world surrounding us and, at times, explore, use, and theorize around material objects in their studies. However, it must be clarified that when new materialists speak of a prior 'neglect' of matter they do not mean that previous researchers did not talk about material entities but rather that they treat them as social constructions, passive bearers of meaning or as real yet mere backgrounds to human action. Let us pause here briefly and offer two examples to elucidate this.

(1) Chamberlain and Lyons (2016) reviewed qualitative studies that focused on the materiality of sport and exercise. Most of these studies treated material objects as cultural artifacts and symbols, focusing on the meanings that humans attach to them. As but an example, one study observed how football statues reveal cultural values and illuminate cultural meanings, while another one explored the use of T-shirts to impart shared meanings of what it means to be a rower.

(2) Nordstrom (2013) critically reflected on the use of material methods, more concretely the use of objects in qualitative data collection. She argued that if nonhumans (e.g., photographs) are included within a conventional qualitative study (e.g., in the form of a photo-elicitation interview), they are generally conceptualized as stable entities that yield information about human life. In other words, they are treated as secondary data sources about people or lifeless objects to elicit information from knowing subjects.

Drawing from new materialism, PQI treats material objects differently. Instead of inert, matter is viewed as 'ontologically lively' (Taylor et al., 2019), meaning that it (alongside discourse) has the capacity to constitute reality. Beyond this shared assumption about matter, one should bear in mind that there are different new materialist trajectories, some partly incompatible with each other. Strictly speaking, using new materialism as a unified rubric is inadequate. So, to avoid overgeneralizations,

we shall concentrate the attention in one new-materialist approach in particular. Given its popularity amongst postqualitative scholars (see e.g., Markula, 2019), the choice is Deleuzian materialism.[i]

According to Feely (2016), the materialism that Deleuze inspires can be characterized as relational and anti-essentialist. As such, it stands in opposition to and problematizes core philosophical arguments of critical realism, an approach of used often in sport and exercise psychology (Poucher et al., 2019). Whereas critical realist scholars define entities through their participation in a common essence (i.e., essentialism), Deleuze argued that entities do not possess essential characteristics or capacities presumed to be immutable, inherent and context independent. Rather, these emerge through the inseparable relation with other entities, be that human, non-human, animate or inanimate. Deleuzian materialism, therefore, is about horizontal relations. All entities of the world exist in the same surface and have the same ontological status. There is not an important difference between material objects, living beings, signs and affects. The conventional view of the psychological, the cultural, the biological, the technological and the emotional as separate domains of reality is abandoned. These seemingly distinct dimensions of life are seen to be mutually affecting and mangled in mobile networks of relations, which Deleuze called assemblages.[ii] However, assemblages should not be understood as fixed entities or closed systems, but rather as connections that come together and work together temporarily. There is a constant flow of relations within and between assemblages. Elements move in and out. Relations come together and break apart at different rates of speed and slowness, forming different assemblages and, thus, different realities. Nothing is ever the same, everything is continually becoming something else (i.e., there is only becoming and no being). Understandably, this idea might not feel right. After all, we can see with our own eyes that some things remain the same at all times and in all places. However, Deleuzian scholars (e.g., Feely, 2016) argue that the perception of things having fixed identities, features or capacities is a kind of 'optical illusion' produced by relatively slow rates of change and discourses of stability that have characterized most of Western philosophy and psychology.

Importantly, understanding the world as a ceaselessly process of becoming leads postqualitative researchers to investigate processes of social production, rather than social construction (Fox & Alldred, 2017). Namely, researchers are interested in the material effects of

assemblages (i.e., what assemblages do or could do in different contexts), rather than in what things and people 'are'. As such, the practice of PQI is not about systematically analyzing how human subjects construct or represent their self and identities, as is the case in much cultural sport and exercise psychology. It is not either about examining the personal, cultural, and historical meanings associated with material objects and environments. Instead, it is about creatively exploring sociomaterial becomings or the ways in which heterogeneous elements of the social-and-material world constitute each other over time.

