Exercise and environment: new qualitative work to link popular practice and public health SI editorial

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Abstract

The health benefits of physical activity are many and well known. Those hoping to promote public health are therefore understandably keen to encourage physical exercise. This paper considers the role of qualitative research in this undertaking when medical researchers have frequently drawn on quantitative approaches to understand what are imagined to be the motivations that make people exercise. Our core argument is that studies concerned with how specific environments are inhabited by specific groups of exercisers could play a more central part. In making this case, and by way of an introduction to the *Health and Place* special issue 'Exercise and environment: new qualitative work to link popular practice and public health, we present a series of statements that we think could usefully guide the further development of this area of enquiry. In advancing this field, we particularly argue for further attention to: how particular material settings play into the exercise experience; how many of the exercise practices we may hope to understand sit uneasily with the idea of sport; the subtleties of how social relationships serve to sustain continued commitment to identified exercise practices; the physical pleasures of exercising; and the ways exercise practices are learnt and change. In so doing, we advocate a relationship between relevant qualitative researchers and public health promoters that is characterized by conversation more than critique.

Key words

physical exercise, qualitative research, environment, sociality, sport, public health promotion

1. Introduction

The health benefits of physical exercise are many and well known. Researchers from a wide range of disciplines have documented the positive effects of exercise and physical activity on reducing and managing the risk of a range of chronic diseases (Colberg et al., 2010), on overall mental wellbeing (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008) and life expectancy (Paffenburger et al., 1986; Lee et al., 2012). Nonetheless, throughout the wealthy economically developed world the majority of adults are insufficiently active (Sisson and Katzmarzik, 2008; Ng and Popkin, 2012). The reasons for this are many and varied; changing patterns of employment, the motorisation of transportation, the mechanisation of household chores, and the decreasing physical demands of everyday life are just a few of the causes (Bassett et al., 2004; Brownson, 2005; Hallal et al., 2012). In response, a great deal of social scientific and medical research has examined how individuals and communities might be induced to be more active. Much work has examined the ways physical activity might be reincorporated into the environments in which people live (Frank et al., 2005; 2006; Sallis et al., 2006; Brownson et al., 2009). This is also a significant body of research exploring the ways people may be encouraged to participate in physical fitness activities (Sallis et al., 2006; Heath, 2012) and an established public health agenda aiming at fostering this (WHO, 2004; Global Advocacy Council for Physical Activity, 2010).

Yet just as the world faces a 'pandemic of physical inactivity' (Kohl et al., 2012), many wealthier countries are experiencing a flourishing popular interest in a whole range of physical fitness practices. Activities like jogging, cycling, walking, yoga, swimming, tai chi, weight training, roller blading, dancing, a whole range of callisthenics, and training for all kinds of sports animate many people's everyday lives in all sorts of ways (Silk et al., 2017). Many of these popular practices are in their own ways a response to the corporeal inertia of modern society (Lieberman, 2013; McKenzie, 2013; Latham, 2015). But they are not only that. Some form part of changing ideas about the ethics of bodily care (Syman, 2010; Schusterman, 2012). Others represent distinctive forms of self and group expression (Bunsell, 2013; Castelnuovo and Guthrie, 1998; Fullagar and Pavlidis, 2014). Yet others are as much about bodily aesthetics as any attempt to prevent future health problems (Sassatelli, 2010; Andrews et al., 2005).

Given the great diversity of popular fitness activities that exist, along with the speed with which many of them seem to be changing - they present an obvious target for agencies interested in promoting greater physical activity within populations (Marcus et al., 2006; Bouchard et al., 2012). Yet whilst existing research has much to tell us about the broader social barriers to such activities (Heath 2012), and the varying motivations that would seem to prompt participation (Sallis and Hovell, 1990; Ingledew and Markland, 2008; Teixeira et al., 2012), there is relatively

little work that directly examines the exercise experience in combination with the physical environments within which it happens, with reference to public health promotion agendas (Sallis et al., 2006). Meanwhile there is a growing body of qualitative research within human geography, sociology, and physical cultural studies that is very much concerned with the how and where of specific exercise practices (see Andrews, 2016a; 2016b; Silk et al., 2017). This work is not generally oriented towards issues of public health. Indeed, as we describe later, some of it is suspicious of how public health agendas can tend to instruct and regulate potential exercisers. Without dismissing these concerns, the result may be a missed opportunity for productive exchange.

