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**Beyond Boundaries: The Development and Potential of Ethnography in the Study of Sport and Physical Culture**

Kass Gibson and Michael Atkinson

## **Introduction**

Klein (2014, p.71) argues anthropology contributes cross-cultural analysis, transnational orientation, and ethnographic methodology to the study of sport and physical culture.<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt, these three elements are prominent in socio-cultural sports literature.

However, such contributions are doubtfully attributable to anthropologists of sport alone given the “benign neglect” the sub-field receives, according to Klein (2014). Indeed, ethnographic approaches to the study of sport and physical culture have been typically framed in dialogue with very traditional, and now post-structural, sociological concerns and themes regarding agency, structure, power and inequality. For example, symbolism and ritual in fandom and participation has been theorised with reference to Bourdieu (Spaaji & Anderson, 2010) and Durkheim (Birrell, 1981; Serazio, 2013) rather than anthropological scholars and studies of ritual.

Academic focus on sport and physical culture has developed primarily within physical education and kinesiology programmes. In such environments, ethnographers are increasingly required to justify their methodology rather than object of study; scholars of sport and physical culture in mainstream sociology (or anthropology) departments face the opposite problem (Atkinson, 2011; Klein 2014). As such, Sage’s (1997, p.333) observation that “there has been no notable growth in the number of sociologists who claim sport as a speciality in the past 20 years” still rings true. Therefore, while scholars studying sport are much less apologetic about their topic of study and field, a view within the academy that sees sport as “just a game” and its study as of lower scholarly merit is still evident.<sup>2</sup>

However, sport is a complex global phenomenon that represents, reflects, and

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term physical culture here to refer to expressions of embodiment such as exercise, physical activity and fitness practices to move beyond the “empirically limiting” nature of the term sport, rather than the Physical Cultural Studies project, or physical culturalist movement (cf. Silk, Andrews, & Thorpe, 2017 p.1).

<sup>2</sup> See Grainger (2011 pp.558-559) for a discussion of this phenomena

reproduces cultural and social practices, values, and norms. Similarly, exercise and physical activity practices provide rich and nuanced sites for interrogating and understanding complex behaviours, habits, values, and practices. Both reflect empirical shifts in the academy towards attending to the position of human bodies in contemporary society. Furthermore, while definitions remain elusive (cf. Andrews, 2008), sport and exercise are bodily practices that have diffused globally from Anglo/European homes and are marked by (the pursuit of) efficiently performing bodies (Maguire, 2004; McKenzie, 2013). We begin this paper by reviewing the emergence and development (i.e., travels) of ethnographic investigation of sport and physical culture. In doing so, we highlight how the empirical site of ethnographic work belies significant changes and development in assumptions about, and theorizing of, movement practices. We demonstrate that while some anthropologists have attended to play and games in their analyses, sport and exercise have largely been ignored. Ethnographers of sport and exercise have similarly ignored anthropology. The transdisciplinary travels of ethnography in sport and exercise, then, have been marked by terminological slippage and different emphases in empirical focus on culture (Midol & Broyer, 1995). More specifically, we note how anthropologically-informed ethnographies are primarily concerned with cross-cultural analyses whereas sociologically-informed ethnographies have homed in on subcultural analyses. Following this we critically outline the emergence of Physical Cultural Studies (PCS) and framing of ethnographic investigation of sport and exercise therein. Rather than exhuming existing debates about the originality and uniqueness of the PCS enterprise, we highlight the need for the consideration of pleasure and decentering of the researcher in the future travels of ethnographic studies of sport and physical culture.

### **Anthropology: Games, play, body cultures, sport**

Anthropologists Midol and Broyer (1995, p.203) argue that sport has not been meticulously examined within their discipline because sport is not seen as “culture in the true

anthropological sense of the word.” Historically, at least, this can be attributed to Wolf’s (1982, p.16) critical identification that “sociology studies the West, while anthropology studies the rest.” The aforementioned cross-cultural and transnational perspectives have trumped sport and physical culture as a site for ethnographic investigation (Markula, 2016). However, charges of fascination with exotic others levelled at contemporary anthropology and anthropologists are unfair. Indeed, “culture” has undergone significant and serious reconsideration, and notions of exoticism have been subject to longstanding critiques (e.g., Clifford, 1988). Nonetheless, in sport and physical culture Markula (2016) highlights exoticism frames most anthropologically oriented ethnographies of sport and exercise. Furthermore, Klein (2014) documents the illegitimacy of sport within the anthropological community, listing a number of excellent ethnographers who shifted empirical focus away from sport for the sake of their careers in anthropology. Against such a backdrop Klein (2014) describes Noel Dyck’s self-identification as a sport anthropologist as “brave.”