Elsewhere, we provided an example of this paradigm shift in action (Authors 1). Drawing on Deleuzian philosophy (Markula, 2019), we explored the process of becoming en-wheeled of a man living with paraplegia called *Name*, focusing on the impact of this process on exercise participation. *Name* and his manual wheelchair were treated as the entangled participants of the research. That is, the research participant was not a speaking subject, but an open-ended assemblage. The *Name*-wheelchair assemblage was not seen and treated as a finished product, but rather as the dynamic process of making and unmaking the product (called enwheelment). We examined how the connection between *Name* and the wheelchair enabled certain actions and affinities while constrained others. Moreover, we selectively looked at the connections between the *Name*-wheelchair assemblage and broader assemblages, including the environments in which Name used to do exercise (see Authors 2). Finally, we theorized about how we could not just enhance our understandings of enwheelment but also intercede in this process, affecting and changing it in affirmative ways. It is important to stress the latter point, for it shows that PQI is not an abstract intellectual task detached from practice. It is not just abstract philosophy. Although this is not always the case, postqualitative researchers address the 'so what?' question and offer concrete recommendations to think about, question and actually change the issues of interest. This includes providing sport and exercise psychologists with useful resources to rethink and develop their tasks. Some reflections in this regard and an example in action can be found in Author (3).

Think* with *concepts

PQI takes conceptual experimentation seriously. This creative activity is key in PQI because researchers often need to name what cannot be named through familiar concepts, or the conventional use of them. The concept of interaction is a case in point. This is a popular concept in sport and exercise psychology, with studies approaching the interactions between athletes and their teammates, opponents, coaches, and parents. Although it is ontologically coherent with qualitative research, the concept of interaction is problematic in PQI, because it assumes that independent individual elements exist prior to their interaction. From this, then, PQI problematizes the conceptual or theoretical work in sport and exercise psychology that talks about interaction or applies it to research.

Rather than interaction, the term intra-action has been suggested as an alternative (Barad, 2007). Consistent with posthumanist new materialism, intra-action recognizes that distinct elements do not precede, but rather emerge through their connection. In addition, intra-action (unlike interaction) acknowledges the entanglement between matter and discourse, in line with posthuman, new materialist propositions.[iii] As Barad (2007) explained:

> *the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity*. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. (p. 152, original emphasis)

Despite that intra-action is aligned with the assumptions of PQI, introducing or applying this concept in a research design will not automatically produce PQI. It is not enough to use concepts associated with PQI; these have to be used postqualitatively. As Kumm and Berbary (2018, p. 76) carefully explained, 'we cannot call our work post-qualitative simply because we think with post∗ theories, within a humanist framework. This ignores ontological differences and simply inserts post∗ thinking into the recognizable, comfortable structure, of humanist inquiry'. In this regard, it is crucial to stress that concepts in PQI are *philosophical*, meaning that researchers do not 'apply' concepts to interpret subjective experiences, like in qualitative research, but rather use them for thinking and re-

orienting thought in ways that cannot be determined in advance (St. Pierre, 2019). In other words, concepts are not instruments that can be applied in the same way in different domains, but rather are lively companions that create orientations for thinking as we go. The practice of PQI might be then described as 'a movement of thought that invents, makes use of, and modifies conceptual tools as they are set into a relation with specific practices and problems that they themselves help to form in new ways' (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xv). Accordingly, concepts displace the centrality of methods in qualitative research. Within the principles of PQI,

> [t]he researcher using a concept would not necessarily use conventional methods of "data collection" (e.g., interviewing, observation, survey) or methods of "data analysis" (e.g., grounded theory analysis, thematic analysis, coding, statistical analysis). Instead, the concept would orient her thinking and her practices, which might or might not include conventional practices (Lenz Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 646).

