

s b c

sport and body cultures
research group



Embodied Thoughts of the Month

Volume 1 (2015)



Embodied Thought of the Month

Our 'Embodied Thought of the Month' (ETM) is offered as a regular brief discussion point presented by members of the Sport and Body Cultures research group about topics that we feel are interesting, relevant, topical and important.

This volume contains all the ETMs posted on our webpages throughout 2015.

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About Sport and Body Cultures research group

The Sport and Body Cultures research group (SBC) is a forum for researchers with a shared interest in the socio-cultural aspects of movement and body cultures, particularly within the context of sport, physical activity and dance. Members of the group recognise the significance of applying embodied approaches to the study of movement cultures and embrace an inter-disciplinary perspective.

Although the majority of the group members sit within a broadly socio-cultural framework, the appeal of an embodied approach to the study of movement cultures is in its accommodation of a wider multi-disciplinary lens. Embodiment is considered a central theoretical approach which, as well as seeking to move beyond mind/body dualisms, incorporates the physiological with the social and psychological. This 'enfleshed' way of thinking informs the way that we explore and make sense of movement and body cultures. As such, the body occupies the central focus for our research because:

1. It informs and is informed by experience
2. These lived experiences are informed by a multitude of embodied sensitivities
3. It is dynamic and constantly changing at both the individual and social level

The aim of this research group is to provide a forum for discussion on all aspects related to embodied movement cultures within sport, physical activity and dance and to provide opportunities for these ideas to be shared with a wider audience through a range of academic and social media outlets.

February 2015

Pleasurable suffering: thinking about pleasure and pain

Ian Wellard

Debates about pain within the context of traditional sport are not altogether new. There has been a lot written about physical pain or, indeed, the way in which pain is understood as 'part and parcel' of taking part in sport. 'Taking the knocks' as it were is pretty much considered an everyday aspect of sporting participation. However, in most of these accounts pain is an unwanted aspect of sport, to be endured or tolerated and recognised so that it can be avoided. In this way, pain is more often related with injury as a result of sporting performance or as a result of aggression and violence that again are considered part of traditional sporting participation.

More recently, qualitative research in sport, and in particular research that takes a more embodied approach, has been able to explore and reveal the more complex aspects of experiencing and understanding pain. So, where pain is often understood in terms of a binary opposite to pleasure it is through more detailed scrutinising of this relationship that we can see how the distinctions between the two are much more blurred than we realise. For it is the case that further scrutiny can allow us to think about these experiences or those times when we can understand pain as something that could equally be considered as pleasurable and alternatively where pleasurable aspects can equally be experienced as painful. What this then reveals is a much more complex analysis whereby social, cultural, physiological, psychological and environmental factors influence the experience of an activity in a range of ways. For instance, a good place to start is Michael Atkinson's description of 'pleasurable suffering' as a way of explaining his experiences of fell running. Here his engagement is understood as physical pleasure through an existential awareness that is dealing with the environment, albeit an often harsh one, where the physical activity in itself can be challenging and brutal but at the same time can be experienced as satisfying and pleasurable. Consequently, this raises important questions about how people engage with sport. So, how do we understand Michael Atkinson's explanation that his experiences are a form of suffering whilst at the same time they are also pleasurable

and compel him to do it again? How do we equate his experiences with those of a marathon runner? Particularly the recreational or amateur marathon runner who attempts to run 26 miles for 'fun' and will readily tell us that the actual experience of the run was agony but they enjoyed the experience nevertheless? Why is it that the experiences that Michael talks about seem so different to those of the Marathon runner?

Michael helps us understand about his experiences of running by using an embodied narrative that graphically depicts what it is that he finds pleasurable, such as his engagement with the terrain and the feel of his body within the environment. The marathon runners, on the other hand often present their suffering as something that they endured during the run but then describe their enjoyment in terms of events *after the run* usually in relation to completing their goal of finishing the race. Although this view offers an explanation of suffering as pleasurable, it is in a much more social way in that pleasure is gained after the event from being able to focus upon the achievement and what they have just done. Thus, their sporting hard work or graft can be demonstrated to others and the sponsor form at the end of the race provides a means of proof of their achievement and allows subsequent heroic stories that can be regaled afterwards to provide a source of pleasurable presentation of the self.

Consequently, by asking questions about pleasure which is often considered at face value as a relatively innocuous aspect of sport, we are able to start to uncover the complex ways in which individuals participate in and experience sport. The questions presented here may only touch the surface but they open up a variety of pathways that we could take to further explore the significance of pleasure and pain in sporting participation. For instance, issues relating to how we understand risk and extreme sports, the various forms of physical pleasure to be gained in sport and how we understand pain and how that pain can sometimes be reconstructed by the individual in a way that might seem counter-productive to pleasure for another.

Notes:

1. Michael Atkinson's discussion on 'pleasurable suffering' can be seen in his chapter in *Researching Embodied Sport: exploring movement cultures* published by Routledge.

2. Ian Wellard discusses further aspects of pleasure (and pain) in sport, in his book *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* published in 2013 by Routledge.

March 2015

Boxing, violence and sadism!

Ian Wellard

Last month's ETM raised the idea of 'pleasurable suffering' and how there are complex dynamics going on in the way an individual may experience pleasure and pain. Michael Atkinson's descriptions of fell running were used as an example to highlight the dovetailing of the physical with the emotional and the environment. What this tells us is the way that pain and pleasure become inextricably bound up with the embodied experience but this is not just a physical sensation it is also something that can be influenced by social discourses as well as the historical and social context of the way in which pleasure or pain can be understood.

However, where we might possibly consider pleasurable suffering in a kind of 'masochistic' sense, there is also an element of pain that we need to understand in the way that it is not always something that is experienced purely by the individual but can be inflicted upon others. In this way, we can take into consideration other elements that relate to issues of power and maybe even sadism. Boxing provides a useful example of this, particularly in light of recent academic interest in broader forms of martial arts, not just professional boxing but also seen in wider society with increased popularity of various versions of combat based physical activities (such as boxercise classes, punch bags next to cardio equipment in mainstream gyms etc). So, while these forms of engaging in physical activity are promoted in a positive way, chiefly through the health related benefits to be gained, the underlying darker side of sadism and uncritical exploration of human power relationships remain hidden (I could be writing a critique of 50 shades of Grey here!).