Despite the field-wide reluctance to engage sport as serious subject of inquiry, anthropologists have long attended to the cultural significance of games and play.<sup>3</sup> Conceptualising sport as a type of game, Blanchard (1995) retrospectively identifies the importance of sport for anthropologists and ethnographers. Similarly, Klein (2014), focusing on the ceremonial and social functionality of games, claims Geertz’s (1973) study of cock fighting as a proto-typical ethnography of sport and example of the importance of sport (as representative of games) in conducting analyses of cultural practice writ large. Rather than demonstrating good practice or the value of attending to sport in ethnographic analyses, however, such claims are reminiscent of tactics used by sociologist of sport whereby retrospective appeal to disciplinary canon is motivated as part of (largely failed) attempts at legitimizing the field (Malcolm, 2012). As such, Bolin and Granskog’s (2003) argument that

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Roberts, Arth, and Bush’s (1959) tripartite classificatory system

“the anthropological study of sport has a long history under the appellation of games” (p.9) is far from compelling given they also note “sport and exercise ethnography of today is still in its infancy” (p.8).

Early ethnographic studies of sport conducted by scholars trained and/or working in anthropology departments include Frankenburg’s (1957) investigation of the connections between the football club, and village activities, friendships, and politics in North Wales, and Fox’s (1961) connection of superstition in Hopi culture to the ways in which baseball was played and the meanings it carried. From such humble beginnings (a handful of) anthropologists have addressed sport (especially baseball)<sup>4</sup> to build understandings of cultural reproduction and resistance (e.g., Gmelch, 1972, 2006; Klein, 1991), nationalism(s), identity, and globalization (Archetti, 1999; Kelly, 1998, 2004; Klein, 1997, 2006; Perez, 1994), gender, sexualities, (dis)ability and the body (Atler, 1992, Brownell, 1995; Deaner & Smith, 2013; Howe, 2004, 2008; Rana, 2014; Samie, 2013), evolution (Apostolou, 2014), and childhood (Dyck, 2006).

Anthropologists have also undertaken ethnographic investigations of exercise cultures. Bodybuilding, described by Klein (1993 p.3) as a “subculture of hyperbole”, has attracted the most significant attention from anthropologists (e.g., Bolin 1992; 2003; Boyle 1995; Fisher 1997; Guthrie & Castelnovo 1992; Heywood 1998; Klein, 1993; Lowe 1998; Probert, Palmer, & Leberman 2007; Shilling & Bunsell, 2009). In pursuit of understanding gendered culture and embodiment a new anthropological literature on exercise is emergent outside of bodybuilding (e.g., Sehlikoglu & Karaks, 2016; Spielvogel, 2003). For example, Sehlikoglu’s (2016) ethnographic investigation of women-only exercise spaces in Turkey highlights the nuanced interactions between cultural and religious norms and gendered organization of bodily movements in public and private spheres of women’s lives.

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<sup>4</sup> e.g., Fox (1991), Gmelch, (1972, 2001, 2006), Kelly (1998), Klein (1997, 2006, 2009), and Perez (1994).

As mentioned above, Markula (2016, p.37) notes that despite significant conceptual and methodological debates that have enabled anthropologists to “view all cultures as ‘strange’, contested, temporal and emergent” anthropologically-orientated ethnographers of sport and physical culture still feel compelled to frame their studies through cross-cultural or unconventional points of difference. The accentuation of difference is most obvious in (the popularity of) analyses of bodybuilding. As such, sociologist Lee Monaghan (2014), who has also conducted extensive ethnographic investigation of bodybuilding, argues anthropologists predominantly framed bodybuilders via a perspective Richardson (2012, p.23) describes as “narcissistic, vacuous ‘muscle-headz’”. Furthermore, anthropologists’ investigations of everyday exercise practices occur cross-culturally (e.g., Spielvogel, 2003; Sehlkoglou, 2016). In much the same way that ethnographic investigations of sport are almost exclusively conducted in, from the perspective of white, Anglo-American scholars, exotic (e.g., Adler, 1992; Brownell, 1995; Fox, 1961; Kelly, 1998; Klein, 1991) or inaccessible (e.g., Gmelch, 2001) cultures. A strong fascination with difference and non-quotidian practices dominates anthropology and underscores an imagination preoccupied with exercising Others.