At first sight, the possibility of including conventional practices in PQI might seem to contradict previous points. But what makes PQI it is not so much abandoning completely qualitative resources and is more about stopping defining research endeavours in terms of a method. The important point is that in PQI a thinker that relies on a method has already decided how to proceed and is simply a functionary of the method, not a thinker (St. Pierre, 2020). In this regard, St. Pierre insists: PQI does not seek to create another, more advanced version of qualitative methodology, but contrarywise, to liberate inquiry from dogmatic, orthodox, structures that domesticate or even repress thinking. PQI must be invented every time, and therefore, a pre-existing method of how reality could be analyzed cannot be offered. In the same way, there are no possible guidelines, toolkits or 'how to do' resources. Within PQI, this is simply not thinkable.

How, then, learn to do PQI? How can we appreciate how PQI looks like in practice? Arguably, the best way is by looking at how other have invented it before, not to get a template or to reproduce their thoughts, but rather to develop our postqualitative sensibility.

Here, then, we would draw on examples of work published from researchers within the field of sport and exercise psychology. To date, however, there is a lack of practical examples available

within this discipline. In these circumstances, and despite the complexity of crossing disciplinary boundaries, engaging with the work of researchers from other disciplines can have much value. For instance, researchers from physical cultural studies, sport sociology and leisure sciences have actively engaged with some threads of scholarship that reflect work within PQI. A relevant example of postqualitative scholarship in sport and exercise is the work of Markula (2019), who provided theoretical and practical examples of how the physically active body can be examined using a Deleuzian perspective. More recently, Newman, Thorpe and Andrews (2020) gathered researchers from the field of sport and exercise to explore diverse technologies and ecologies of the moving body. Other original contributions exist that can help viewing PQI in action (e.g., Authors; Cherrington & Black, 2020; Depper, Fullagar & Francombe-webb, 2018; Esmonde & Jette, 2020; Landi, 2018; Lynch & Hill, 2020; Clark & Thorpe, 2020; van Ingen, 2016).

It is worth noting that few of these works are purely postqualitative or, better put, they do not fully correspond with the principles of PQI as indicated, for example, in St. Pierre (2019, 2020). This is to be expected, as however much it may be desirable to move away from certain conventions, avoiding them all together is difficult -for different reasons. For instance, including a section called 'Design' or 'Methods' makes no sense in a postqualitative study, but is mandatory in some journals. Similarly, reviewers and editors oblivious to the logics of PQI might interpret certain postqualitative gestures or omissions as errors or bad qualitative practices. Beyond these external constraints, we must consider the difficulty of leaving behind the comfort of methodology and thinking outside our academic training which, in spite of our best efforts, normalizes our thinking. Echoing the realistic views of Ulmer (2017), perhaps the conventions of qualitative methodology are something that might be troubled in degrees: if purely PQI research is the aspiration, then less-conventional research might be an intermediate goal. In this regard, PQI research (much like the new materialist and posthumanist ideas that develop in parallel with PQI) might be viewed as a scholarly project that advances through a long and winding road.

Why might sport and exercise psychologists engage with postqualitative inquiry?

Researchers in sport and exercise psychology may turn to PQI for reactive reasons, as well as the proactive opportunities it provides. Whilst not exhaustive, the following reasons for doing PQI are suggested.

The first reason or driving force for turning to PQI might be a dissatisfaction with current traditions of qualitative research. For example, PQI can address some of the shortcomings of social constructionist approaches. Paraphrasing Fox and Alldred (2017), such approaches 'emphasize the constructed character of the social world; consequently constructs, language, systems of thought and discourses have been the focus of concern, both theoretically and as objects of social inquiry'. This unilateral focus on language and discourse (i.e., logocentrism) has limited qualitative psychology to mostly use interview research, focus groups or recordings of naturally occurring talk as the primary source of knowledge. Here, things remain mute, and people's entanglement with matter unrecognized. Set against this, PQI argues for a broader approach that, first, enables researchers to simultaneously appropriate discourse and matter, and second, invites us to imagine other ways of approach what we want or need to investigate (although we might not know that until we start investigating it). In addressing the shortcomings of other approaches and pushing their boundaries, PQI might help us advancing in exciting directions. This argument is further elaborated in Authors (5).