In this introduction to this special issue on 'Exercise and Environment', we outline some ways in which emerging qualitative work could most usefully take on this task. Specifically we consider its potential role in: (1) highlighting how concrete components within environments play into the exercise experience; (2) exploring how many forms of contemporary exercise have a rather uneasy relationship the idea of more formalised sport; (3) uncovering the subtleties of how exactly social relations play into exercise practices; (4) asking new questions about the corporeal pleasures of exercise; and (5) drawing attention to the processes of learning involved in all exercise activities and what that means for how relevant activities evolve and mutate. Further studies focused on these matters have the potential to generate original insights for those who hope to promote public health through exercise. As such, before jntroducing the empirical papers that in varied ways serve to substantiate this argument, we end by emphasizing the potential for further productive conversation on these matters.

2. Some guiding statements

Environments are evidently varied

All physical exercise takes place somewhere. This is an obvious enough statement. And, as recent reviews of work on physical activity and health promotion by Sallis et al., (2006) and Heath et al. (2012) demonstrate, there is a good deal of research that examines the likelihood of physical infrastructures such as parks, sidewalks, and recreation centres leading to of increased levels of participation in various forms of exercise. Less attention, however, has been paid to what participants themselves believe different physical features do to their exercise experience and the part this potentially plays in their continued participation. And these are more than just traditional forms of infrastructure since in addition to roads, courts, trails and other provided surfaces, sunshine, rain, temperature and any number of other features will have an impact. Yet these can sometimes be lumped together under the unhelpfully bloodless banner of

'context' . However, when the problem is couched in terms of more general exercise 'motivations', for example, the physical environments in which exercise happens can soon start to slip out of sight as psychological models that are assumed to apply everywhere come to the fore.

Yet that these environments vary in ways that clearly matter for those exercising is evident if one looks at some of the research already undertaken by human geographers and others. Saville, for example, pays close attention to how parkour practitioners learn new ways of dealing with benches, roofs and walls (Saville, 2008). Spinney has carefully shown us how the experience of sport cycling changes when riders are faced with a protracted mountain ascent (2006). Eden and Barrett (2010) have explored how indoor and outdoor climbing walls present different opportunities for different feelings when climbing. Cook et al. (2016: 10) have suggested that one of the main appeals of recreational road running may, for some, be very much about being in an environment that is explicitly different to, and away from, that which is found at home. And Wylie (2005) has usefully underlined how coastal walking is, when we allow ourselves to examine this, far from a straightforward practice of gliding past attractive natural scenes to be visually enjoyed with little effort but a brute, physical encounter that can actually lead to various bodily discomforts. Though all these studies are starting to explore how particular environmental features feed into the experience of exercise, it is also true that have hitherto been relatively distant from the wider question of how this could link to public health.

Addressing this issue, Barnfield (2016) argues that public health promoters may benefit from seeing the environment as much more than an 'inert backdrop' (282) for exercise. The point we would particularly stress is about attending to the extent to which physical contexts kick in. Lorimer, for example, with reference to running, provides an excellent primer in the variety of ways in which a range of surfaces can influence the experience in ways that render the runner 'a highly accomplished sensualist' (2012: 83). From this account it may appear that the physical feelings engendered by repeated contact with particular surfaces are central. However, in some of our own work (Hitchings and Latham, 2016), some of those who find themselves regularly running on treadmills, when forced to reflect on the matter, found that the very absence of distracting environmental variation served to secure their continued participation in a personally valued activity. Clearly there will be contrasting accounts of how environmental features play into the exercise of different groups. The point, however, is to explore this variation because that could tell us much about how physical experiences serve to

sustain or unsettle exercise practices that, returning to our overall agenda here, we know can be good for us.

Sport is often something else

Thinking about the environments within which physical exercise occurs, leads to a parallel concern: where the action is at least in terms of public health promotion is not so much sport as exercise, and although interrelated the two are not the same thing. Attending to the diversity of physical fitness activities that populate the landscapes of our cities, suburbs, and countrysides it is clear that much of this activity is only very loosely related to any strict definition of sport (cf. Guttman, 1978). Meanwhile much work that focusing on exercise has come out of sport science and a range of cognate sub-disciplines such as the sociology of sport and sports history. It is also true that, over the years, a range of physical activities have themselves been 'sportified' in the sense that they have been codified and reconfigured as competitive (Bale, 1994). This has furnished us with many insights into how those who take part in sport feel about it, what it does to them, and how they relate to one another and to wider society through this practice (Sewell et al., 2012; Dunning, 1999; see also Andrews, 2016a).