In this sense, the aforementioned definitional issues of culture manifest in cross-cultural and transnational comparisons to the (ethnographic) study of sport and physical culture. For Markula (2016), such approaches are yet to shed the baggage of viewing other cultures as authentic living histories of cultural development and evolution. For us, this reflects both an anthropological fascination with difference, which faintly echoes “old” exoticism, and anthropologists’ attendance to social groups on the fringes of society. By way of comparison, studies of gyms (Crossley, 2006; Sassatelli, 2010; Smith-Maguire, 2004; Waring, 2008; Wiest, Andrews, & Giardina, 2015), aerobics classes (Parvianinen, 2011; Neville et al, 2015), and other fitness practices (Dworkin, 2001; 2003; Weedon, 2015) informed primarily by sociological and cultural studies concerns and theoretical perspectives

have mushroomed. Evidently, there is a distinct lag (but by no means complete absence, e.g., Sehlikoglu, 2016; Sehlikoglu, & Karakas, 2016) in anthropologists following suit. We agree, in hope, with Eastman (2014), who notes “anthropologists of sport may yet have something more to say about how the politics of play shape rather than merely reflect the play of politics.”

### **Sociology of Sport, Exercise, and Ethnography**

The development of ethnographic investigations of sport occurred significantly differently amongst British academics than the (mostly)<sup>5</sup> North American anthropologists mentioned above. This can be attributed to, in part, to the dominance of football (and virtual non-existence of baseball) in the British sporting landscape and its prominence in British culture (Cleland, 2015). In this sense, sociologists’ ethnographic forays were less concerned with definitional and conceptual issues regarding culture than anthropologists’ (cf. Markula, 2016) and decided to “get on with it” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). More specifically, as Dunn and Hughson (2016) identify, the pervasiveness of football hooliganism<sup>6</sup> in Britain coincided with rising interest in Norbert Elias’ career-long theorising of the civilizing process and relationship with inter-personal violence and self-control.<sup>7</sup> Elias’s figurational sociology became central in the genesis of the sociological study of sport proper (Mennell, 2006) but also to the emergence of ethnographic studies of sport specifically (Dunn & Hughson, 2016). For example, John Williams, supported by Patrick Murphy and Eric Dunning, used covert participant observation to understand the antecedents and precursors to episodes of fan disorder (i.e., hooliganism) and official responses. As such, Williams, Murphy, and Dunning (1984) sought to understand the social causes of hooliganism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the

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<sup>5</sup> Save, of course, Frankenburg (1957) whose aforementioned study was based in Wales.

<sup>6</sup> Football hooliganism is unruly, violent, and disorderly behaviour by soccer fans. While sometimes spontaneous disorder, hooliganism is marked by racism, and organised conflict between rival gangs, or “firms” associated with football clubs. Hooliganism was so widespread in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s it was dubbed “the English disease.”

<sup>7</sup> See Mennell (2015) for a discussion of the ‘discovery’ of Elias theory and Dunning (1999) for a discussion of sport



research team were unable to provide any definitive answer. Partly, according to Armstrong and Harris (1991) because – in a critique common to ethnographers - Williams, Dunning, and Murphy (1984) were not ethnographic enough.<sup>8</sup> That being said, and by way of response, fan disorder became a key focus of study using a range of ethnographic practices (e.g., Armstrong, 1998; Boyle 1994; Giulianotti, 1996, 1995, 2002; Hughson, 1998; Robson, 2000; Williams, 1994). Violence, particularly in the form of boxing (and certainly not predominantly from an Eliasian perspective) was another key site in the emergence of sociologically oriented ethnographies of sport (Sugden, 1987, 1996; Waquant, 1995, 2004).<sup>9</sup> Of broader import to sporting ethnography, however, was the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), which provided both impetus and theoretical benchmarks for ethnographic inquiry beyond attendance to violence and traditional sport forms (Carrington & Andrews, 2013; Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000; Wheaton, 2017).