Second, PQI abandons a limiting use of systematicity, generalizability, coding data, and data itself (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013). On the issue of empirical data, for example, PQI is different to qualitative research in that it does not grant a privilege position to it. In PQI, data and theory have the same ontological weight, and therefore there is not a hierarchy of empirical data being more authentic or closer to reality than philosophical theory, or anything else that can be useful. In this sense, St. Pierre (1997) (years before introducing the idea of PQI) talked about transgressive forms of data that are typically out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research. Along with or instead of interview transcripts, fieldnotes, written audio diaries, video recordings, photographs, graphical representations and material objects, postqualitative researchers can bring into consideration a philosophical book, a fictional story, or their own and other people's emotions, senses, and responses as data. Or, perhaps, as something else. In PQI, it is not clear what counts as data, how to define the notion of data, or whether this notion keeps making sense when we reject the subject/object

binary. Perhaps, as Denzin (2013) suggested, the moment has arrived to imagine a world without data and conceive new rules to live by. For some, PQI can help us imagining differently, and this might be a good reason to engage with it.

A third reason to engage with PQI is its potential to critically review the intellectual histories of psychology, including dominant values, theories, and concepts. The propositions that orient PQI put upside down very humanist assumptions that define the discipline; psychology is about emotions and cognitions as experienced by humanist subjects, but PQI changes that drastically. From PQI, psychological processes such as motivation, recovery, competitive stress, resilience, depression, or flow cannot be treated as having some sort of fundamental characteristic for human subjects because we can never know what a subject is in particular entanglements until we investigate them. From PQI, we do not talk about what is to be an athlete, but rather how an athlete is done. We are interested in how athletes emerge out of their entanglement with material and discursive worlds in which their sporting lives are embedded. We want to know what kind of entanglements enact particular realities and what these realities produce. These kinds of concerns throw us into a divergent and 'less comfortable' psychology (Lather, 2007), one that is itself entangled with other fields and forms of knowing. Not surprisingly, some sport and exercise psychologists might not consider this move something desirable or beneficial for the discipline. In this sense, PQI creates conflict in psychology. But this paradigmatic conflict can generate fruitful dialogue. More will be said about conflict and dialogue in the next section, but put simply, a field with conflicts might be preferable to a homogeneous field where everyone speak with the same, monotonous paradigmatic voice.

Fourth, PQI is an adequate lens to critically understand the positive and negative consequences of our posthuman societal condition, a condition that troubles the artificial boundaries between humans, other species and the environment. Whereas qualitative research is still grounded in dualisms that fail to do justice to the complexity of the world, PQI seek to work through posthuman connections of nature, society, technology, biology and culture. As Greene (2013) summarized, PQI 'offers a way of being in the world that fits with and can engage the mangle that the world is' (p. 753). In contrast to the traditional approach to psychology that assumes the humanistic values of the citizen as self-contained, autonomous, rational, and independent, PQI understands athletes, coaches, fans,

referees and parents as posthuman subjects not interacting, but entangled with one another and with their environments, including specific artifacts like footballs, grass, flags, whistles and scoreboards. The capacities of these subjects are a product of continuities and discontinuities within non-unitary assemblages. This means that sport and exercise psychology researchers and professionals have to attend to assemblages, not persons. To repeat an important point, this does not mean that persons are forgotten and that their voices and actions stop mattering. Instead, it is to say that what these persons do and say matter differently, namely, as things that are entangled with other things in assemblages that exceed the traditional understanding of a person. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari (1987), our work after engaging with this logic is not "to reach the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I" (p. 3).

Finally, the propositions that animate PQI raise philosophical and political concerns from social sciences and humanities that, with exceptions, are out of the radar in sport and exercise psychology. For example, PQI might help us respond to calls for sport and exercise psychologists to engage more with social justice by, as one case in point, fighting the tide of neo-fascist movements within sport. According to Strom (2018a), fascism feeds on divisions and separations, on negative or punitive difference. PQI offers a way to reframe difference in affirmative and productive terms. The collectivist, relational way of thinking of PQI might help us building solidarity and community while understanding the reciprocal and distributed nature of our agency, including the way we produce each other and our environments. This kind of sensitivities might contribute to emerging topics in sport and exercise psychology such as sport activism and physical activity in the era of the climate change.