This is all to the good but the problem is that many of the exercise activities that are on the rise in many countries sit uneasily within this category. It has been swimming, cycling, running, all sorts of exercise classes, activities like yoga, and simply going to the gym, that have become increasingly popular in the UK at least (MINTEL, 2010). The extent to which they can be understood as 'sports' which are often about coming together in different forms of competition is questionable. And when they do involve competitive elements - timing, rankings, and so on - it is not clear how central these elements are to the activity being undertaken. Take for example the growth in mass participation Marathons over the past two decades. This has involved a substantial relative decline in the portion of fast runners, with growth in participation concentrated on those who take four hours or more to complete the course (Running USA, 2015). Competition amongst already keen runners is clearly not the main driver here.

In this regard, there is reason to be skeptical about the extent to which the paraphernalia and professionalism associated with the worlds of competitive sport spills over into popular fitness practices. We have seen studies that show how recreational runners seem comparatively uninterested in the perfect shoe for the job despite the valiant attempts of retailers (Gibson, 2012). Equally if sport may be off-puttingly

formalized and intimidating in its associations perhaps too is 'exercise' itself with its comparable accompanying ideas of undertaking dedicated activities. When studies have sought to understand how 'exercise', or perhaps more rightly 'physical activity' features in the lives of identified target groups, we have seen how younger American girls prize opportunities for play and dance (Clark et al. 2011), whereas older European men find creative ways of inserting certain physical actions into their domestic lives (Sixsmith et al., 2016). Though both sets of respondents might be reluctant to define what they do as 'exercise' they are presumably getting the same benefits. We highlight these examples because many previous studies into exercise and popular fitness practices for a variety of understandable reasons focus on the committed enthusiast (Bunsell, 2013). Yet if the ambition is for positive exercise forms to move outside of cliques of eager competitors, we should turn to those who do not see themselves in this way. For those interested in promoting public health, more attention should be paid to the everyman and everywoman of exercise.

Sociality works in subtle ways

The above arguments encourage us to see exercise as determinedly ordinary, determinedly everyday in the sense that it is undertaken by whole swathes of people who must reconcile relevant activities with the many other pressures, problems and priorities that compete for their time (Shove et al., 2009). In this regard, one of the ways in which many would seem to be responding to the common refrain of 'not having the time' to exercise is to find more efficient ways of inserting exercise into daily and weekly schedules that are felt to be increasingly packed and decreasingly shared in terms of people being free at the same time (MINTEL, 2013). So, just as how we should be careful about positioning relevant practices as sport, we are now encouraged to be circumspect about the changing nature of the 'social' in contemporary exercise since, on first glance, more and more people seem to be exercising alone. This is of course not to suggest the everyday exercisers of today are social isolates. Exercise is intertwined with a whole range of social relations that are interesting, evolving, and likely to be important in securing continued participation. Rather our point is that qualitative research is likely to be one of the best ways of investigating the subtlety of how this works for specific practices.

In this respect, there is a great deal of work that emphasises how interaction with fellow exercise participants works to pull people into a shared set of group norms and identities (Wacquant, 2005; Robinson et al., 2015). But the importance of identity recruitment can be overplayed. Sassatelli (2010) in her work on commercial fitness

gyms, suggests that gym goers find the presence of others motivating although there is little active social interaction between exercisers the activity of the other exercisers helps focus and frame the task in hand. Crossley also shows how occasional, seemingly casual conversation between gym goers may serve to sustain continued participation (2006). Krenichyn (2004; 2006) describes similar, if more diffuse, patterns of sociality amongst women exercisers in a New York City park. Here the sense of commonality between those using the park to exercise - walkers, joggers, cyclists, and others - produces a widely felt "ethics of care." This is something like the reassuring familiarity of swimming together with strangers described by Busch (2007). And we should not overlook the importance of the everyday sociality that may arise as a by-product the act of exercising; conversation that does not necessary have anything to do with the task of exercising but which may nonetheless be a valued part of the exercise experience (Watson, 2006; Iverson, 2007).