Sport, especially football, in Britain was germane to the CCCS' broader programme of understanding (male) working-class culture (see: Critcher, 1974; Peters, 1976; Willis, 1974). However, only Clarke (1976) engaged empirically with sport. Nevertheless, Donnelly (1985), Silk (2005), and Wheaton (2017) all point towards sporting subcultures, prompted by CCCS sensibilities, as the primary sites for the development of ethnographies of sport and physical culture.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary commentaries from Donnelly (1985) and Donnelly and Young (1988) identified that while a number of sociologists in the late 1970s and early 1980s studied sport “seriously” (e.g., Faulkner, 1974a, 1974b; Furst 1974; Henricks, 1974; Massengale, 1974; Vaz & Thomas, 1974), ethnographic forays into sporting subcultures stemmed from dissatisfaction with such studies (notably including Eliasian scholarship such as Sheard and Dunning, 1973) rooted in observational and interview and/or survey

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed figurational sociologists in sport have long dealt with criticisms of their empirical “groundings” (cf. Dunning & Rojek, 1992)

<sup>9</sup> See Channon & Jennings (2004) for a review of boxing and combat sport studies

<sup>10</sup> See Donnelly (1985), Wheaton (2013), and Thorpe et al (2016) for definitional issues related to subculture and sport

methodologies.<sup>11</sup> Central to the emergence of a new “critical mass” of ethnographic studies of sport was a collective desire to develop “description of the characteristics of the subculture and behaviour of the members – the presentation of ‘insider’ information that is only accessible to the participant observer” (Donnelly & Young, 1988 p.223). From such beginnings, Silk (2005) argues early ethnographic investigations of sport primarily provided descriptive accounts of subcultural practices (e.g., Fine, 1987), careers (e.g., Donnelly & Young, 1988) and deviance (e.g., Young, 1988). Thus, just as sport did not resonate with the conceptual apparatus of anthropological framing of culture (cf. Midol & Broyer, 1995 above) the descriptive purposes of early ethnographers, and critical questioning regarding violence and deviance, resonated with sociological ways of thinking generally and contemporary trends in social theory. Subsequent development of sporting ethnographies, as recounted by King-White (2013), grew out of dissatisfaction with symbolic interactionist theorising in (sport) ethnography<sup>12</sup> rather than attempts to understand more than the cultural practice(s) of sport (cf. Atkinson, 2012).

King-White (2013) highlights the growth in ethnographic techniques used to build understanding of cultural intermediates (MacNeill, 1996; Silk, 2001, 2002; White, Silk, & Andrews, 2008) and sport in marginalized subcultures (e.g., Darnell, 2007, 2014; Loland, 2000; Paraschak, 1997). Marginalized “sporting” subcultures and leisure-based “action sports” were also key sites for the uptake of ethnography (e.g., Beal, 1995; Wheaton, 2000). Importantly, a central component of these developments was framing ethnography as a “civic, participatory, collaborative project” (Silk, 2005 p.71).

In the first instance this was indicative of sporting ethnographers reflecting performative turns and crises of representation brought about by way of methodological consideration of the explosion of post-modern and post-structural theorising in Anglophone

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<sup>11</sup> Typical of this ilk is Goodger and Goodger (1977) who note their positions as cultural insiders in Judo, yet did not deploy ethnographic methodologies

<sup>12</sup> A dismissal we see as unfair (cf. Atkinson & Gibson, 2017 p.28; Prus, 1999)

academia in the mid- to late-1990s (Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1994). As such, creative and storied presentation, particularly through auto-ethnographic research (e.g., Sparkes, 2002a, 2002b) emerged apace in sport and physical culture literature. Second, nuanced critique and consideration of the politics of evidence and the potential for ethnographic engagement to promote change meant that the emphasis of ethnographies of “privileged [sporting] subcultures” (King-White, 2013, 2017) shifted. Therefore, ethnographic investigation increasingly focused on physical cultural practices beyond sport, and addressing privileges (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) enjoyed and maintained - deliberately or otherwise - within sporting subcultures (e.g., Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thorpe, 2011). In doing so, the desire to “open up the back regions, the non-public aspects of the subcultures” (Donnelly, 1985, p.546) that initiated the sporting ethnographic enterprise was decentred.

