I have spent the better part of the past twenty years entrenched in one ethnographic research setting or another. My lengthy field experiences do not automatically qualify me as an expert on ethnography, as much as they connote my deep commitment to ethnographic epistemologies. From the very moment I learned about ethnography in an undergraduate lecture hall, I could hardly believe a university would actually pay someone to hang around with people as a legitimate vocation. In my undergraduate days, ethnography generally meant participant observation or fieldwork in the anthropological sense; or simply, deep immersion in the everyday life practices of other people as a means of learning, knowing, and representing them accurately.

More recently, and perhaps owing to both the global growth in sport and exercise science programmes and the interpenetration of substantive and methodological interests among sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists of health, there has been a conceptual and empirical mushrooming and diversification of ethnographic sensibilities. As a direct function of the comingling between disciplinary traditions and foci of inquiry, social-scientific analyses of sport and exercise now take on a full spectrum of ethnographic tacks. In this chapter, I present several traditional means of doing ethnography alongside more recent innovations. I argue that ethnography in its broadest sense collates, crystallizes, integrates and galvanizes seemingly disparate disciplinary interests, and leads to improved conceptualizations of the multifold cultural roles of sport, exercise, and play in society. Given the recent groundswell in ethnographic methods there is good reason to de-emphasize how diverse theories, paradigms, ideologies, ontologies, and levels of analysis separate researchers of sport and exercise, and emphasize core epistemological ties that bind.

**Attempting to define ethnography**

The term ‘ethnography’ (from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning people, and *graph*, meaning writing) is often quite loosely applied to *any* qualitative research project where the in-situ observation of, and interaction with others is used to provide an inductive, detailed, in-depth description of cultural practices. This is sometimes haphazardly referred to as the systematic ‘thick description’ practices (Geertz, 1973), and their relationship to cultural frameworks. An ethnographer believes that in order to understand, translate, and conceptually explain how culture unfolds,
and how it provides what Raymond Williams (1977) describes as ‘maps of meaning’ for people, one needs to become a member of said culture. An ethnographic epistemology generally upholds that theoretical knowledge about cultures is best generated by direct contact and experience with members of a culture over time (Wolcott, 1999). Therefore, the epistemology is straightforward; one becomes a member of a cultural group, does what they do, travels with them, and lives alongside them as a means of achieving an understanding of their cultural (and indeed psychological) realities.

Realist ethnographic methods have been employed quite extensively in studies of sport, exercise, and physical culture over the past thirty years (Atkinson, 2011). Realist ethnography involves direct and long-term immersion in the cultural life worlds of other people, to grasp how they live, interact, and view life. First and foremost, it involves interaction with them in a sport or exercise setting (such as a gym or sports field), or social practice (such as golfing or running), and the establishment of a personal role in the group. Realist ethnographers typically spend months or years conducting their field research, often forming lasting bonds with people there to eventually write journal articles of full-length books that attempt to accurately and ‘realistically’ present what the culture is actually like for participants. Many undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members conduct ethnographies in the communities where they themselves live and work. Gold (1958) describes four principal ways in which people become ethnographically emplaced in a community to conduct realist research. These participatory roles range along a continuum of social immersion, from complete participant (one who is fully immersed and participates in the culture), to participant-as-observer (one who participates, but not in everything), to observer-as-participant (one who participates moderately, but principally watches the culture from the social periphery), to complete observer (one who only observes the culture, without ever participating in or interacting among its members).

Realistic ethnographic efforts exist on surfers (Sands, 2001), boxers (Wacquant, 2004), skateboarders (Beal, 1995); roller-derby participants (Donnelly, 2014); snowboarders (Thorpe, 2011), sport participation among refugees (Spaaij, 2013) sport for development volunteer workers (Darnell, 2010), NASCAR fans (Newman and Giardina, 2011), windsurfers (Wheaton, 2000), media-production workers (Silk, 2001), rugby players (Howe, 2001), and bodybuilders (Monaghan, 2001). In my own research, I have employed realist ethnographic methods to articulate the cultures of duathletes and triathletes, traceurs, fell runners, greyhound-racing enthusiasts, Ashtanga yoga practitioners, anorexics in sport, and, most recently, youth sport coaches in Canada. Sport and exercise researchers undertake realist modes of ethnography to address questions pertaining to who participates in sport, how sport is a site for the (re)production of identities (gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion), how sport involvement jibes with one’s cultural worldview, and how the construction of one’s social and cultural networks are reinforced through participation (Atkinson & Young, 2008).

Realist ethnographies involve the close exploration of several sources of data in the field. Long-term engagement in the field setting or place where people in the culture meet and interact daily is essential, and most commonly called participant observation (Wolcott, 1999). The notion of participant observation captures the dual role of the fully immersed ethnographer in that one is both a participant in the culture, but at the same time is an academic observer. Elias (1987) outlines the degree to which a (field) researcher, like any other social scientist, must strive toward maintaining a balance between empirical involvement with subjects (required to gain a sympathetic understanding of others) and cognitive/emotional detachment from them (required to adequately identify the conceptual themes, patterns, and structures – or, generic social processes – organising cultural life). To develop an involved/detached understanding of what it is like to be a member of a culture, the researcher participates in the settings wherein the
culture operates, while also maintaining the stance of an observer, someone who can describe the experience with a measure of what we might call professional detachment; this is how one is able, as the method goes, to produce a realist tale of culture.