Readers might find the general benefits and reasons for doing PQI that we have highlighted more or less appealing. In either case, there are another kind of reasons that are equally, if not more important. These are the context-dependent reasons that can neither be anticipated logically nor pre-determined within a research design. These reasons are not just thought rationally, but also felt in the flesh. We *feel* that the previous way of thinking about an aspect of our research does not reflect its complexity, or that there is something we are missing or overlooking that is key. To put this idea a bit differently, reasons for turning to PQI might be breakdown-driven. That is, they might arise in *situations* of breakdown in understanding, which cause the researcher to stop and wonder

(Brinkmann, 2014). Here, a situation can be meeting someone, hearing a good story, finding an analytical exception, or reading an essay, for example. Thinking with Deleuze, a situation represents a 'line of flight', which shifts researchers and research materials 'toward a more "nomadic" space of possibilities for action or desire' (Fox & Alldred, 2017, p. 87). In the introduction of his PhD, author (3) reflected about how he started his doctoral research without a clear design, and how unexpected situations, breakdowns in understanding and a sharp feeling of wonder gave him situated reasons to make a turn to PQI. Other authors have made explicit their particular reasons for turning PQI (Benozzo, 2020; St. Pierre, 2014; Brown et al., 2020).

Perils and horizons for postqualitative inquiry

Whilst some have reacted to PQI with enthusiasm, others have received it with suspicion. For instance, Greene (2013) critically responded to a series of papers comprising a special issue on PQI (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013), regarding the loss of systematicity, representation and the cognitive as important limitations of postqualitative inquiry. More recently, Mayes (2019) provided a short but useful review of critical debates around PQI that have taken place over the last years. At least we have found, these are not easy debates to enter. Understanding some of the critiques being made to PQI requires previous familiarization with the issues being criticized, which are frequently intricate and multi-faceted. However, we have noticed significant critiques that can be translated to facilitate entry into PQI. We believe that the spotlighted critiques do not indicate definitive faults of PQI, but rather perils or tensions that can and should be addressed. As such, we will also suggest possible directions and horizons envisioned for PQI.

One peril for PQI is access. As some readers may have found from reading this paper thus far, and from our experience, the language of postqualitative work and its associated perspectives is dense and often very difficult to grasp, which might leave many people from outside PQI outside conversations. Although the language used serves deconstructive purpose and prominently constitutes the characteristic ideas of PQI, its use is not so much inevitable as deliberately chosen. To explain, postqualitative scholars are not always for using a readable style. Some believe that

> not being easily understood might be an ethical imperative because any call for transparency, clarity, or accessibility is always already a call for consensus or a call to reinforce status quo. In other words, accessible language and clarity always already rely upon the taken-for-granted or common sense meanings and common sense beliefs that are persuasive precisely because they do not present themselves as ideology or try to win consent (Berbary, 2017, p. 723).

Calls for clarity, in short, are understood as a way to keep the unfamiliar at a distance and illegitimate (Lather, 1996). Some even suspect that these calls are also part of the now prevalent discourse of anti-intellectualism that, on some level, assumes that the ordinary person cannot understand complexity. We recognise the importance of such arguments. Likewise, we coincide with postqualitative scholars such as St. Pierre in that we should read closely, and not try to understand things too quickly (see also Kuecker, 2020). This acknowledged, the exclusionary or segregating effect of the language can and should be critically addressed. Within the field of education, Strom (2018b) provided thoughtful reflections on this issue:

> Deleuzian concepts and their related language must be used purposefully and in ways that allow multiple entry points for readers to be able to plug into the ideas presented to create microtransformations in thinking. Without doing so, a wider educator audience will not be able to access Deleuzian ideas to think differently about issues of teaching and learning, which limits the transformative potential of these concepts. In other work, I have employed Deleuzian terms strategically, and often in the singular, to ensure that the concept can be 'translated' concretely for readers in a way that renders the ideas accessible for those who have not extensively studied Deleuzian philosophy—in other words, so that readers can connect with the text productively, plug into the ideas, and put them to work. (p. 108)

In our opinion, Strom's words map out a path that future postqualitative researchers in sport and exercise psychology could follow. Certainly, the outcome of a strategic use of language would be less pure and precise reports, when comparing with postqualitative studies being unapologetically dense. In either case, we must assume that our language choices come with cost.