### **Physical Cultural Studies and (Re)consideration of Ethnography: Promises & Pitfalls**

PCS as an “intellectual assemblage in constant state of becoming” (Silk, Andrews, & Thorpe, 2017 p.2) is the ferment of the organization of the study of sport, exercise and physical activity identified by Robert Hollands which “ironically pairs the social critic with those very individuals in sport science whose professional ideology reinforces ahistorical and functionalist approaches to the subject” (1984, p.73). A range of scholars deploying ethnographic methodologies and sensitivities, and actively self-identifying as engaged in the PCS “dialogic learning community” (Silk et al., 2017, p.2) has emerged recently. However, formally designated PCS research programmes have emerged in but a handful of institutional ‘groups’ (e.g., University of Bath and University of Toronto) and ‘laboratories’ (e.g., University of Maryland and University of British Columbia). Nonetheless, a common feature of the institutional homes of PCS researchers, in formally designated groups or otherwise, is their location in faculties and departments attentive to sport, exercise, and physical activity

(e.g., Maryland and British Columbia PCS laboratories are housed in Departments of Kinesiology). Direct calls and antecedents for PCS are found in Ingham's (1997) vision of Physical Cultural Studies departments, Andrews' (2008) seminal identification of kinesiology's "inconvenient truth", and a 2011 special issue of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*.<sup>13</sup> Alongside aforementioned broadening of empirical sites of investigation and focus on power and privileges within such departments PCS is also a crystallization of a contextual response to the intensification of conservative ideologies within the academy. Such intensification is arguably felt more acutely (if not encountered more frequently in intra-departmental politics) given the aforementioned ironic pairing (cf. Sparkes, 2007). In such a context, imperatives to pursue research impact (narrowly conceived) and concomitant redoubling of neo-positivist philosophies of science bolsters sport and physical culture research agendas (preferably privately funded) focused on advancing athletic performance and biomedical rationale for physical activity in chronic disease prevention and management (Andrews, Silk, Francombe, & Bush, 2013; Silk, Francombe, & Andrews, 2014). Thus, for PCS protagonists - including King-White (2017) and Giardina and Newman (2011) - issues of embodiment, reflexivity, representation and interventionists agendas for ethnographic research attending to varied forms of human embodiment is what marks its methodological and empirical difference from the sociology of sport in particular. To this we would add anthropological studies of play and games. Ethnographies in this vein have addressed questions pertaining to who has the power to participate in sport (e.g., Donnelly, 2014; Laurendeau, 2011; Maddox, 2015), how sport is a site for the tactical (re)production of normative identities (e.g., De Luca, 2014; Francombe-Webb, Rich, & De Pian, 2014; Swanson, 2009), how sport involvement jibes with dominant cultural worldviews (e.g., Atkinson, 2009; Fletcher, 2014), and how the construction of privileging social and cultural

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<sup>13</sup> See Silk et al., (2017) and Vertinsky and Weedon (2017) for more detailed discussions of the emergence of PCS.

networks are reinforced through participation (e.g., Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Walton & Fisette, 2013). Importantly, as PCS scholars note, such developments are by no means new.

However, for proponents of ethnographic inquiry in PCS the re-articulation and reinvigoration of radically contextual critical ethnographic understandings of embodiment and corporeal representation in, through, and about sport, physical activity, and exercise practices must be mobilized in pursuit of positive and progressive cultural, political, policy, and procedural change in the hope of more equitable, safe, inclusive, pleasurable, and meaningful experiences. King-White (2017 p.491) specifically calls for PCS ethnographers to become “more emotive, pedagogical, and moving.”

A central pillar of the kind of ethnography advocated for PCS is a response to the act of using reduced and selected participant stories assembled to suit the researcher’s theoretical purposes and career development (King-White, 2013; see also Klein, 2014 above). For some, any attempt to portray a physical culture and its members academically may be viewed as an act of academic deception or thievery (van Maanen, 2001). This methodological critique is connected to pervasive theorizing in PCS about hyper-individualism, ideological implosion in the West, identity-rights movements and associated politics, and the degree to which scholars in the field have called into question (and rightfully so) how minority groups have been systematically excluded from the historical creation of knowledge about physical culture. More specifically, the methodological response is PCS scholars’ urgency to pursue ethnographic work “driven by principles of self-reflexivity, critical intervention, committed to co-creating the context for multi-vocal performances and texts, and social justice for all those participating in our studies” (King-White, 2013 p.300).