Surveys of motivation can and do explore these social factors, of course (Teixeira et al., 2012). Yet what is distinctive about the above qualitative accounts is the depth and texture they provide. The ways in which social relations play into the everyday exercise experience may be changing. The seemingly solitary practices we mentioned earlier in this section may be sustained as much by social relations as more traditional forms. It may just be that today's social relations are different to those of the past such as, for example, people now share and display their performance through various social media platforms. So whilst sociality still matters in contemporary exercise practices, close attention to the changing ways in which it does for each should help us understand how individual practices might be better encouraged. And, by virtue of their ability to stay close to the action in terms of how exactly they feature in contemporary physical exercise, qualitative research approaches are likely to be particularly helpful.

Pleasure plays an important part

This is not, however, to suggest that exercise is not in many ways a profoundly individual and self-sufficient activity. The novelist Haruki Murakami (2008) writes how he runs 'in order to acquire a void.' And van Leeuwen (in Warde this issue, p 6) describes how the domestic swimming pool 'allows, even invites, intellectual wanderings.' And there is no end of literature praising the meditative qualities of the walk (Solnit, 1999). There is no reason to think that swimming, running, and walking are unique. Exercise is clearly bound up with the generation of a complex range of corporeal sensations and affective states; sensations and states that are central to how and why practitioners undertake them and which vary in subtle ways between

different activities. Or, to put things slightly differently and more prosaically, for many the doing of exercise is bound up with a range of pleasures.

In gaining a sense of such profoundly corporeal experiences and their associated pleasures qualitative techniques offer a range of possible routes. Researchers such as Throsby (2016), Spencer (2009; 2014), and Cohen (2006) have used the training of their own bodies to draw themselves into the experiences of particular groups of exercisers. Committing herself to an arduous training regime, Throsby transformed herself into a free water Marathon swimmer, to gain an intimate insight into the pleasures and corporeal commitments of such swimming. Spencer (2009) spent four years of participant observation learning the ways mixed martial arts practitioners teach their bodies to work with the pain of being struck by others. Cohen (2006) describes how 20 years of karate instruction attuned his body to move and sense in ways unique to karate initiates. In a similar manner, in a series of auto-ethnographic studies Allen Collinson (2005; 2008) examined how runners handle the vicissitudes of injury and ageing. And Lea (2009) drew on her extended participation in Iyenjer Yoga classes to draw out the ways this practice altered her somatic attention (see also Philo et al., 2015; McCormack, 2013).

There are also other, less immersive, ways of exploring exercise experience, which draw in exercisers' abilities to describe the experience of exercising. Foley (2015), for example, uses interviews to examine ocean swimmers' experiences of encountering nature, highlighting the importance of the tactility of being in open water. Anderson (2012) draws out a similar set of qualities in his work on surfers. Phoenix and Orr (2014) used life history interviews to tease out descriptions of the pleasures of exercising experienced by a diverse group of ageing exercisers. The swimmers, runners, dancers, walkers, and others gathered together in this study recount a surprising diversity of pleasures; from the smell of their dancing partner's aftershave and the feel of their warming muscles against the cold a swimming pool's water, to the abandon of dancing Zumba and the reassuring feel of a body easing into movement at the start of a long bike ride. In each of these accounts we gain insights into sensuous pleasures of exercise, pleasures that are drawn out through the intimate intertwining, of exercising bodies, technique, equipment and, to return to our starting point, environment. Insights that are all the more challenging for the fact that social scientists in many ways lack an effective language with which to talk about such pleasures.

Why does this matter? It matters because it is clear from the accounts outlined above is the physical pleasures of taking part is clearly important to those who exercise. Public health promotion has tended to overlook this, stressing instead the instrumental health benefits that accrue from exercise (Jallinoja et al., 2010). The result may be a missed opportunity for

harnessing what is clearly so central a part of what pulls people into exercising. This is not simply to say that public health promotion of physical activity needs to unquestioningly empasize pleasure. Rather it is to recognise that the pleasures of exercise are many and various, and that in-depth studies could help us understand how, for individual practices, these pleasures come about and how they might be encouraged to come about more often. And it is to challenge those doing such in-depth research to think more about the ways their accounts might inform those within public health; something that surprisingly few have attempted thus far.