In his forthcoming chapter exploring boxing, Christopher R. Matthews provides an account of his experiences 'in the ring' and reveals some of these darker messages relating to the complex embodied relationships that are negotiated within the context of boxing. In this particular sport, the notions of pleasurable suffering, mentioned above, can be considered in relation to the two-way process of both experiencing pain and inflicting it. Consequently, complex notions of power relationships are brought to the

table in a much more direct sense. By entering into the ring, it could be argued, one has to embody a particular way of being where any conscious forms of critique are blocked in order to preserve one's right to be there. Thus, more reasoned questions about why one wants to engage in an activity where the aim is to cause physical harm to another person or why one feels the need to dominate another person in an aggressive manner are left to the side. Unpacking the initial intentions and motivations, as well as being possibly disruptive to the desired outcome of the contest, reveal more uncomfortable 'truths' about the human condition. Attempting to understand the motivations for taking part in boxing makes me think of an analogy like the 'Lord of the Rings' – where one slips on the ring (or slips into the metaphorical ring) and becomes seduced or overtaken by the 'dark side'. In some way this is similar to the seductiveness of complicit masculinity as described by Raewyn Connell. There are aspects of society that become so embedded in our being that we sub-consciously mask them, or are, indeed, too cowardly to confront. For example, even though I would not consider entering into the boxing ring, precisely because of my anti-violence beliefs, I am still occasionally seduced by the dark side of sport. In my book on *Sport, Masculinities and the Body*, I provide an example of when I played a tennis match against another gay guy in a singles league and then became so carried away with the whole match that I ended up wanting to 'beat the guy up' on the court. In this case, I described it by talking about complying with hegemonic masculinity in a situation where things seemed to take over without me knowing. In his chapter, Matthews talks about similar forms of complicity when he enters the ring. Here, though, there is a more defined element of the physical where there is a hint of enjoyment gained through both inflicting pain and receiving it. To an extent, one could explain this with the notion of 'rough and tumble' play, which is a key element in childhood play where giving and receiving physical knocks are part of the whole experience. Only the other day, I was having 'rough and tumble' play with my dog. We end up sort of wrestling on the ground and I invariably come out of it worse, with cuts and bruises. But I consider it fun and although the cuts may hurt they can be justified in terms of the whole game (and I know he didn't mean it). However, where it may be more reasonable to align rough and tumble play with a sport like rugby, it is less convincing when considered in relation to boxing or other martial arts when there is a clear intention to physically harm the opponent – no matter how the rule books may express this. Thus, for me, although I can understand the arguments offered for why boxing remains popular, I still cannot

ignore its underlying *raison d'être*, which is ultimately about dominating another person through the use of physical violence. Nevertheless, despite my personal take on it, boxing is interesting because it offers us a fascinating example of much more complex forms of embodied pleasure and pain - that cannot simply be described as either pleasure or pain.

Notes:

1. Christopher R. Matthew's discussion on his experiences researching boxing can be seen in his chapter in *Researching Embodied Sport: exploring movement cultures* published by Routledge in September 2015.
2. Ian Wellard's book, *Sport, Masculinities and the Body*, was published in 2009 by Routledge.
3. Raewyn Connell describes 'complicit masculinity' in her book *Masculinities* published in 2005 by Polity Press.

April 2015

Embodied experiences within the context of disability

James Brighton

Over the last couple of months, Ian has reflected on the corporeality of '*pleasurable suffering*' in fell running and boxing and the multiple social, cultural, and historical influences affecting how individuals may experience these sensations through their bodies. Having had a painful relationship with my own sporting body for most of my life I have developed empathy for others whose own bodies have been affected by pain and impairment and are required to re-imagine their life stories. Subsequently, I engaged in a PhD study through which I hoped to gain some understanding of the embodied experiences of disabled athletes. This month therefore, as part of a commitment I made to my participants to promote their stories, I wish to use my now privileged position as a 'communicative body' (Frank,1995) to begin to offer some thoughts on how wheelchair basketball and rugby players make sense of the pains and pleasures experienced in disability sport and hint at the 'able' bodied discourses that police how these carnal sensations are felt.

Under medical understandings that now pervade society, the disabled body has been understood oppressively as among other things weak, defenceless, dependent and passive. Especially in the case of individuals that have experienced catastrophic injury such as those who acquire spinal cord injury (SCI), a 'wrap them up in cotton wool' attitude has become common where individuals should be cared for and protected from future harm. Although the origins of disability sport lie in physical rehabilitation, contemporary disability sport such as wheelchair rugby and to a lesser extent basketball has been described as risky, dangerous, barbaric and brutal and a 'seductive cure' for the crises of masculinity that some men may fear impairment brings (Hutchinson & Kleiber, 1999: 135). As a result, tensions exist in the way disabled athletes *should* engage in sport which in turns limits the embodied pains and pleasures that may be experienced through its participation.

The enjoyment and pleasure that may be gained from sport has often been ignored in favour of achieving wellbeing and reaching performance outcomes (Wellard, 2012).

This lack of consideration may be even more evident in disability sport where under *medical understandings*¹, focus has been on returning individuals to a sense of normalcy and as economically functioning members of society with little recognition of the fun and enjoyment that sport brings. During my time in the ethnographic field however, a central finding was that disability sport provided individuals opportunities to experience the simple *pleasures* of physical movement. Somatic sensations breathed through the body before, during and after competition were cherished, allowing individuals to “feel good”, experience “the same adrenaline rush” and “relax more contently” afterwards. These are examples of what Wellard (2012: 22) terms “body-reflexive pleasures”, the explorations of which offer potential to re- think personal accomplishment and understand the physical body in alternative ways. For many participants in my study, disability sport allowed individuals to experience the joys of moving the body again unshackled from medically informed rehabilitative discourses and obsession with empowerment in the face of disability which was deemed negative.

For many participants who acquired SCI, sport also offered the opportunity to be aggressive. This held symbolic importance for participants as it was indicated that demonstrating aggression helped to dispel stereotypes of “disabled people as weak” and restore senses of athletic and masculine identity. However, what was perhaps more interesting was that sport provided an arena through which participant’s needs to *feel* aggression, pain and pleasure *with* other bodies in the competitive yet controlled settings could be explored. This was particularly important considering so many of life’s embodied experiences had been either been restricted by impairment or taken away from disabled athletes by rules of a normative society.

For example, many wheelchair rugby players wanted **both** to be aggressive *and* feel pain from being the object of aggression. Indeed, many individuals proclaimed their love for the pain felt in their muscles after an intensive training session and from the bumps and bruises sustained in the hurly burly of competition. These corporeal experiences resulting from manoeuvring wheelchairs around court and smashing into each other were central in allowing participants to “sense life” again - similar to the boxers in DeGaris’s (2000) study who enjoyed feelings of “somatic intimacy” when sparring with others. In a way then, pain was narrated amongst wheelchair

athletes as desirable and important in providing a positive sense of corporeality. Disabled athletes therefore did not solely engage in sport for 'rehabilitation', for its symbolic significance in re-establishing athletic or masculine identities, or for cathartic release from restrictive and regulatory discourses alone. Rather, a combination of these factors and desire to experience life's embodied pleasures and pains again all contributed to athlete's love for sport.

The embodied experiences of disabled athletes therefore require further attention. As part of this analysis questions should be asked as to why non-disabled society finds aggressive disability sport in which there is potential for pain and injury so unsettling when it is normalised in 'able' bodied sport. As one participant asked me "Able bodied rugby is dangerous too isn't it?" Thoughts that destabilise or 'crip' the way we think about the disabled sporting body and non-disabled sport in these ways will form the basis of future publications but here I finish by inviting you to reflect upon some of the bodily pleasures and the '*pleasures in pain*' that you may experience in sport. I know that I have been captivated by these embodied sensations my whole sporting career from the edgy nervousness created by adrenaline flooding my body before sport, to defying the calls from aching lungs and screaming muscles during competition, and the sore calmness (helped by a hot shower and a cold beer!) that I feel afterwards. These embodied experiences have a lot to do with why in spite of how much sport has hurt me and my profession is to offer critique of it, I still love, and always will love, the way sport can make my body feel.

