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SPORT

# Pedagogies, Physical Culture, and Visual Methods

Edited by  
Laura Azzarito and David Kirk



# **Pedagogies, Physical Culture, and Visual Methods**

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# Pedagogies, Physical Culture, and Visual Methods

To understand and more creatively capture the social world, visual methods have increasingly become used by researchers in the social sciences and education. However, despite the rapid development of visual-based knowledge, and despite the obvious links between human movement and visual forms of understanding, visual research has been scarce in the fields of physical culture and physical education pedagogy. This groundbreaking book is the first to mark a “visual turn” in understanding and researching physical culture and pedagogies, offering innovative, image-based research that reveals key issues in the domains of sport, health, and physical education studies.

Integrating visual research into physical culture and pedagogy studies, the book provides the reader with different ways of “seeing”, looking at, and critically engaging with physical culture. Since human movement is increasingly created, established, and pedagogized beyond traditional educational sites such as schools, sport clubs, and fitness gyms, the book also explores the notion of visual pedagogy in wider physical culture, helping the reader to understand how visual-based technologies such as television, the internet, and mobile phones are central to people’s engagement with physical culture today. The book demonstrates how the visual creates dynamic pedagogical tools for revealing playful forms of embodiment, and offers the reader a range of visual methods, from researcher-produced photo analysis to participatory-centred visual approaches, that will enhance their own study of physical culture.

*Pedagogies, Physical Culture, and Visual Methods* is important reading for all advanced students and researchers with an interest in human movement, physical education, physical culture, sport studies, and research methods in education.

**Laura Azzarito** is Associate Professor of Education and Physical Culture at Teachers College, Columbia University, USA. Her visual research examines the links among young people’s construction of the body, identity, and inequality issues from a pedagogical and sociocultural perspective.

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**Pedagogies, Physical Culture, and Visual Methods**

*Edited by Laura Azzarito and David Kirk*

A mia figlia Vivien Rose Azzarito-Thompson.  
Con tanto amore,  
Tua mamma

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# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	xi
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xv

Introduction	1
LAURA AZZARITO	

## PART I

### **Physical culture and visual pedagogies in school** 13

1	Beyond words: the visual as a form of student-centered inquiry of the body and physical activity	15
	KIMBERLY L. OLIVER	
2	Empowering high-school girls as media consumers/producers: engaging in activist research through visual methods	30
	JENNIFER L. FISETTE AND THERESA A. WALTON	
3	Slightings, cameras, inaction: using flip cameras in cooperative learning to explore girls' (dis)engagement in physical education	47
	VICTORIA A. GOODYEAR, ASHLEY CASEY AND DAVID KIRK	
4	From media images to body narratives: photo elicitation as a method for triggering young people's "body talk"	62
	ADRIANA KATZEW AND LAURA AZZARITO	
5	Rejecting the weak Asian body: boys visualising strong masculinities	76
	JOANNE HILL	
6	"Speaking for themselves" through digital photography: the re-making of South Asian girlhood in "home-made" physical culture	92
	LAURA AZZARITO	

**PART II**

<b>Physical culture and visual pedagogies beyond school</b>	<b>113</b>
7 Out of focus: sport media, women athletes, and media literacy SALLY R. ROSS, KATIE SULLIVAN BARAK, AND VIKKI KRANE	115
8 Sport, gender and development: on the use of photovoice as a participatory action research tool to inform policy makers LYSANNE RIVARD AND CLAUDIA MITCHELL	131
9 What did I do-see-learn at the beach? Surfing festival as a cultural pedagogical sight/site LISA HUNTER	144
10 Learning from YouTube MIKEAL QUENNERSTEDT	162
11 “The stuff that I do”: children’s views of and meanings assigned to physical activity KEVIN PATTON AND MELISSA PARKER	178
12 Young people as curators of physical culture: a metaphor to teach and research EIMEAR ENRIGHT	198
13 Visualizing the social landscape of high-school Waka Ama and the apotheosis of visual ethnography CLIVE C. POPE	212
14 The <i>Moving in My World</i> project: a museum exhibition of physical culture for “real people in real places” LAURA AZZARITO	229
<i>Index</i>	249

# Figures

1.1	Girls transforming barriers to activity participation	15
1.2	Messages that girls receive about their bodies	21
1.3	Places where girls receive messages about their bodies at school	22
1.4	Places where girls receive messages about their bodies at school	23
1.5	Photographic essay: why girls play softball	24
1.6	Photographic essay: how cheerleading relates to girls' bodies	26
1.7	Photographic essay: the mall	27
2.1	The participants identified images that represented their active and moving bodies	37
2.2	The participants conveyed their results visually with simple text graphics, accompanied with music and voiceovers	38
2.3	The video participants produced included clips from YouTube	40
2.4	The video included quotes from the students in response to the open ended statement, "If you really knew me..."	41
2.5	The participants organized the quotes by theme, such as in this one, Identity	42
3.1	How to use the flip camera	53
5.1	Satnam and Mitesh: "It shows the diversity between stockier build and skinnier build"	81
5.2	Ben and Dev on the rowing machines	82
5.3	Deepesh's training regimen	84
5.4	Mickey lifting weights	84
6.1	The field, a "perfect place"	99
6.2	"It's a pathway"	100
6.3	"It's easy to get to the top now... I'd like a bigger place like that"	101
6.4	"I do biking every day"	103
6.5	"It's fun to play at home. I like kickboxing"	104
6.6	Dristi's sister, "doing star-jumps"	106
6.7	Dristi's sister, "running in place"	107
6.8	Dristi: "I play on the Wii regularly"	108
6.9	Dristi: "I play baseball"	108
7.1	Nicole's montage	120
7.2	Kate's montage	121

