

## **Sport and Body Cultures Research Group**

*Members' abstracts for ISSA Paris 2015*

### **1. Ian Wellard**

#### **'I felt like someone had a knife and they were dragging it up and down my legs': Exploring embodied experiences in adult recreational sport.**

Taking part in a physical or sporting activity incorporates a range of corporeal and emotional sensations that are interwoven with the individual body as well as the social context in which the experience occurs. This paper explores the complexity of embodied pleasure within the context of adult recreational sport participation. Drawing upon empirical research in the form of sporting life histories conducted with adults, accounts of pleasure and pain are explored in detail so as to provide a deeper understanding of the pathway to, as well as experience of, in this case, swimming and running. Here, participation is primarily a voluntary decision and considered in the light of previous (non) sporting experiences at school and as young adults. The intention is to reveal the complex processes through which a physical activity is experienced, in an attempt to qualitatively account for the multitude of individual and external influences that determine whether participation is considered enjoyable, and, ultimately, worth doing again.

Connell's (2005) concept of body-reflexive practices which acknowledge physiological, psychological and sociological factors informs the notion of body-reflexive pleasures (Wellard 2013) which are central in determining whether sporting activity is considered pleasurable or not. Adopting an embodied approach to the adult sporting body provides a deeper understanding of the not so straight-forward patterns of physical activity experience and participation.

## 2. Amy Clark

### ***'Negotiating the spit and sawdust: Embodied femininities in gym spaces.'***

Whilst there has been considerable research exploring the representation of women's bodies in sport and fitness environments and the oppression women face in fitness cultures (e.g. Dworkin, 2001) there is a paucity of qualitative research exploring the embodied experiences of women in sport and exercise within alternative fitness spaces (e.g. Allen-Collinson, 2010; 2011). Against this backdrop, I present material gathered from part of an ongoing research project into the lived experiences of women who work-out in a 'working-class' gym in the South-East of England. In doing so, I reveal the corporeal, 'fleshy', in other words embodied aspects of participating in what could be considered a traditionally male 'spit and sawdust' gym. Observations of women in the weights room and the spin room and mediated semi-structured interviews are incorporated to illuminate the stories of women and the living, breathing, sensing bodies through which they exercise and make sense of the world. Recognising the importance of my own body in the research process, in this presentation I also reflect upon some of my initial experiences of entering the field and how I negotiated some of the anxieties, difficulties and challenges that I faced. I also consider my rationale for adopting alternative researcher roles, the crossing of boundaries in relation to researcher/informant rapport, and the maintenance of my feminist identity. Discussion is provided that highlights how taking such a self-reflexive approach is helping to interpret the embodied experiences of being a woman within fitness cultures.

### 3. John Day

#### ***'Physical activity, Families & Wellbeing: The Neglect of Intimacies and the Prominence of Being Active in the Wellbeing of Children'***

There exists a tendency for studies of physical activity within the context of families to amount to little more than investigations of parenting practices. As such, physical activity research to contextualise children within their family roles as sons, daughters, brothers and sisters is the exception rather than the rule. In sociological terms, this preoccupation has reduced our understandings of children's family lives to the paternalism of being the child of an adult. Simultaneously, the intense focus upon the one-directional vertical family ties of 'the children of parents' at the expense of interdependent vertical and lateral ties has significant implications upon making sense of physical activity as an aspect of wellbeing. Moreover, most research in this area uncritically assumes that being active is good for the health and wellbeing of children. While there may be evidence to support such a view, neglected altogether is the more comprehensive evidence base telling us that our intimate relationships, such as being sons, daughters, brothers or sisters as well as parents, serve as one of our most fundamental sources of wellbeing. This paper will discuss the implications of the neglect of children's intimacies as a source of wellbeing in favour of their physical activity patterns within the intimate social context of families in reference to previous and future research.

#### **4. James Brighton**

**James Brighton (Canterbury Christ Church University) & Andrew C. Sparkes (Research Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, Leeds Beckett University)**

Drawing on data generated from a four year ethnographic study into wheelchair sport in England we examine how (dis)abled athletes come to understand themselves as a “complex hybridisation” between (Wo)Man and machine (Haraway, 1991). A structural narrative analysis of the ‘big’ and ‘small’ stories (Bamberg, 2006) told by the (dis)abled athletes in the field revealed three ideal types in action. Techno-survival stories and techno-rehabilitation stories were entrenched in, and sanctioned by the medical discourses of restoration and normalisation that informed the way participants made sense of their bodies and constructed their identities over time. In contrast, using cyborg embodiment stories some participants demonstrated a sense of agency in creating new ways of relating to technology which allowed them to challenge and reject various dualisms (e.g., able/disabled, normal/abnormal), and instead construct ‘proud’ (dis)abled identities that imagine different kinds of humanity in relation to various technological fields. Some reflections are offered on the ways in which these cyborg embodiment stories transgress established dualisms and offer what Haraway (1991) calls “dangerous possibilities” for the empowerment of (dis)abled athletes. In this process we suggest that in the future (dis)abled athletes have the potential to become “ambassadors of transhumanism” as described by Miah (2003).