Notes:

1. DeGaris, L. (2000) 'Be a buddy to your buddy': Male identity, aggression and intimacy in a
2. boxing gym. In McKay, J., Messner, M. & Sabo, D. eds. *Masculinities, Gender Relations and*
3. *Sport*. London: Sage, pp. 87-107.
4. Kleiber, D. & Hutchinson, S. (1999) Heroic masculinity in the recovery from spinal cord injury. In: Sparkes, A.C. & Silvennoinen, M. eds. *Talking bodies:*

Men's Narratives of the Body and Sport. University of Jyväskylä, Finland: SoPhi, pp. 135-155.

5. Wellard, I. (2012) Body-reflexive pleasures: Exploring bodily experiences within the context of sport and physical activity. *Sport, Education and Society*, 17 (1), pp. 21-33.

May 2015

Embodied sporting friendships

Ian Wellard



A few days before we broke up for the Christmas holidays, I had to go to Bournemouth to examine a PhD thesis. I had travelled down the night before and stayed in a hotel near the sea front. In the morning, after breakfast, before I had to set off for the viva, I walked down to the beach to take in some air. It was an overcast morning, but the air was crisp and fresh. It could hardly have been more than a few degrees and I was wrapped up like someone about to set off for the North Pole. As I walked down to the pier I noticed some surfers out in the water and on closer inspection observed that they were in two groups on either side of the pier. I presumed that the pier acted as some form of wave maker. The sea wasn't really that rough, in fact it was pretty still but the area around the pier was occasionally producing reasonable sized waves that could produce some moderate surfing. The group of surfers appeared to be acting as a small community. I couldn't see any solo surfers or others on their own further in the distance. What I did see was a group of surfers sharing the experience of this freezing cold December morning with others. I think I was more fascinated by my initial embodied reaction which was influenced by a physical sense that going into the sea must have felt really cold. Added to this was

a recognition of the specific time of the year with Christmas only a few days away and my awareness that I was wrapped up to the nines while these surfers were in the water and attempting to enjoy the experience of riding the waves. But there was more to it than just about surfers enduring the cold waters and the specific activity of riding the waves. As I watched further, it was clear that because the waves were not that strong or frequent there appeared to be greater periods of time spent sitting on the surfboard waiting for the next wave. But this aspect seemed to be an equally important part of their activity as it was during those times the surfers were chatting with each other and laughing and joking. Although I couldn't hear their conversations I assumed that this was an important part of the whole surfing experience because otherwise they would have been surfing alone.

The notion of the broader aspects, or the 'whole package', of taking part in a sporting activity is important. In her chapter on surfing friendships, Georgina Roy talks about the camaraderie and the companionship that is an integral element of surfing. In her research spent participating with women surfers in the UK, Georgina elaborates upon the additional elements which contribute to the whole surfing experience which, ultimately, drew the women together. It was interesting that what might be considered extreme aspects of the sport, such as surfing in the winter months in the bitter cold, were part of a bonding ritual and shared experience that consolidated the women's friendships and created a sense of unity and shared identity. Consequently, being able to talk about and share those experiences (of being cold and embracing the elements), not only while surfing, but in the pub afterwards, created deep and meaningful ties. Although this idea is not altogether new, much of it has been generated in writing about male bonding within the context of sport. However, in this case, Georgina demonstrates how these were just as important for the women surfers.

That the extreme conditions could be an enjoyable aspect of the surfing experience not only can be seen as significant in terms of the shared experiences that the surfers have but they are also indicative of a particular cultural knowledge relating to the peculiarities of the British weather. In contrast to the stereotypical image of the sun-kissed surfer riding the waves in Hawaii or Australia, the surfers that I saw on a cold December morning in Bournemouth were united because of their shared understanding of facing the British seasonal elements.

As I walked back to the hotel, I passed two men who were just putting their surfboards into a parked van. It was about 8.30am and I wondered where they were going now. Whether they were off to work or whether they were going home to have a nap. Either way, I admired their endurance and judging by their glowing faces I thought how it must have been a really invigorating way to start the day. Although, I'm not entirely sure that my cold phobic body would have responded to that challenge and I also don't know how fair it would have been on the PhD student that I was about to examine had I followed riding waves with a viva.

Notes:

1. Georgina Roy's discussion on her research with women surfers in the UK can be found in her chapter in *Researching Embodied Sport: exploring movement cultures* published by Routledge later in September 2015.
2. Ian Wellard talks about the idea of the 'whole package' of sport in his book, *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* which was published in 2013 by Routledge.

June 2015

***The Authenticity and Meaning of Embodiment in Life History
Interviews***

John Day

My research uses life history interviews to better understand the connections between family relationships, being active and well-being across the life course. During the one-to-one pilot interviews of my study with family members, one thing that struck me was how the more meaningful stories relayed to me by participants comprised of both a relatively authentic sense of connection with previous lived experiences and how these experiences were simultaneously played out within the interview context. In a number of ways it might be argued that while participants were providing me with historical snippets of their biographies, a second story was also developing concerning the way in which these histories were being told.

During the interviews, when the conversation moved to the topic of engagement with physical activity during adulthood, participants felt it was something that they 'should be doing' but their lives had become 'comfortable' in the intimate space of a romantic relationship and they often struggled to find time because of work commitments or household circumstances. While they were telling me about their everyday challenges and struggles to be regularly active I noticed how some participants appeared to become more aware of their bodies. One woman, who was in her seventies, put her cardigan back on and folded her arms while another male participant, in his mid-twenties, moved from a sitting position and curled up on my sofa. It seemed to me as though they had become more conscious of their bodies and were (consciously or subconsciously) making attempts to hide them from my gaze, maybe because they felt guilty. At no point did they orally express that they felt guilty about what they described as 'not being active enough as I should be', but coupled with their embodied responses to this topic of conversation, indicated that they might have felt somehow to blame for not being as active as they used to be.

The participants in the interviews also spoke with delight about their early experiences of being active during childhood. These stories referred predominantly to the enjoyment and fun associated with play. Noticeable at this point, was how one participant moved his arms to illustrate to me the height of the jumps that he, his brother and their friends would attempt to land safely using skateboards, rollerblades and bikes. His embodied illustration of how they safely negotiated risk and danger without physical injury highlighted to me how meaningful these experiences were, in a way that the interview transcript was unable to capture.

Thus, their stories of the past became embodied in the present. This type of response to the interview schedule might be specific to the topic of physical activity and other experiences where the body is a central feature. Yet regardless of whether such embodied experiences of interviews are exclusive to stories of bodily practices, the way that the interviewees brought their stories to life through their bodies provided a point of connection between narrative and realist perspectives of life history interviews. Both lived experiences (realist perspective) and the role of the interview context (narrative perspective) can be extracted for analysis from a life history transcript. However, if capturing authenticity and meaning are as essential to life history research as scholars suggest, we might look to pay more attention to the embodied aspects of interviews in physical activity research.

