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The world of physical culture in sport and exercise: visual methods for qualitative research [book review]

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The World of Physical Culture in Sport and Exercise: Visual Methods for Qualitative Research, Cassandra Phoenix & Brett Smith (Eds.), 2011, London & New York: Routledge, £85.00 (hbk), 216pp., ISBN: 978-0-415-61555-6

Phoenix and Smith's volume *The World of Physical Culture in Sport and Exercise* is a reprint of a special edition of the journal *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, volume 2, issue 2, published in 2010. The papers drawn together for that edition, reproduced in full in this book, specifically relate to visual research on physical culture and provide a useful introduction to different approaches to the visual, audio-visual and material within qualitative research spanning a number of fields related to sport, exercise or the body.

Sarah Pink, in the Foreword, draws attention to the emergence of visual methods in qualitative sport research as particularly pertinent given the corporeality of the field and the centrality of visual practices and media to sports as cultural phenomena. Physical cultures are defined by Phoenix in this book as 'human physical movement occurring within recognised cultural domains such as sport, dance and, more broadly, outdoor and indoor recreational activities involving expression through physicality' (p. 1), Research in these domains marks an effective reconsideration of the links among exercise, sport media, sport cultures, physical activity and physical education. The aims of the book are to address the lack of visual methods in sport and exercise research and explore why and how these methods can be incorporated. In the opening chapter, Phoenix calls for seeing sport and exercise as part of worlds in which visual practices, images and cultures are part of the everyday. Indeed, studying physical culture reminds us of the context of sport and physical activity, the importance of social and physical space, and the specificity of experience. She indicates that the book will address issues of ethics, interpretation and representation of visual methods; three pertinent topics for contemporary visual researchers. Phoenix suggests the strengths of visual research are in creativity, expressivity and uncertainty and for the postmodern or poststructural turn, the methods outlined here have a lot to offer. She also points out that this may be unnerving for those versed in scientific methods. Making up the book's editorial content, Pink's Foreword and Phoenix's first chapter guide us into contemplating ways of seeing, what can be done with visual data in terms of reaching participants and audiences, and ways of working with data. Furthermore, as more ways of collecting and handling (audio-)visual materials develop, students and researchers new to visual methods may be concerned with producing valid and rigorous analysis. These themes return throughout the subsequent empirical chapters. Not being a "how to" book, it does not provide a comprehensive answer, but many of the chapter authors address their particular concerns with validity, quality, and finding a legitimate place for visual methods alongside "traditional" methods. They introduce

some of the many ways in which qualitative visual research can be done, and for what purpose.

Concerning what visual data bring to qualitative research, the chapters address a broad range of methods and rationales for such. Visual methods are used as a convenient way to remember ethnographic knowledge (Pope) or likened to narrative methods. Cherrington and Watson (p.179) summarise what is said throughout, that 'it is the visual method that captures' the viscerality and hard-to-communicate aspects of data collection. A range of researcher- and/or participant-produced approaches are found here – Photovoice (Sims-Gould et al.; D'Alonzo and Sharma) and similar participant-produced or directed photographic projects combined with photo-elicitation (Azzarito and Sterling; Krane et al.); researcher-produced (auto)ethnographic studies (Atkinson; Pope); sports media image collation (Griffin); video diaries (Cherrington and Watson; Kluge et al) and drawing (Gravestock). Gravestock's paper is the only one not to use a camera of some sort in producing data, but the themes of seeing what might be otherwise unseen through the visual are also found here.

In many of these papers, the visual is the key through which connections among sporting activity, physical cultures and broader social meanings are made in the analysis. There is a sense that without the visual methods, physical culture could not be researched to the same extent. This reminds us of the relevance of both media and bodily appearance to the study of sport, and highlights another theme – the critique of the gendering of sport. While the editors do not identify from the outset that gender will be a focus of the book, visual culture can be seen through these studies to produce gendered identities, defining or challenging who can be perceived as an athlete. While Atkinson focuses on men's fell running as a masculinist pursuit to push the boundaries of the body's capabilities, Griffin notes the preoccupation of weight loss imagery and discourse in Women's Running Network recruitment media. Papers exploring the physical activity participation of other marginalised groups, such as Latina domestic workers in D'Alonzo and Sharma's paper, older women in Sims-Gould et al. and Kluge et al, and young South Asian women in urban schools who Azzarito and Sterling worked with, also add to a timely refocusing of sport and exercise research on marginalised groups, although the intersections of ethnicity, gender, class and age are not always made clear particularly where participants are white and middle class. Overall the book celebrates sport and physical activity participation, whilst addressing some structural and social barriers.

The empirical chapters, 2 to 11, outline their methodology and analysis techniques to varying degrees. Although each chapter was presumably written separately and each is a standalone study, a strength of the book is that they do speak to each other on a number of issues around the *how* and *what* of visual research: the production of quality research; the "authenticity" of visual data over textual or verbal data; achieving funding; establishing the place of visual methods in qualitative research; and continuing the much needed dialogue on analysing visual data, alone or alongside talk and text. Not all the papers reflect to the same extent on their uses of visual data, and in terms of the ordering of the papers, Cherrington and Watson may be best read last for their offering of a conclusion or round up on the difficulties of interpretation, ethics and representation; the three foci that Phoenix identifies in her opening chapter.

As an already published collection, this book does not offer much more than the journal special edition beyond a foreword and index; however part of the book's value lies in bringing these papers to a wider audience and, additionally, in reasserting the place of images in text-based publishing. By providing links to the website where the colour images and the video materials referred to in the chapters can be found, the book tries to ensure no loss of connection between academic texts and the photographs and films of the everyday that the researchers and participants produced. The book would benefit from a *closing* editorial discussion to draw together common themes, points for discussion and challenges for moving forward, although arguably the opening pieces by Pink and Phoenix achieve this.

This is an innovative volume that brings visual methods into greater circulation, continues the focus on physical cultures, and cements the links between visual cultures and physical cultures. Its power lies in furthering knowledge about what can be achieved with visual methods especially where they can potentially 'produce ... embodied accounts of people's experiences' (Kluge et al. p.187). On a substantive level, this book may be of significant interest to those readers concerned with women's access to and experience in sport, exercise or recreation, with a majority of papers centring on individuals or groups of women as they negotiate gendered identities and spaces within physical culture. The book has a clear use to sports studies courses with a focus on sociology of sport, (youth) sport cultures, equity, pedagogy, gerontology and other body studies, also having interest for sport psychologists interested in physical activity participation. It will also have a place in both research methods and visual studies courses across the social sciences. The single paper from a school setting indicates the prospects still available for pedagogical research on visual methods in physical culture. Phoenix and Smith's collection contributes, at this time, uniquely to the field of qualitative research in sport, exercise and recreation by highlighting the interlocking of physical culture and visual culture.

By Joanne Hill,
Teaching Fellow in the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences,
Loughborough University.