Practices are acquired and evolve

Thinking about the heterogeneity of people's exercise experiences, not only returns us to themes we have already highlighted - most notably the importance of all sorts of environmental elements - they also nudge us to think about the importance of learning to the exercise experience. The ability to be a swimmer, a climber, a runner, a martial arts practitioner, involves the - sometimes tremendously time consuming - acquisition and learning of a range of corporeal techniques. There is an enormous variation in the degrees of corporeal training involved in becoming proficient in different exercise practices. There is too a great deal of variation in levels of skill within particular domains of fitness practice. This points toward the need to understand the ways exercise practices are picked-up. Sassatelli's (2010) previously mentioned study of commercial gyms explores how the popularity of many exercise machines is a product of the low skill thresholds required for their use. The particular contemporary appeal of recreational running may be that very little formalized training is required – people can simply start doing it, should they so wish such that the idea of 'learning to run' may make little sense for some contemporary practitioners (Hitchings and Latham, 2016) In this respect, we should again be circumspect about the terminologies we use since, just as sport may be the wrong starting point because of how connotes the adherence to formalized codes, so we should be open to the extent to which 'learning' is how exercisers understand their process of doing so regularly.

And these processes of finding ways of exercising that personally work can collectively combine to shape what particular activities as a whole are taken to be. In this respect, Shove and Pantzar (2005; 2010) have traced out the ways the practice of Nordic Walking, a form of exercise walking involving two light handheld fibreglass walking sticks, has evolved as it successfully reinvented and reconfigured the seemingly self-evident and stable practice of walking as it spread through Finland and then Austria and Germany before then venturing even further afield. Their point is that this involved a dynamic process of co-production with those

exercisers adopting it. In making similar arguments about the story of floorball their argument is that popular exercise practices are to a certain extent unstable, and subject to modification by those who take part (Shove and Pantzar, 2006). O'Toole (2009) makes a comparable point in her study of franchised gyms. She explores the variation in common ways of exercising despite the presence of formal protocols prescribing how such activities should be carried out. Even those exercise practices that should be the most stable and lacking in individual and geographical variation, can, when we look closely at them, exhibit important differences in how they are undertaken.

So, if learning (or perhaps more rightly, processes of practice acquisition) is important to the societal success of different exercise practices, we should make attempts to study how this could be harnessed. Yet here once again, it seems that the prevailing focus on 'sport' has shaped the nature of previous relevant qualitative research since we have seen a number of studies of how 'coaching' influences they ways in which exercise activities get done (see for example, Evans, 2006; Stodter and Cushion, 2017). The point we would make is that few contemporary exercisers (and even fewer of those casual exercisers who, as we argued earlier, we may particularly want to understand) have coaches. As such we see many more future studies that look at practice acquisition and evolution in ways that draw out the complexity of how this works for those less interested in resulting sporting success. In this respect, what we learn from Shove and Pantzar (2005; 2010) is that existing fitness practices possess an interesting dynamism. This could be successfully influenced and re-invigored by various institutional actors (see also Latham, 2015) and careful qualitative studies may provide valuable insights into how.

Conversation not critique…

Many of the themes outlined in the previous section will have a familiar feel to readers of *Health and Place*. This has long been a forum for exploring a diverse range of approaches to how health and wellbeing relate to the specifics of geographical context. In that regard, our aim to better target the research capacities of qualitative work on environment and exercise to the needs and interests of those in public health should resonate. That said, we should not take for granted that the public health promotion of physical fitness is an un-ambivalent good. Researchers like Herrick (2009), McPhail (2006) and Veal (2017) to name just a few recent examples have highlighted the ambiguities and social inequities implicit in many such programs. Such critiques are certainly useful when one important use of our time as researchers is to scrutinize the implications of various policies that may only superficially seem laudable. But we do also wonder why so much social science is taken up in critique. Given the overwhelming

epidemiological evidence that physical inactivity is a serious health issue, it is surely equally important for qualitative research to help inform and calibrate efforts to increase activity.

And so we end our opening discussion to this Special Issue by calling for more conversation that critique. We do this partly because this is a conversation to which many interested in public health seem open. Sallis et al. (2006: 310), for example, in reviewing active living research argues for using a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches, noting that "if only averages are considered, important aspects of the experience are missed." Considering the complexity of how current patterns of physical inactivity came about Kohl et al. (2012: 303) likewise highlight the need for "improved understanding of what works" with regard to physical exercise promotion. Our argument is that in order to understand what works for people involved in the diverse and dynamic suite of popular exercise practices currently at large in our societies, qualitative research informed by some of the above statements could really help. .

4. An overview of the papers

So, what kinds of conversation might we attempt to initiate? The articles collected together in the following special issue suggest some interesting possibilities.