As Pringle and Thorpe (2017 p.33) note, “many contemporary ethnographers [within and outside PCS] seem to agree in the virtue of reflexivity.” However, the kind of reflexivity that King-White (2013, 2017) advocates too often becomes a self-indulgent discussion about

ethnographers between ethnographers. Here we see examples of work that Lynch (2000, p.47) would recognise as “tedious, pretentious, and unrevealing” (e.g., Newman, 2013). To be clear, ours is neither a criticism of auto-ethnography nor reflexivity in ethnography.<sup>14</sup> When the balance is right the ethnographer provides greater insight (e.g., Bunds, 2016; Flanagan, 2014) and/or methodological lessons and ethical considerations regarding the everyday and oftentimes unavoidable challenges of doing ethnography (e.g., Atkinson, 2014; Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Newman, 2011). However, the foregrounding of reflexivity in PCS ethnographies creates a tendency for introspective hand-wringing (e.g., Bunds, 2014; Clift, 2014; King-White, 2013; Newman, 2013) or tales of self-valour (e.g., Thorpe, 2014) despite being conducted in the effort of deconstructing power and social inequality in/through/as physical culture.

Meeting the avowed interventionist and reflexive intent of PCS ethnographies means eschewing the notion of universal or generic cultural truths hidden under the guise of critical theory. More importantly, contra the claims of some PCS protagonists, it means pushing the performance of reflexivity about the nature of one’s position (identities) in the research process (e.g., King-White, 2013; Newman & Giardina, 2011) to the background. As such, it requires exploring possibilities for representing living, moving cultural processes beyond standard flat, two-dimensional textual means; viewing the social and cultural milieu of sport and physical culture as more than a breeding ground for injustice, suffering, alienation, and a host of other social problems; and, perhaps most importantly, enabling people to speak for themselves by de-centering the (hyper-reflexive) researcher. These brands of PCS ethnography require slow, meticulous and long-term approaches to the ethnographic research act (Silk, Francombe, & Andrews, 2014), a willingness to live among and like those we study

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<sup>14</sup> We count ourselves amongst the aforementioned many ethnographers identified by Pringle and Thorpe, and have used auto-ethnographic methods in our own work (e.g., Atkinson & Gibson, 2014; Gibson, 2012.)

and, as such, requires us to become a more wholly *emplaced* presence in the practice of everyday life with others (Pink, 2009).

### **Future Travels**

Whilst the form, content, originality and direction of the emerging, inclusionary, disciplinary-spanning PCS movement are hotly debated (Atkinson, 2011), there can be no doubt that ethnographically-based PCS scholarship has, at a minimum, challenged extant thinking about the role, purpose and dominant epistemologies in studies of sport, exercise, activity and health. That said, although often unwritten as such, ethnography's enduring contribution to the study of the human condition in sport and physical culture (or elsewhere) perhaps rests on its foundational interest in unpacking the ways in which people experience embodied life daily within small groups. Each ethnographic journey shares an epistemological and ontological mandate for examining how people's experiences in the world should and must figure at the centre of theorising what it means to be a situated person engaged in a specific socio-historical context. To this end, the most beautiful, engaging, penetrating, moving, enriching and reality congruent ethnographies of PCS are conducted as embodied cultural studies in and of the *first-person*. A PCS of the first-person strives to unpack the ways by which people, in cultural contexts and social locations, experience life within small groups, institutions and highly organized human societies. For us, a first-person PCS is a humane, emotionally-sensitive, embodied and deeply interpersonal enterprise attentive to the striking similarities, rather than mass differences, of the human experience for people immersed in sport, exercise, physical activity and other movement-based leisure pursuits. First-person ethnographies PCS are fundamentally, then, about how people perform, reproduce and challenge culture through mutually oriented forms of "sporting" embodiment, but also how core questions about the human condition may be studied.