Another peril for PQI is the potentially negative ideological effects of it. On several occasions, Brinkmann (2017, 2019) has warned that the philosophy of PQI mirrors and facilitates late capitalist ideology of destabilization, or neoliberal flexibilization. Although he proposed that qualitative psychologists can accept much of the ontological theorizing developed by postqualitative scholars, he warned about the dangers of transforming the onto-logics of PQI into advocacy for instability that renders humanist ideals of social justice impossible to enact.

> we should not transform ontology into advocacy or ideology. instead, we should see the precarious and unstable nature of reality as giving rise to an ethical demand for humans, namely, to enact relatively stable practices in which it becomes possible to conduct flourishing lives together.

While accepting the promise and potential of the posthuman condition, Goodley (2020) shared similar concerns:

> I worry that posthuman thinking is being fervently adopted without a recognition of important questions of race, class, sexuality, gender and disability that still persist today. Posthuman technophilia and the new materialist orthodoxy threaten, I feel, to flatten human life. We live in deeply dehumanising times. And these very human questions require our attention, our care and our engagement.

Against the above, both Brinkmann and Goodley make a case for new forms of humanism that disrupt the individualized, essentialized humanist subject and simultaneously preserve our humanity. Brinkmann thinks with a philosopher called Hans Jonas, whereas Goodley thinks through disability. Can we think and articulate new forms of humanism through thinking with sport and exercise psychology? If one is open to this question, then why not?

A third peril for PQI is establishing a convenient relation to past research and former traditions. In their critical reading of the politics of PQI, Gerrard, Rudolph and Sriprakash (2017) described PQI as ‘forgetful’. They argued that in the search for a break from the ‘old’, PQI has mobilized a modernist–colonial temporal logic of progress on a linear trajectory and has stated itself as more progressed and progressive than earlier or other ways of knowing -including but not limited

559 to Indigenous theories of non-human agency (see Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt, 2019). Following from this,
560 Gerrard, Rudolph and Sriprakash sustained that PQI is at risk of being deemed another 'fashionable
561 post-something' and of creating its own set of binaries, closures, and erasures (p. 386). Analogous
562 critiques have been formulated (Mayes, 2019). We appreciate that some of these critiques come from
563 researchers that might have not engaged with poststructuralism. While it is important to welcome and
564 learn from all the critical responses to PQI, we need to ask if these are applicable. This may not
565 always be the case. For example, the idea of a problematic linear trajectory in PQI is questionable,
566 because the idea of linear trajectory is refused by poststructuralism. The point is that judging PQI
567 from the logics of other paradigms can be, although possible and desirable, philosophically unfair.
568 Be that as it may, postqualitative researchers have the responsibility to investigate the (unintended)
569 harmful effects that PQI can produce. There is much to learn and reflect about in this respect. In the
570 meantime, the most sensible option to avoid overinflated, incongruous or amnesic claims is keeping a
571 respectful attitude towards other theories and methodologies, be them traditional or emergent. As
572 Lunden (2002) wrote, 'all one's thoughts have probably been thought by others, earlier or right now'.
573 As such, postqualitative researchers would benefit from avoiding unnecessary claims of newness,
574 uniqueness, and paradigmatic superiority. Especially important in this regard is accepting
575 disagreements and affirming the existence of qualitative research. A case in point: in setting the
576 agenda of PQI St. Pierre stressed that deconstruction and re-thinking does not mean rejection: 'I want
577 to be clear that I'm not rejecting conventional humanist qualitative methodology. If one accepts its
578 humanist assumptions, it makes sense. However, if one doesn't accept them, it doesn't.' (St. Pierre,
579 2014, p. 4). This clarification matters for St. Pierre as an ethical issue; as she acknowledged, rejecting
580 and excluding another onto-epistemology also means rejecting and excluding the people who live that
581 onto-epistemology. Against this, it is important to develop the attitude and the ability to coexist with
582 researchers that have different and often competing understandings of the world, of knowledge, and of
583 research (Rautio, 2020).