7.3	Liz's montage	122
7.4	Bowling Green State University volleyball poster print	127
9.1	The beach; photo of the site of the Roxy Pro/Quiksilver 2011 competition, Snapper Rocks, Gold Coast Australia, shown live through TV One	145
9.2	Onsite photo of festival poster showing professional Sally Fitzgibbon, a sponsor's rider, in a barrel	146
9.3	Onsite photo of an early-morning competition with competitor (foreground), camera tower (top left), beach screen in front of trees (center back) and VIP tent (top right)	150
9.4	Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP) web profile of surfer and multiple world champion, Stephanie Gilmore	151
9.5	Offsite photo of live broadcast commentary from inside VIP tent	152
9.6	Offsite asynchronous festival website screenshot with contrasting images of woman as athlete/consumer/object of gaze	153
10.1	YouTube clip of a "Day School Sports at Park Avenue, Bradford (1902)"	163
10.2	YouTube clip of instructions showing how to shoot a soccer ball effectively	165
10.3	YouTube clip of a physical education class in Sweden	170
10.4	YouTube clip of fitness training in physical education practice	171
10.5	YouTube clip of girls walking-and-talking around a track during physical education	172
11.1	Katrina's photograph of "fitness gym"	185
11.2	Makayla's activity map	185
11.3	Anahi's photograph: "Soccer, I play soccer"	187
11.4	Miguel's activity map	189
11.5	Miguel's photograph: "My trampoline"	190
11.6	Carmen's photograph: "My friend Kloee"	190
11.7	Mary's activity map	191
11.8	Makayla's photograph: "Sancho. It is a good photo of him"	192
12.1	Grace's boyfriend "hanging around the wall"	202
12.2	Physical activity in my community	204
12.3	Overweight children eat too much	206
12.4	The things that are important to me (Debra)	207
13.1	Culture in action: Waka Ama paddlers return from their race	212
13.2	The landscape and "home" for five days	220
13.3	Seeking synchronicity: team land drills	221
13.4	Structured and casual interaction	222
13.5	The team: founded on interaction and relationships	222
14.1	"Lazy phases"	229
14.2	The New Walk Museum and Art Gallery	238
14.3	Postcard invitation, <i>Moving in My World</i> exhibition at the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery	240

14.4	Visitors at the <i>Moving in My World</i> exhibition	242
14.5	The <i>Moving in My World</i> exhibition, flanked by museum coffee shop and gift shop	243

# Introduction

*Laura Azzarito*

The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed a significant growth of image-based research in a number of disciplines, and many social science and education researchers are using visual methods to understand and more creatively capture the social world. Despite the rapid development of visual-based knowledge, few researchers in the fields of physical culture and physical education (PE) pedagogy employ image-based methods in their research. This is a significant shortcoming, especially considering that images, in a wide range of forms, are signifiers of physical culture(s). Given current trends in socio-educational research, there is a clear need to bring visual research into sport, PE, and health studies. The collection of visual research projects included in this book, therefore, aims to mark and embrace a “visual turn” in understanding and researching physical culture(s) and pedagogies. The “visual turn,” according to Rose (2007), highlights the centrality of the visual to the cultural fabric of contemporary life, where people are surrounded by, and consume more and more, visual technologies (for example, photos, videos, television, the internet). We live in a society where “ocularcentrism” – an increasing saturation of images – has a powerful impact on the complex ways people’s daily lives, behaviors, and experiences are shaped.

Taking such “visual turn,” *Physical Culture, Pedagogies, and Visual Methods* offers innovative, image-based research that reveals key issues in physical culture(s) in studying the domains of sport, health, and PE studies. With this book, I advocate for researchers to consider and incorporate visual images into their research designs to understand and provide a more problematized picture of the nuances and multifaceted embodied experiences of people in various sites of physical culture. We live in an increasingly globalized society where images produced by television, the internet, videos, magazines, advertizements, museums, and other forms of communication impact what we watch, what we learn, and how we live our everyday lives. As part of today’s global transformation of culture, images are ubiquitous in our society (Banks, 2007). Freedman and Stuhr (2004) suggest that, in our visually saturated world, “visual culture is pervasive and it reflects, as well as influences, general cultural change” (p. 816). Especially for young people who spend more and more time on the internet, in front of the TV, and playing video games, the images they consume daily play a central role in their lives, experiences, and concerns. Young people are not merely

interested in images; they are, indeed, seduced by them because images enable young people to express themselves in interesting and engaging ways. In line with Thomson's (2008) argument, I suggest that, for young people who have difficulty using words to communicate their thoughts, conceptions, and feelings, image-based research enhances their agency, enabling them to "speak for themselves" about their experiences in ways that are more authentic, creative, and contextualized than they can through words.