July 2015

Impaired sporting bodies and Father-Son Relationships

James Brighton

In April's ETM I discussed some of the embodied experiences of disabled athletes that I spent time with during my PhD research. As well as my own interrupted bodily biography, another reason for my interest in researching the lives of disabled people has arisen from my relationship with my Dad, a theme I will now explore further following on from last month's ETM where John introduced an aspect of his research that is incorporating life history methods to explore reflections of physical activity and family relationships.

As a kid I loved sport and spent all my time either playing it or dreaming about it. Just being physically active gave me huge joy and pleasure and helped me to enact my active imagination through my body. My Dad was a huge influence in this interest and my subsequent sporting career, but his earliest embodied memories were somewhat different. He has Polio, short for poliomyelitis, but also known as "infantile paralysis" in his lower right leg. As I have got older I have talked to him more and more about his experiences of childhood – which as his son I find it hard to listen to. As the World Health Organisation (2011) recognises though, "there are still polio victims living in our communities – they have stories to tell".

A couple of years ago my Dad's Mum (my Gran) died and we were faced with the poignant task of clearing out her house so it could be sold. Stepping through the front door the coldness and emptiness (which was in stark contrast to the love and warmth that I had previously known) struck me. Looking around I couldn't help but think about how much removing all of my grandparents personal belongings revealed about their lives – and the lives of their families. Amongst the boxes of books, clothes, ornaments and collectables (including letters and artefacts from the 2nd World War in which my Grandad had been a soldier) I came across the lower leg brace that my father wore as a child. I was immediately shocked by its size. It was so small, about eight inches long with rusted metal rods running down either side.

Attached were dark leather buckles that kept his leg secure that were only an inch and a half in diameter. The crudeness of this contraption did not seem fit to wrap around the delicate limb that it secured and I struggled to imagine my Dad – who I had always known as so big and strong, being so small.

Later that evening, I thought more about what life would have been like for him as a kid and how different it would have been from my idyllic and active childhood. So I asked him. He told me without any sense of self-pity or unfairness, how he spent much of his young years in hospitals either recovering from surgery (of which he had many) or being imprisoned in a hospital bed due to severe pain, sickness and fatigue, all associated symptoms of Polio. Much of the time in-between was spent at home, resting or recovering from illness where my Gran would tutor him. His opportunities to play with other children were limited and he was unable to learn new sports or experience the pleasure, enjoyment or imagination that being active brings. He was never able to simply run – something he has always longed to do.

Surviving Polio (when about 3% of the population died from the disease) and growing up into his teens Dad also told me of the challenges and tensions that adolescence brought. He reminisced how at a tough inner city high school he was scared that he would be bullied by the other boys that would call him a “cripple” and was petrified that girls would not find him attractive as a result of his disability. However, having adapted to his impaired lower leg (which has no muscle and very little movement) he also told me how he had developed a love for sport and the growing importance it had in his life. Not only did he find out that he was naturally gifted and able to learn sports quickly allowing him to make up for lost time, he also appreciated the benefits that constructing an athletic and typically masculine identity had on challenging stereotypes of his disability. Initially, he took up as many aggressive sports as possible, including boxing for the school team. Later he became an accomplished Cricketer and Tennis player. He desperately wanted to play rugby, but he was simply not mobile enough around the pitch with his paralysed leg.

Sport has since been a lifelong presence in my Dad’s life, which in turn has shaped my own sporting career and provides the basis of my close relationship with him. Reflecting back now, my earliest memories are framed by not just playing sport, but

playing with him. He taught me how to play cricket in the back garden and tennis at the local courts and did his best to play football with me even though he struggled. He bought me shiny new sports equipment including new cricket bats and footballs that I was fascinated with and took me to games and training when he could. As I grew up, he taught me, but never pressured me, to find myself through sport too. Part of this was not only assisting my participation but also introducing me to the rituals and pleasures that make up what Wellard (2013) describes as the “whole package” of sport including having a beer afterwards and engaging in appropriate forms of talk. It was through my Dad therefore that I learnt about sport and what it was to be a heterosexual, able (hegemonically masculine) man.

As I became more successful in my own sports career, I wanted to use my body to do what his impaired body had prevented him from doing by competing in high level sport. Aged 19 I was well on the way to realising these ambitions and making him proud by playing junior level cricket for my county and football for a semi-professional club. However, a career ending injury initially diagnosed as a “ruptured anterior cruciate ligament and severe bucket handle tear of lateral meniscus” but resulting in long term degeneration prematurely ended these dreams. After the fifth surgery to my knee I remember Dad coming to see me in hospital. Sitting next to me on sheets covered in blood and sweat I felt afraid that I could not enjoy sport again and ashamed that it was my body that had now let us both down. Sensing my feelings he gave me hug and wrapped me up in his still muscular upper body. Exiting hospital a few weeks later, I was provided with my own leg brace that I was told to wear when possible.

I have since struggled to come to terms with my impairment as I had no storyline beyond high level sport on which to fall back on. However, like my Dad I have learnt to manage the limitations of my body and am still able to enjoy cricket and tennis at an amateur level. I have also learned to enjoy fitness and physical activity in different ways by for example pushing my body to its limits in a gym where I can mediate the pain I experience, or by busying myself with alternative physical tasks such as manual labour around the house and garden. Perhaps the symbolic importance of competing in high level sport is less significant to us both now and we focus more upon health, wellbeing and enjoyment once again along with more pressing needs to

be providers for our families. Even in these new activities though, we still understand each other through our broken bodies.

Notes:

1. World Health Organization (2011) World report on disability, Geneva: WHO
2. Wellard, I. (2013) *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* London: Routledge.

August 2015

Understanding past sporting experiences in the present

Ian Wellard

Historians will always tell us about the importance of understanding the past. I agree with this, but when I think about things that have happened in the past I understand them in terms of my present state of mind and my predictions for what might happen in the future (or what I would like to happen). In June and July's ETMs, John and James demonstrate the significance of what has happened in the past and how we can as individuals (and academic researchers) gain a deeper understanding of the impact of previous experiences and relationships upon our orientation to the world or, in this case, our engagement with sport and physical activity (or even our bodies). While John focussed upon the methodological aspects of employing life history approaches, James reflected upon how his relationship with his father was instrumental in his subsequent engagement with sport. In doing so they both highlight the importance of past memories in terms of how they shape the ways in which we act or are able to act in the present. Here though, it is not just a recollection of 'what happened' but a much more reflexive process in the way that Jean-Paul Sartre outlined when he suggested that we need to look backward in order to understand the future by adopting a 'progressive-regressive' approach to the way we think about the present and how we act upon it.

I want to continue this train of thought so that I can also look back at some of my early experiences of sport and physical activity and reveal similarities and differences in the way that those foundational experiences shaped my orientation to sport in my adult life. Like James, I have fond memories of my early experiences of sport and physical activity and my relationship with my father was pivotal in my subsequent continued love of sport and physical activity throughout my life. However, unlike James, sport was never considered for me as a potential career and neither do I think that I have ever wanted it to be as such. I have written elsewhere (Wellard 2009, 2013) about the importance of childhood experiences of sport and

physical activity and in my case these were gained within the immediate context of my family and with friends outside school. School sport and PA did not cater to my interests and I consider myself lucky that I was able to flourish because of the opportunities that my parents provided and the experiences that I gained with friends and external clubs.