The SI kicks off with articles by Brown and Ward both of which concern themselves with how physical contexts are experienced – the mountains of Scotland for the bikers and walkers of Brown or the indoor pools for the recreational swimmers of Ward. Both underscore the centrality of environment to experience. Brown teases out the haptic pleasures mountain bikers gain from the roughness and varied terrain of the trails they traverse, a set of pleasures subtly different to that generated by walkers. From this she argues for the need to develop a repertoire for talking about the surfaces that engender certain feelings of playfulness, challenge, letting go, a sense of 'textural immersion'. Far from a matter of merely providing visually attractive landscapes, her study opens up a whole series of challenges for those who provide spaces of outdoor recreation and what physical experiences they facilitate. Ward meanwhile, focuses on the highly regimented, contained, standardised, environment of the 25 metre swimming pool. It is easy to read such places as the embodiment of "rigid temporal and spatial disciplines". Yet by speaking with lane swimmers, and dissecting her own participation, she finds a more corporeally engaging environment. The uniformity of the swimming pool is revealed as affording swimmers a series of perhaps surprising pleasures; pleasures available to people with a notably wide range of physical capacities. Here, unlike with Brown's trails what is valued is sameness.

The papers by Little, Barratt, and Hitchings and Latham particularly showcase how qualitative research can illuminate the subtleties of how the 'social' features in contemporary exercise. Little explores the relationship between recreational running and body management amongst a group of middle-aged women. Certainly they understand their running as a form of bodily self-discipline that, along with attention to diet, is aimed at keeping the practitioner healthy. Yet Little's interviews also reveal a more socially entangled story. They spoke of being prompted to run by their concern to stay healthy for their children and loved ones and of the valued bonds that can come through running. But they also described the enjoyable solitude that running affords them. Barratt describes a louder, more explicitly competitive, case of how social relations and exercise interweave. Much has been made of the potentially transformative effects of new monitoring devices on exercise. In response, Barratt explores the social dynamics of how social media platforms such as Strava, Garmin Connect, and MapMyRide are engaged with by a sample of club cyclists. Through these means he draws out some of the subtleties of how new technologies shape the contours of established practices as mediated competition can act to replace more the traditional forms that require co-presence; so this is a story of leaning and change as well as sociality. By contrast, focusing on recreation runners unattached to a running club, Hitchings and Latham present a group of exercisers with little apparent interest in the intense, comparative and competitive, sociality of Barratt's cyclists. Instead, they find exercisers who have found themselves running partly because it leaves them independent of other exercisers. The runners they studied very much liked how they had been able to find their own 'best' way to exercise, leaving them with no obligations to compare themselves with others. Through these accounts we, once again, see the importance of attending to the specifics of how the social features in identified exercise practices and how its role may both vary between groups and be in a current process of flux.

This brings us to the next two articles. The articles by Qvistrom and Blue both speak to the ease with which relevant activities are inserted into everyday life. Examining the evolution of fitness running in Sweden in the 1970s and early 1980s, Qvistrom outlines how the diffusion of American ideas about jogging conflicted with existing recreational running practices. In part the conflict was about the right environment for running. Could running be undertaken more or less anywhere (as in the American model), or did it need the right kinds of surfaces, terrain, and supporting natural elements to be effective (like the Swedish version)? But it was also a debate about the temporal organisation of everyday life. Jogging American style spoke to notions of an individualised daily routine in some ways radically different to that of the prevailing Swedish model. In this respect, he also speaks to the idea of learning in the sense that

forms of running are not straightforwardly fixed and runners may come to acquire quite different approaches depending on where they are. Blue makes a related argument in his discussion of how people sustain a commitment to mixed martial arts training. He moves us away from the space of the gym, suggesting that to understand how such exercise practices stabilise we might need to talk to people about how others around them evolve rather than what happens in the gym. For Blue we need to understand exercise as part of a nexus of related practices, within which the individual is enmeshed. What is particularly original about his argument is the suggestion that future exercise studies might sometimes do well not to fixate too fully on the physical activity itself. If we really want to encourage it, we may do better to explore how other aspects of everyday life must be reassembled if the practitioner is to become more committed.

The final article by Olafsdottir, Cloke, and Vögele particulary takes on the challenge of showing us what qualitative research can provide that is different to other approaches. As part of a larger quantitative study, they explore a series of personal accounts of participants' experiences exercising (and not) in varying contexts. Here we are reminded of the power of the phenomenological gaze; how close, exhaustive, attention to detail might reveal things that more generalising approaches cannot. We notice the pleasurable affects emerging as people become absorbed in their exercise. And how they draw on previous experience to shape and channel these sensations.

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