*Physical Culture, Pedagogies, and Visual Methods* offers groundbreaking approaches to research, as well as informative, visual-based knowledge. Integrating visual research into physical culture and pedagogy studies, this book aims to achieve a number of purposes. First, it provides readers with different ways of "seeing," looking at, and critically engaging with physical culture(s). Since human movement is increasingly being created, established, and pedagogized beyond traditional educational sites such as schools, sport clubs, and fitness gyms, a crucial aim of this book is to explore relationships among visual public pedagogy and physical culture. The focus on visual pedagogy in physical culture helps convey to readers how globally available visual-based technologies (such as the internet, magazines, TV, technologies such as mobile phones, digital cameras), more than ever before, take place outside of the formal educational site of schooling. A second aim of this book is to encourage the reader to problematize how the visual performs pedagogical work on the body, informing subjectivities in physical culture(s). Accordingly, chapters in this book recognize and explore how traditional school-based and public pedagogies (Sandlin *et al.*, 2010) take form to visually represent, display, and shape the development of identities and social formations in various sites of physical culture. This book incorporates an innovative aspect, then, in demonstrating how the visual creates dynamic pedagogical tools for revealing playful forms of embodiment. It encourages the reader to critically view how the pedagogical work of the visual is integral to people's actions, experiences, and behaviors and is contingent upon their historical and geographical contexts. The third aim of the collection of chapters in this book is, by presenting a range of image-based research studies, to make ongoing inequalities of the body visible and to sustain a social justice agenda in physical culture studies. Thus, the chapters attempt to reveal the typical, alternative, marginal, and creative physical culture(s) youth convey in the local, real, virtual, and global social spaces they inhabit. Finally, *Physical Culture, Pedagogies, and Visual Methods* offers readers a range of visual methods, from researcher-produced photo analysis to participatory-centered visual approaches and researcher-participant collaborations, for the pedagogical study of physical culture. This book highlights a variety of methodological approaches that introduce readers to groundbreaking, image-based knowledge in the study of sport, health, recreation, and PE studies.

### **Beyond words: the power of images**

Words alone are not sufficient to communicate or shed light on the complexity of culture and individuals' experiences in today's image-saturated society. The visual



provides young people with alternative and engaging means of expression. In conducting research with children and young people, using of images might elicit different responses than research methods that rely on written and oral means of communication. Banks (2007), for instance, suggests that, to investigate today's social world, methods that depend solely on linguistic-driven explanations are neither sufficient nor adequate. Rather, he advocates the inclusion of images in research methods because they are expressive, powerful, and, explicitly or implicitly, tied to desire. In the world of physical culture, according to Phoenix (2010), visual methods include any type of research design that incorporates visual evidence, such as photography, maps, websites, posters, videos, diagrams. Such visual evidence enables researchers to explore the multiple social meanings constructed and expressed by people's experiences of their physicality. With the collection of these chapters, I suggest that visual research, in various forms, can advance ways of knowing about people's engagement with physical culture and can, moreover, shed light on inequality issues with regard to gender, race, social class, and ableism that would otherwise continue to be hidden and unaddressed. With their research, for example, many authors in this book aim to capture the potential transformative aspects of visual methods for social change (see Chapters 1, 2, 8, 12, 14).

The visual and its pedagogy, according to Goldfarb (2002), challenges the Western historical construction that writing and words in the social sciences occupy a higher status than the visual. Differently than words, images evoke aspects of human consciousness, eliciting personal and meaningful narratives (Pink, 2007). Many young people might feel more confident with modes of production that include drawing, taking photos, or creating videos, and thus visual methods can also be used to empower young people to express their views on issues of social justice. Prosser and Burke (2008), for instance, suggest that "cameras can be employed in imaginative ways to enable children and young people to confront difficult aspects of their lives" (p. 415). Images shed light on the inequalities that young people experience and negotiate in spaces they inhabit daily. In conducting research with young people's engagement with physical cultures, visual methods can address important and difficult pedagogical questions about human movement: questions about social life at sites of physical culture; body practices; identities and embodiment; media (mis)representations of the body; and issues of social difference and social justice in physical culture. Thus, the chapters included in this text provide support for the argument that visual research with young people reveals insightful data in physical education, sport, health, and recreational sites that would not be accessible through words.

Images express, represent, and symbolize multilayered and complex meanings; they communicate feelings that individuals construct around their body practices, values, attitudes, and beliefs in their everyday lives. The etymology of the word "idea" is rooted in the Greek verb "to see" (Jenks, 1995: 1). Images are "not simply visual records of reality but representations that are interpreted in terms of different understanding of reality" (Pink, 2007: 84), and they are characterized by multivocality and polyvocality (Banks, 2007). Images are "multivocal" in that they "speak"