In James's ETM he portrayed the strong relationship he had with his father and this was obviously the focus for this piece. This is not to suggest that he did not have equally meaningful relationships with his mother and siblings. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that James's relationship with his father was also central in the formation of his love of and orientation towards sports and his subsequent decision to pursue a career in it. One thing that stands out when I try to remember my earlier experiences of sport was the importance of weekends as a time and place to do sport and be with my dad, my brothers and my friends. I describe in the introduction of my book, *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment*, how Saturday mornings were devoted to my dad taking me swimming at the local pool. This was a regular occurrence and something that I looked forward to throughout the week. But it was not just about swimming it was about being with my dad and a time of the week which was very much about having fun with my dad as well as my mum and my brothers. Dad was never around in the week because of his work commitments, and looking back now I feel that he felt a need to make the most of the weekends with his family. As he loved sport, family activities were very much based around some form of physical or sporting activity. Consequently, I see connections between the resilience (and maybe stubbornness) displayed by James's dad and mine in terms of the way that they were determined that their children should be able to experience sport positively and in ways that would be enjoyable. However, whereas James's dad had to overcome the barriers of physical disability, my dad had to overcome the barriers of work constraints and time. Nevertheless, in both cases they were able to find ways to work around the barriers.

In presenting some of these 'thoughts' I am not trying to portray an idyllic version of a childhood. To an extent, the relationship that I had with my dad was less than ideal (if there is an ideal) in that his role could possibly be viewed as part-time, much like the experiences of many other children. Weekdays I hardly saw him and when I did he was usually tired or grumpy and less willing (or able) to engage with us. It is also

interesting to note the 'absence' of my mother (and James's). My mother loved sport too and was a good tennis player but the 'structure' of our family imposed roles upon her that made it equally as difficult for her to engage in maybe the way that she would have liked. At the time we accepted this as normal family life and when my dad wasn't around during the week, there were many other things available to occupy us, such as school, playing with friends and going to sports clubs when I got older.

The point I am making here relates to the importance of recognising the influence that early experiences within the family have upon subsequent orientation to sport. The memories that I describe are undoubtedly subjective but, nevertheless, can on further examination be seen to connect with other (individual's) narratives of early sporting experiences. So, rather than being merely subjective accounts that can only be understood as one-off, indulgent personal stories, these narratives help us understand the complexities and intricacies of early forms of socialisation to everyday life as well as orientation to sport. Above anything else, these narratives help us to NOT fall into the trap of making sweeping generalisations that certain forms of family life are necessarily always better than others and that sport is always a panacea to cure all the ills of modern life - something which politicians and sport development proponents tend to do so again and again.

Note:

1. Sartre, J-P. (1968) *Search for a Method* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
2. Wellard, I. (2009) *Sport, Masculinities and the Body* New York: Routledge.
3. Wellard, I. (2013) *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* London: Routledge.

September 2015

Understanding Feelings of Happiness and Well-being: the Effects and Experiences of Physical Activity

John Day

Attempting to measure well-being has become quite popular recently, with even the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron setting out a happiness 'agenda'. However, most thinking about well-being has focused upon conventional, quantitative studies comprising large scale surveys and statistical analyses. Within the context of sport and physical activity the question which usually frames research is *how might being active contribute to well-being?* Studying how someone feels immediately before, during and after physical activity participation by asking them to rank their experiences on a scale between 1 and 5 is a popular method for assessing subjective well-being (SWB). These surveys offer a reliable, valid and legitimate measure of SWB because the way in which the human brain initiates feelings of well-being is similar, if not the same, between individuals. This is the reductionist perspective of well-being, advocated by a number of scholars in happiness economics and the behavioural sciences.

Regardless of the methods employed, a recurring theme in the research findings of studies on physical activity and well-being, and the data I have collected within my own research, is that participants refer to how being active plays a central role in feeling good about themselves and better about their bodies. The feeling 'good' and 'better' dimensions of well-being are something that quantitative methods of collection and analysis are able to represent by way of comparison between individuals. Although in this type of research, the self and the body, the instruments through which people's well-being is manifested and embodied, are removed from the well-being experience and treated as static. While the body's physiological response to being active and feelings of well-being are similar, and thus comparable between individuals, the lived experience of attaining feelings of well-being through the self and the body are contextual. That is, the *causes* of feelings of human well-being are context-specific and would seem to be evoked by the environments in

which the self and body are situated. If the over-arching objective of the well-being research agenda is to make a meaningful offering to the understanding of human well-being and have any real-world implications, a contextual rather than a reduced conceptualisation of well-being is essential.

One way to go about this is to adopt a biographical and longitudinal qualitative approach to understanding physical activity and well-being. For instance, the life history interviews that I have undertaken in my research so far suggest that the feel good effect of being active can be prolonged following physical activity participation via the bodily sensations encountered as a consequence. One person made reference to how his body felt the day after a weights session at the gym, 'waking up in the mornin and ya ache, that's a good feelin, cos ya know, you know you've worked for that, you've made that happen and that means there's guna be a change or there's growin, there's growth that's guna happen'. The same participant also referred to how weight training made him feel better about himself. When I probed him further about exactly how it made him feel better, he responded, 'I suppose it comes after a couple of weeks when you, you know when you're able to do normal routines, or normal jobs, but beforehand you'd feel a bit, you'd get a bit tired or maybe get a bit out of breath, or you'd find it a bit of a struggle to lift something in a certain way. Whether it be with work or a house chore and then all of sudden it, it seems to become a bit easier and that is a nice physical change cos you know you've done that, you've made it happen'. Being active made a valuable contribution to his well-being because of the way it assisted him in performing physical tasks within his everyday work and household contexts. Thus, such methods provide a more detailed insight into both the peculiar pleasure of experiencing 'good' feelings of bodily pain as a result of physical activity involvement and connecting the functional benefits of being active to people's lives.

The causes and consequences of physical activity engagement upon well-being are influenced by a plethora of social, psychological and physiological contextual factors. Meaning that reductionist representations of well-being are void of human experiences of these factors that give rise to the sought after feelings of well-being. Richard Layard, an expert in the new science of happiness, is supportive of survey methods in bettering our understanding of human happiness because 'every life is complicated, but it is vital to separate out the factors that really count'. I am not convinced whether this is always possible and am more inclined to think that it is the

multiple 'complications' of human life which shape the contemporary personal and political quest for enhanced well-being.

Note

1. Richard Layard discusses the science of happiness in his book, *Happiness: Lessons from a new Science* (2011). The quote I use can be found on page 6.