584 Recently (Authors, 6), we asked: Can conventional and post qualitative researchers coexist
585 democratically within our fields and discipline projects? And, If so, how? To address this key
586 question, we followed the thoughts of Mouffe (1996) and other agonistic theorists to answer such

questions. Mouffe argued that ‘any democratic project must come to terms with pluralism. This means discarding the dangerous dream of a perfect consensus, of a harmonious collective will, and accepting the permanence of conflicts’ (p. 20). On this basis, rather than accentuating what qualitative research and PQI have in common in the quest of a middle ground, we explored the possibility of emphasising the legitimate differences between them. This polarization does some useful work in holding in tension the two approaches and letting conflicts arise to enable paradigmatic dialogue across difference. Beyond this strategy, we might want to contemplate a possible third space encompassing the range of variations that can operate in between qualitative research and PQI, as well as the possibility to fluctuate between them. Liminal or ambivalent zones (zones of paradigmatic conflict) might exist, and the prospect of overlapping paradigmatic positions has been recently pictured. For instance, Brinkmann (2017) suggested that one could perhaps be a ‘postqualitative qualitative researcher' or a ‘posthumanist humanist’. Such positions are highly controversial and intriguing. There is no consensus about their legitimacy, and if qualitative research and PQI are to be combined this cannot be done capriciously, given the risk of ontological incoherence -remember that the onto-epistemological arrangements of qualitative and postqualitative approaches to inquiry are incommensurable, and that, because of that, a qualitative study cannot be made postqualitative after the fact. We believe that this tension can be a fruitful site for learning, and we expect to read interesting debates on this complex positionality in years to come.

Concluding thoughts: towards the introduction of postqualitative inquiry in sport and exercise psychology

This paper has provided a partial overview of PQI, of its foundations, ambitions, potentials, perils, and horizons. Although recent articles have introduced PQI into the vocabulary of sport and exercise sciences (e.g., Fullagar, 2017; Giardina, 2017; Ray, 2019) and qualitative psychology (e.g., Brinkmann, 2017), this term has not yet permeated in sport and exercise psychology. Against this, we have tried to present an invitational rather than meticulous resource with the intention to support initial engagements. Importantly, though, encouraging an engagement with PQI does not mean to suggest that all of us must make a paradigm shift. Just because an approach is made available and

attractive does not mean we should simply rush to exploit it. Following the recommendations of Giardina (2016),

> we should also not, clearly, just make the quick turn to "ontology" and ask, for example, "How can we apply DeleuzoGuattarian concepts to our study?" (or, more specifically perhaps, "How can we use 'entanglement', or 'assemblage', or 'rhizomatics' in our research?"). This is exactly what St. Pierre (and others) caution us about: i.e., just "dropping in" a concept such as "assemblage" without: (1) understanding the ontology in which it is based; and (2) ignoring that it is connected to numerous other specific ideas in DeleuzoGuattarian thought. (p. 468)

To summarise the point, we should not desire PQI and define our work as such if we do not take in its foundations (Kuecker, 2020). Of course, learning the foundations of PQI is an intense and laborious process that requires time. But today it is the case that academics and students rarely have time. In the current accelerated university, who can spend months and years 'reading an entire corpus of a philosopher's work in order to just begin to read a single piece of their work'? (p. 2). Thinking differently is rarely helpful in practical and working terms. Getting a job, and getting published, cited, and funded is easier when one is aligned with ways of thinking dictated by the dominant paradigms. However, sport and exercise psychology research will become intellectually stagnant if new ideas and dissident paradigms are not introduced. Providing a partial overview of PQI is useful but insufficient to support the introduction of PQI into the field. Therefore, we close this article by offering a cluster of interrelated considerations and recommendations in this regard. Of course, these are not highlighted for the purpose of providing the final word, but rather to open up dialogue.