A forward thinking, ethnographically-based, physical cultural studies of the first-person must explore the possibility of human pleasure through movement as a (if not *the*) core substantive and ethnographic focus. Said differently, embodied (cultural) pleasure becomes a sense of creative agency as demonstrated in the work of, for example, Sehlikoglu (2016). We feel that such an ethnographic enterprise requires researchers of sport and physical culture to break new ground and transgress disciplinary boundaries by pursuing theoretically-driven research with much vigour, and research beyond the comfortable subjects we so regularly study as PCS researchers. Indeed, we think it is fair to write that PCS ethnographies have almost universally homed in on the ways in which injustice, power differentials, inequality and cultural alienation are located and expressed through sport. That is to say, in studying moving bodies and their articulation in society PCS often focuses more on social structures and forces rather than on people doing meaningful, everyday, non-political, and banal things with their bodies as physical culture. Indeed, the focus on forces and structures over engaged people has become both the methodological and theoretical *lingua franca*. Further still, ethnographically documenting the pleasurable aspects of the human condition, especially beyond functional or utilitarian perspectives, appears to be a radical interventionist task (Atkinson & Gibson, 2017). Thus, despite Stebbins' definition of the ethnographic focus as, "the study of what people do to organize their lives such that those lives become, in combination, substantially rewarding, satisfying and fulfilling" (2009, xi) few PCS "first person" scholars have—save for a handful including Pringle, Rinehart, and Caudwell (2015), Gibson (2014), and Wellard (2013)<sup>15</sup>—explored first-person testimonials of the intricacies of pleasure in everyday leisure, sport, physical activity, and exercise practices. Therefore, in seeking to break new and interesting substantive and theoretical ground, ethnographies of physical culture might do well to explore how forms of sport, exercise,

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<sup>15</sup> We include – retrospectively given the emergence of PCS - Pronger (2002) to this list



dance, and play might help to proactively serve (and dare we argue, meet) the psychological, emotional, and cultural needs and desires of people. In essence, this requires realising the aforementioned retrospective credence-seeking claims for ethnographies of sport and physical culture made by Blanchard (1995) and Klein (2014). This would involve exploring human movement/training/exercise in physical cultures as forms of agency-building in a variety of manners, or the cultivation of mind-body connections for people. As Game and Metcalfe (1996) contend, such a discipline requires an orientation of passion and humanism in one's ethnographic enterprise. It requires one, at times, to speak truth (and often *many* truths), and to become more engaged with, and committed to, the outcomes of our research on people's lives. It may require (re)turning to anthropology to go beyond the sporting realm in order to (re)centre non-mainstream physical activities and 'populations.' In effect, to better understand and promote pleasure, inclusively healthy notions of the body, inclusivity, and experiences of health, wellness, varied (dis)abilities and illness. Such approaches enable both attending to potential solutions to broad gauge social problems as well as emphasising aspects of embodiment that cannot easily be explicated in discursive and academic terms.

We would add that a person-first PCS in which ethnographic epistemologies are privileged is one in which both interpersonal sensitivity between researchers and subjects, and *the social validity of the very research process itself* (i.e., is this project going to do some good for someone), are deeply engrained in and through the emplaced/embodied ethnographic research act.

PCS is the latest iteration of the contested disciplinary terrain that ethnographic study of sport and physical culture travels through. Ethnography could become, as we hope it will, an academic place where key features of the human condition revealed through sport and exercise are investigated ethnographically (such as the experience of pleasure, suffering, the quest for personal meaning, authenticity and truth, and the realization of personal agency) we

recommend that future travels of ethnography in sport and physical culture are predicated on a number of steps. All of which must go beyond definitional struggles with culture to form a bulwark against the disembodied framing of rationalised approaches to sport and physical activity.

First, it requires a researcher to be personally, affectively, cognitively, physically, and socially open *with and among* people. Second, it demands *co-presence* (thinking, feeling, interacting, working beside, pursuing intersubjectivity) with them in the practice of everyday life. Third, the practice of PCS ethnographies evolves as a concatenated effort to illuminate *the commonalities of lived experience* and the human condition, in the hopes of destabilizing conceptual and structural-material differences between people that are used, so often, as a social tool of exclusion, power, dominance and exploitation. Fourth, it asks researchers to think creatively and simultaneously about how the *pleasurable and not-so-pleasurable aspects of human existence* are apparent in physical cultural practices. Fifth, such a vision of PCS asks researchers to *allow themselves to be written*, in a liminal way, by and through the ethnographic research act; in short, to be changed (socially, emotionally, cognitively, ideologically) at times. The making of relationships that last beyond the ‘fieldwork stages’, changes to the physical body, changes to one’s mind-set, new emotional experiences are all regular parts of engaging and learning cultures. Sixth, and finally, it requires new and innovative ethnographic modes of representing the human condition as learned and constructed through fieldwork. This is what Gouldner (1975) referred to, quite some time ago, as a more humane (first-person) ethnographic research practice. The merit, hope and future of ethnographies of physical culture may just very well lay in their collective engagement with such visions of the academic enterprise.

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