October 2015

Gym Bodies (1): Personal training

Ian Wellard

For most of my life, tennis and swimming have been my major sporting pastimes. I have always liked doing other things, but these two sports tended to take priority. However, throughout my life I have always trained in some way whether this has been in terms of going to the gym or doing training that involved drills, cardio and flexibility. I don't think of myself as a sports fanatic but then again I imagine a lot of my friends would say that I am – suffice to say that sport is a big part of my life. Or maybe I should qualify that by saying it is physical activity rather than sport that is a big part of my life. In recent years, however, I have had some problems with my eyesight which has meant that I have not been able to play tennis in the way that I have done in the past or would like to continue to do so. This has meant that I've been playing less and I've been looking at other activities to fill the gap. Going to the gym has therefore become one of the ways in which I have been able to fill this gap. I refer to this in one of my books (1), how going to the gym fits in with my lifestyle and my body in terms of what the gym offers and how I am able to engage in it. I suppose that because I have been working out at the gym more and tennis no longer holds the same appeal that it had before (because of the way that I am able to play) I found that going to the gym has become an even more frequent activity. Therefore, when my Department at work announced that it was to offer a range of strength and conditioning activities (as part of an overhaul of activities that they were able to provide for students and the general public) I thought I would take advantage of one of these - a series of personal training sessions that were based upon Olympic lifting and weight lifting techniques. These were one-to-one sessions which were designed to look at and improve form and technique in strength in strength and conditioning exercises.

I have always thought that gym based personal training is an interesting phenomenon, particularly from a sociological perspective in terms of its relationship

to a highly commercialised 'fitness industry' in the way that Brian Pronger (2) describes. Because of this, I have generally considered personal training as different to traditional sports coaching and it is only more recently that I have had cause to consider why I have developed these views. So whereas I had always valued the coaching I received in tennis, either on a one-to-one basis or as part of a team, this view was generated through my understanding of coaching and the respect that I held for the skills and expertise of the coaches who guided me. I have not always been so convinced about the capabilities of the personal trainers that I have seen at the gyms I have attended and this has influenced subsequent deliberations about whether I could trust placing 'my body in their hands'. In the case of the sessions offered at work, however, I knew that the person who was running the sessions was a very capable trainer and educator, with a substantial background in sport and exercise training and strength and conditioning. By mentioning this, it makes me realise that there are many important considerations one has to make even before getting to the stage of taking part in an activity like this. Here, the notion of trust and the recognition of the dynamics of a one-to-one encounter highlight some of the complex relationships that operate in such situations. It is not just a case of 'going to the gym' or 'getting a personal trainer' but rather negotiating a series of social encounters that offer a range of contrasting outcomes. These relationships are very much what Foucault talks about when he describes *relationships of power* (3). These are relationships that are not governed by forms of straight-forward dominance where one individual has power *over* another, but are much more complex and dynamic. A session with a personal trainer provides a good example, precisely because it highlights the forms of power that are not only operating between the participants but are influenced by a range of competing social discourses generated about the body, health, fitness, age, ability, consumer culture and so much more.

From the outset I found that I really enjoyed the sessions. They were a combination of instruction and practice, along with some intensive work outs. I liked being pushed physically and also relished the serious focus, in particular, being in a learning situation. I enjoyed learning about the capabilities of my body and being guided in routines and exercises that I had subconsciously (or probably consciously) avoided when training on my own. At the same time, I enjoyed the subtle forms of power

relationships that I mention above, where I was the one that had to follow the lead and be told what to do, in the same way that I enjoy having opportunities to listen to a lecture rather than presenting one. The sessions, therefore, embraced a range of physical and social experiences and allowed me to feel comfortable putting myself 'in the hands' of the trainer. The important point here is that in these circumstances, and within this context, I am complicit in this relationship of power and allow myself to be at times subservient because I recognise that I have something to gain from this exchange. I am, however, aware of the subjectivity in these accounts of my experiences and I am sure this is not always the case in the relationships that are forged within the context of many other gym spaces and settings where those engaging are entering with different expectations and motivations and where other factors might be more significant (such as losing weight or income from 'clients').

These sessions continued until the summer of 2015. During this time I became aware that my trainer (as well as her partner) was heavily involved in CrossFit. Until then I didn't really know much about CrossFit. However, further investigation revealed that it was an activity which drew heavily on cross training techniques and, in particular, elements of gymnastics, weight training, and aerobic fitness. It is probably not surprising that I took to the sessions bearing in mind that I had engaged in a number of these activities in various forms throughout my life and have always enjoyed fitness related activities. So when my trainer incorporated many of the core activities found in CrossFit, I was curious to find out more. It is interesting that as I have started to learn more about the correct techniques and form required for Olympic lifting, my enthusiasm to embrace CrossFit has increased much more than I expected when I first started the personal training sessions (4).

Notes:

1. Wellard, I. (2013) *Sport, Fun and Enjoyment: an embodied approach* London: Routledge.
2. Pronger, B, (2002) *Body Facism: Salvation in the Technology of Fitness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

3. I am referring specifically to Foucault's discussion of relationships of power in Foucault, M. (1985) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Tavistock Publications.
4. My subsequent engagement with CrossFit has extended to undertaking a period of training to see whether I can make the qualifying grades (in my age group) for the CrossFit Games. My experiences doing this training are being recorded on the following blog: ianembodiedresearch.blogspot.com

November 2015

Gym Bodies (2): CrossFit

James Brighton

Back in July, Ian and I took a break from our everyday routines to take a trip to Malmö in Sweden to concentrate on some fieldwork for our new book on gym cultures (with Amy as third author). Ian has always loved the area for its clean living, outdoor life and freer attitudes towards bodily presentation and performance. We hoped that escaping our claustrophobic academic environments and the confined ideologies of the body that pervade contemporary British society would be fruitful to encourage critical thought and also allow us to experience alternative fitness cultures. The plan was that Ian would attend a few of the gyms in the city and I would sign up to the local Crossfit 'box' and attend some classes and we would be able to share our experiences. This month's ETM therefore focuses on my first-hand experience of Crossfit, and follows on from Ian's reflections last month of his experiences using gyms and being 'trained'.

CrossFit Malmö: "Home of the good guys"

Exhausted and unable to move I lay flat on my back, my arms lifelessly spread out next to me, my knees bent and my feet tucked up underneath me. My ribs are violently pumping up and down as my chest expands and contracts. Gasping for air my throat is dry and I have the familiar metallic taste of blood surfacing from my screaming lungs¹. Droplets of sweat on my skin have joined together to form little salty streams that make their way to ground forming small puddles next to me. My t-shirt is saturated and I am grateful for its wetness clinging to my body cooling me down. The muscles in my arms and legs are weak and shaking from the intensity of the physical exertion I have just undertaken. Closing my eyes, I have little consciousness of where I am or who I am – my attention is solely focused on recovery and returning my body to a more comfortable state of being. All I can think about is how much this fucking hurts yet simultaneously how much I love this feeling and am becoming addicted to it.