Primarily, it would be desirable for faculties and departments to have people on staff equipped to teach about PQI and then, to incorporate PQI into the curricula of postgraduate research courses and doctoral programs of sport and exercise psychology. Surely, students can encounter PQI by chance, but if we want it to become part of our research culture, we cannot completely rely on serendipities and exceptional cases. There are more opportunities of witnessing students becoming interested in posthumanism if they are introduced to it in a pedagogical manner. This is not to advocate for an extensive course on PQI, as there are many other important contents and research

traditions that deserve detailed attention. A good place to begin would be simply talking students about the existence and potential of PQI as an orientation to thinking and knowledge production. In doing so, it is important to stress that PQI is *not* a rejection of qualitative inquiry or any other preexisting social science research methodology, but rather a 'poststructural deconstruction' that overturns and displaces a structure to make room for something different (St. Pierre, 2020).

Second, there is a need to incorporate experienced postqualitative scholars to the editorial boards of sport and psychology journals, groups, and societies. As Ekkekakis, Hartman, and Ladwig (2019, p. 46) said, 'when authors, peer reviewers, and editors are all products of the same paradigmatic tradition[s], there is no element that can challenge the system to move in a new direction'. As we have argued, the provocative views of postqualitative researchers could be valuable to promote paradigmatic diversity within sport and exercise psychology, which is much needed to enhance the academic and social impact of the field.

Third, it is vital to generate a 'critical mass' of postqualitative researchers, as well as opportunities for networking. For instance, creating dynamic advocacy groups would help PQI achieve presence, continuity and legitimacy, both locally and globally. The more alliances established, the stronger PQI will become. Having said this, we would argue that alliances should not only be stablished with the like-minded. In our opinion, it would be better to assemble a broader group in which postqualitative researchers coexist with researchers with other views, or what we called 'critical friendly enemies' (Authors, 6). As implied earlier, coexistence is key to establish sustainable dialogues, explore tensions and build democratic communities, as opposed to closed circles.

Finally, the incorporation of PQI in sport and exercise psychology will depend on researchers and students daring to read more philosophy and less methodology. Namely, they will have to engage with poststructuralism, since PQI is a derivative of it and cannot make sense without having studied postsructural theory and concepts. In stumbling upon the vocabulary and counterintuitive ideas of poststructuralism, newcomers may feel wonder, surprise and excitement, but also confusion and fear - of failure, rejection, being laid off, being opposed by others, not being respected, or losing control. Such discouraging or paralysing feelings might lead to the conclusion that PQI 'is not for me' or for

671 'us' (i.e., sport and exercise psychologists). However, the experience of not knowing and getting lost
672 can be cast in a constructive light. This is precisely what postqualitative scholars argue for:
673 abandoning the comfort of thinking under the dogmatic structures of qualitative research and learning
674 to live with ambiguity, uncertainty, and partiality of unfamiliar knowledge. Moving forward, this can
675 be facilitated, for example, by allowing students to fumble around in obscurities, mysteries, and
676 doubts, both in their learning and the reasons why they learn. To be sure, fumbling around does not
677 mean losing direction; it means to work in a state of 'rigorous confusion' (Lather, 1996) to do justice
678 to the complexity of the world.
679

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684

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[i] The adjective Deleuzian refers to Gilles Deleuze, a key posthuman thinker and arguably the most important source of inspiration for the postqualitative scholars (Brinkmann, 2017). Alongside with Félix Guattari, Deleuze formulated and developed several philosophical insights of great relevance for PQI.

[ii] In line with Mayes (2019), our article accounts for the concept of assemblages as it is taken up in much postqualitative inquiry, which sometimes simplifies or departs from the original conceptualisation of Deleuze and Guattari.

[iii] In this introductory article, the ontological position of Barad and Deleuze seem to be identical. Naturally, they share key points. However, if we read closer, we can observe that, in fact, they are incommensurable. To know more about this issue, please see Hein (2016).