¹ This common feeling is termed 'CrossFit lung' or 'Iron lung' at my regular box in the UK

Laying forlorn for 30 seconds or so I manage to lift my arm and extend the fingers on my hand to 'touch 5'² the coach and a couple of others around me who have seemingly recovered far quicker than me. After a few more seconds, lifting my head off the matted floor, I am just about able to sit up and wrap my arms around my legs and comfort myself in a childlike position in an attempt to make me feel more secure. After a couple of attempts I feel ready to consciously enter the material and social world again. Putting my weight on one leg and then the next I half stand up, stopping and resting for a few more seconds by bending over and supporting myself by placing my hands on my knees. Sweat continues to cascade over my face as I stay motionless watching the droplets drip onto the dirty black mat and mixing with chalk dust as they land. Feeling more like a toddler who is learning to walk than an adult man, I look behind me at the 'sweat angel' that has formed in the shape of my body on the floor and manage to walk over to the window and the promise of fresh air.

Sticking my head through the window I take big gasps and let the late afternoon Scandinavian sun flood over my body. Lifting up my still heavy head and opening my eyes, I see rays of light shimmering on the surface of the ocean in the distance creating little dancing angels. Wiping the saliva away from my lips with my t-shirt, the aridness of my mouth is now calling for my attention. Still stumbling, I make my way to the wooden bench at the side of the 'box' and search for my bottle amongst the others that have been placed on the floor. Locating the correct one, I unscrew the top and lift it up to my desiccated lips, tip it vertically and attack the fluid inside and the promise of rehydration. Letting the water pour down my throat and spill over the front of my t-shirt I rest more easily. Others are already busily taking the brackets off Olympic weightlifting bars, sliding off the blue, yellow and green plates and returning them to the designated stacks.

Feeling obliged, I stand up and start to dismantle the bar in front of me that has 84kg of weight on it. I grip the shiny silver bracket between my fingers and my clammy palm and ease off the end of the bar, then repeat on the other side. Taking the plates off one by one I join the other sweating bodies clearing the area before the arrival of the next class. A few of the younger, fitter members are chatting to each other in Swedish and laughing. I make eye contact with one or two and they seemingly

² Like a high 5 but done with the arm straight out and lateral to the body

acknowledge my pain in a friendly and knowing way having just experienced the same physical brutality. Still soaked, my body is now recovering, my breathing becomes more regulated, muscular movement more controlled, and blood pumps around my body more slowly and purposefully.

Just as my mind is beginning to look forward to the pleasures of basking in post-exercise glow, waves of nausea begin to spread over me. I head back over to my spot on the bench and take a few more gulps of water knowing I need to fight this feeling again. I run my hand through my drenched hair and focus again on what needs to be done next in an attempt to ignore the pain and sickness my body is producing. I manage to slide off my Reebok Nano trainers (which everyone else in the class seems to be wearing in a multitude of differing colours and patterns) and slip on my flip flops in the hope that just putting them on will relax me further. I stand up again and walk over to the reception desk and thank the coach in English. When asked "how was the work out?" I respond "I think I need an Ambulance!" Although joking, I am seriously wondering if I am able to ride the bike I had hired the few kilometres back to our hotel through rush hour. After a few more minutes' recovery I find the strength to take some photos inside the 'box', limply walk to my bike and free wheel through the industrial estate and onto the cycle path and back to meet Ian in the city.

In the account above I have attempted to describe my embodied experiences immediately after taking part in a *WOD (workout of the day)* at CrossFit Malmo. The class consisted of the following structure which is aimed at metabolic-conditioning (*Met-con* for short):

Warm Up:

800m run followed by:

12 reps > 9 reps > 6 reps

1) kips 2) kettle bar swings 3) strict pull-ups

WOD:

7 burpees > 5 power cleans (84kg) > 3 muscle ups

To complete every second minute for 20 minutes (total exercise in 20 minutes is therefore 70 burpees; 50 cleans; 30 muscle ups)

My intention in this months' ETM is therefore mainly to provide embodied insight into the 'intense embodiment' (Allen-Collinson & Owten, 2015) I was experiencing at this time and hint at further thoughts which require analysis in the chapter in the forthcoming book. Of course deeper experience and interpretation is required to provide a more considered conceptualisation of CrossFit but here I hope I have at least illuminated a sense of empathy to the embodied pains, pleasures and addictions that were evoked by this work out. Just so that you don't worry for my wellbeing, it took me a few hours and lots of cold drinks to fully recover and I'm afraid to say I was poor company for Ian for the rest of the evening!

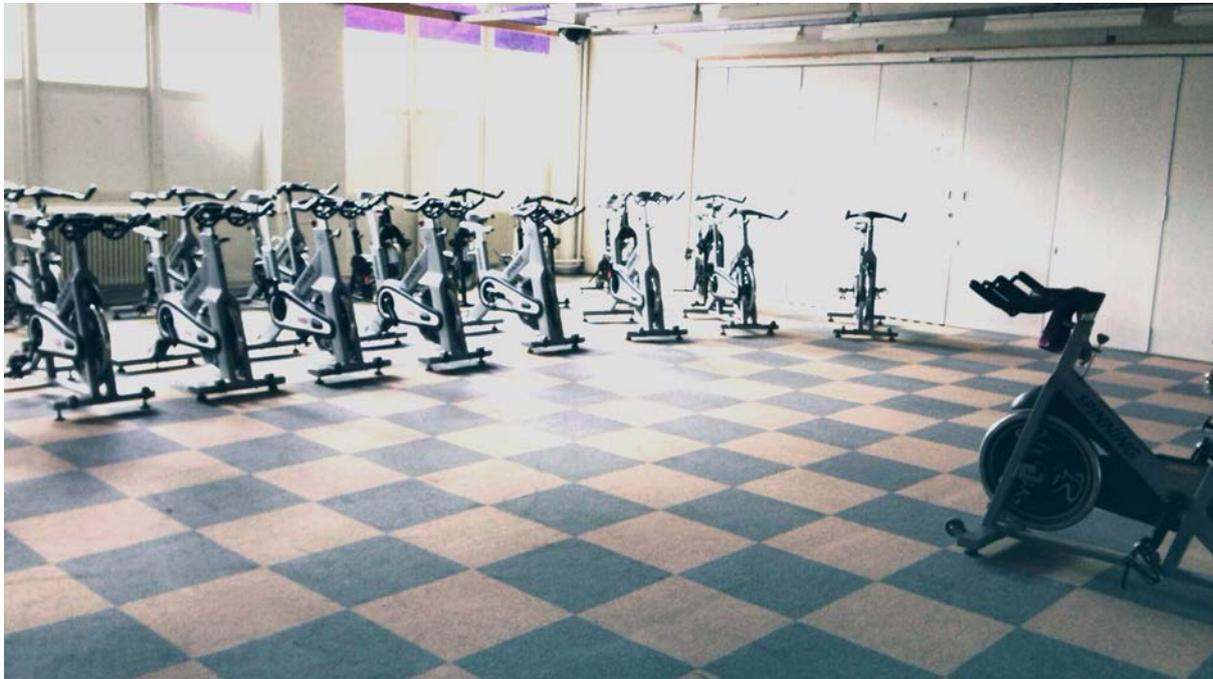
Note:

Allen-Collinson, J. & Owten, H. (2015) Intense Embodiment: Senses of Heat in Women's Running and Boxing. *Body & Society*, 21 (2): 245-268.

December 2015

Gym Bodies (3): Spinning

Amy Clark



Indoor cycling is a relatively new gym activity that emerged in the 1990s after the initial step aerobics craze. Fitness giant Reebok had a hand in this phenomenon too, as the term ‘spin’ is actually a trademark of its own indoor cycling program (1) which eventually became synonymous with the activity. The concept of indoor cycling is fairly simple: a room full of stationary bikes, with an instructor who leads participants through various workouts which incorporate both cardio and strength exercises combined with a pulsating music playlist.

I became an indoor cycling instructor in 2012 although I use the term ‘spin’ or ‘spinning’ for the classes I instruct at the gym and refer to the participants as ‘spinners’. When I had started out as a gym instructor, I thought that gaining a spinning qualification might be a useful addition to my cv. However, previously, the thought of doing exercise to music classes and Zumba classes had never really appealed to me as I didn’t like the dance aspect of these. I did have a gymnastics

background and had competed for thirteen years, although thinking back now even my gymnastics routines were regimented and I always considered myself to have two left feet. Nevertheless, I found that I really enjoyed 'spinning' and have participated as an instructor and 'spinner' ever since. In order to understand what it is that I enjoy about this activity, I have attempted to reflect upon my experiences in the spin room. The following is what could loosely be described as a sensual ethnography of my experiences in the spin room (2).

When I enter the spin room, it is dark and empty, almost neglected. A mechanical whirring from an overworked fan is echoing throughout the room. The windows are open and the room smells fresh. Outside, traffic noise can be heard. As I turn the lights on, a sudden change in appearance occurs as the light bounces into the room and reflects off the mirrors.

I drop my bag down behind my spin bike and take out my disc selection. I flick through the forty different play lists I have created so far over the years and finally choose a disc that I consider will deliver a good 'torture' session, one where I can push my body to a maximal level while accompanied by a good song. All the time, commanding others to push their own bodies to the limit. I will be the one dictating the way in which the session will run and possibly how they will experience this spin class. My choice of playlist is crucial as this will determine whether more sprints or hills climbs are included within the class.

The spinners slowly start to enter the room. The majority of these are my regulars although every now and then a beginner or newcomer will join in. They normally retreat straight to the back row of spin bikes, expressing what seems like nervousness when I ask them if they have participated in spinning before so I can go through the bike set up with them. The more advanced spinners claim their usual bike in the front row, towels and water bottles are lined up on the bikes and I can hear murmurs of anticipation and friendly laughter before the class starts.

When the time arrives to start the class, I press the button on the stereo and as the CD closes a rush of adrenaline and anticipation flows through my body. I adjust the volume of the speaker, normally placing the dial on the same volume level. I take a deep breath and look down on my bike, making sure it is in line with the tiled floor. Heavy, new beats fill the room while I sit on my bike and adjust my foot straps,

making sure they are not too tight. I look up and all eyes are on me, ready and waiting for my first command. My body feels like it is moulded to this bike and this is a feeling that I recognise as a familiar sensation. The seat, handle bars and resistance all work together with me. When I start to pedal I can feel the metal against the bottom of my feet. If my feet aren't correctly aligned they will start to ache and hurt, so I make sure every time that they are secure by doing a quick 'shuffle' with my feet whilst I'm seated. This familiar practice took a while for me to adjust to, I remember when I first started feeling very uncomfortable on the bike seat, but it gradually got better each time. I always tell the new spinners this too, so they are aware that it will get better and it is a normal experience to have. I also joke and say that my bottom is now moulded into the shape of the bike seat!

I start with the warm-up, stretching and making sure everyone gets used to the pace and the 'feel' of the bike. My body starts to flow with the beat as I sing to the songs that I have chosen to include within the playlist. In any other context I never find myself singing in front of such a large group of people, but in front of my spin class, I find this fun, comforting and acceptable and I use it to aid me with my breathing and shouting.

Gradually as my body heats, the usual signs occur. My heart rate increases, my breath becoming warmer and as the class progresses from the warm-up to sprints, jumps, endurance and hill-climbs, I start to sweat. I'm working at my best when I'm sweating. It's interesting how sweating in front of class is acceptable in the spin room. My eyes and neck are stinging from the sweat dripping down my body. I can smell the perfume being released from the pours on my drenched body. I feel a sense of empowerment by the demands that this spin bike is placing on my body and the thought that my classes and instruction might be helping the other spinners to feel this way too.

Grabbing my towel, I quickly wipe the excess sweat away. I'm not feeling conscious of how I may be looking, my hair starts to curl more and my make-up is wearing off because of the sweat. I wear tight clothing when I'm on a spin bike as I'm sure this aids my performance. I don't like the feeling of baggy clothing as it leaves me cold and damp during and after a workout. I remember how I used to wear brightly

coloured clothing, but over time I found myself choosing to wear darker clothing, so as not to draw too much attention to myself when I'm in the main gym.

The spinners are concentrating on their own efforts and appear quiet, flushed, sweating and breathing heavily as they wipe themselves with their towels. The flywheels of the spin bikes are working as I can hear their distinct grinding against the resistance. My bike is keeping up with me, my body being pushed to its limit. There is a burning sensation in my legs and my hands gripping tightly to the rubber handle bars. As I shout out every command, the spinners follow, pushing themselves further. I'm sure they trust me. Sweat drops off my body, some splashing on the frame of the spin bike. My mouth is dry although relief is at hand as I replenish quickly with my usual choice of water. I always let the spinners know when they have two songs left before the cool down and some say this helps them with a final push towards the end of the class while others gesture (some with two fingers, others with facial expressions) their dissatisfaction for knowing.

After 45 minutes the class slowly decreases to a cool-down. Less frenetic music fills the room and the resistance on the bike is released. I can hear the sighs of relief and satisfaction that follow. Some spinners even cry out with gleeful cheers! As we start stretching I can feel my muscles slightly start to pull and ache as each one is manipulated. My ears are humming. The mirrors in the room are steamed up – I always love it when this happens as it signals to me just how hard everyone has worked out.

The fan is still hard at work, trying to provide relief to the class with some cooler air. As my breathing slowly decreases, I get off my bike and looking around I can see that all of the other spinners are doing the same as me. I count out hygiene wipes to make sure the bikes are left clean for the next class. As I hand out them out, always starting from the same direction, I thank everyone. A feeling of satisfaction flushes through my body knowing everyone has had a good workout - I can see it in their faces.

As I wipe down my own bike, I feel further satisfaction (is this a form of euphoria?) as I remove my sweat, evidence of my hard work, off the bike leaving it clean and ready for another demanding workout. Endorphins are still buzzing through my body when the spinners depart and say goodbye. I look back into the room and as I switch

the lights off it looks empty and neglected again. I'm looking forward to the next workout already.

Notes:

1. Newhall, K. (2010) 'You Spin Me Right Round, Baby', in Malin, J. (2010) *My life at the gym: feminist perspectives on community through the body.* Albany: State University of New York Press
2. Sparkes, A.C. (2009) *Ethnography and The Senses: Challenges and Possibilities.* *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise.* 1(1), p.21-35.

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