Realist ethnography has fallen under critique, as a far too naive approach to studying culture (i.e. as the overt and direct study and description of people’s immediate behaviours, thoughts, and constructions of the world in the here and now of everyday life). Critics suggest that realist ethnographers cannot simply know culture by being ‘around it’, or can be able to translate, into an academic text, a clean and perfect representation of the culture for all people who comprise the culture. For example, realist ethnographers should better attend to and theorise the connection between the actions of people in social settings and the social, economic, and political structures within which those actions occur. As such, the uses of ethnography simply to ‘tell non-fictional stories’ about sport and physical culture, its meaning, its expression, and its participants are only partially valid since we can neither take behavioural observations as simply representative of some given social world nor fully reveal or reconstruct the social through our understanding of actors’ meanings and beliefs. Rather, explaining observable events requires a consideration of the social-structural, behavioural, or even cognitive/emotional conditions that enabled these events – enter, critical realist ethnography.

Critical realist ethnography holds to the existence of underlying social (or cognitive and emotional) structures and mechanisms that influence life. Human action is thus conceived as both enabled and constrained by social structures, environmental conditions and one’s own personal tendencies and (pre)dispositions. Critical realism, growing especially popular in sport and exercise psychology, offers a meta-theoretical paradigm for explaining the underlying generative mechanisms that shape human action, and the social relations or sets of social values that this agency in turn reproduces and transforms. Whilst deep structures and generative mechanisms that help shape people’s involvement in the world, their choices, their feelings, and their perspectives are worthy of study, they are not readily apparent, and can be observed and inferred through their effects. For example, Byers’s (2013) study of volunteerism in sport clubs, Sassatelli’s (2010) research on fitness centres, Cushion and Jones’s (2006) ethnographic venture on coaches, and Tamminen and Holt’s (2010) analysis of young athletes’ coping strategies equally illustrate the rising prominence of critical realism in ethnographic research on sport culture and the structural components of life that shape individual behaviours.

Throughout the twentieth century, the lion’s share of ethnographic inquiries on sport and exercise deployed realist or critical realist methodologies. But any number of ethnographic modes of inquiry are at the disposal of a contemporary sport and exercise researcher. Following a progressive scepticism regarding an ethnographer’s ability to merely represent the objectively descriptive or invisibly structural aspects of life via straightforward accounts of others (see Denzin, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997), a panorama of ethnographic forms emerged that privilege polysemic, fractured, and radically contextual constructions of physical-cultural realities in sport and exercise worlds. Newer modes of ethnography include: standpoint, queer, post-structural and postmodern, feminist, institutional, autoethnographic, media, audience, Internet-based, sensory, mobile, visual, blitzkrieg, guerrilla, and others (Atkinson, 2011). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to enumerate differences between all ethnographic modes, but a handful are worth highlighting.

New ethnographic imaginings

A number of research questions pertaining to studies of sport, exercise and physical culture are well suited for the family of innovative ethnographic approaches. By and large, research
questions focusing on the ways in which membership of certain social groups or cultures shape one’s personal and collective sport and exercise practices are most amenable to ethnographic modes of inquiry. For example, my first fully ethnographic venture homed in on the ticket-scalping subculture in Toronto, Canada (Atkinson, 2000). I wanted to know how the subculture is (re)produced, how members are brought in, how tickets are acquired and what this illegal subculture signifies with regard to the broader sports-entertainment complex in Canada. Such is a classic example of a small-scale (sub)cultural ethnography influenced in part by critical realist leanings. The purpose of these ethnographies was to learn the inner workings of a very small group/subculture and then explain how and why the culture operates as it does, inductively, as a theoretical venture. Ethnographies involving the study of two or more groups/cultures over time are often called ethnologies, whereas historical accounts of a culture arising from a study of it are referred to as ethnohistories. Although not a prerequisite of small-scale cultural ethnography, researchers will occasionally strive to connect what is learned in a local cultural setting with broader trends and processes in a society along critical realist lines; that is, a ticket scalper’s subculture is important to study as a means of understanding how culture works on, through and between people, but why and how the ticket-scalping subculture emerges at a particular time, place and historical juncture categorized by broad-scale social tendencies is equally important. In my ticket-scaling study, for example, I argued that the scalping subculture itself is partially produced by diffuse market capitalist trends and neo-conservative political trends in larger Canadian society.

Institutional ethnography is an increasingly popular ethnographic approach to empirical inquiry, most frequently associated with the Canadian feminist scholar Dorothy Smith (1987). The approach emphasizes connections among the sites and situations of everyday life, professional practice and policymaking. Somewhat dialogical with critical realist ethnography, institutional ethnography (sometimes called a standpoint ethnography) strives to understand how people’s culture practices are deeply structured by forces and relationships of power working through and within institutions like the family, media, workplaces, schools and sports organizations. It addresses questions of what it is like to experience and be shaped by the cultural practices of social institutions. To date, and quite surprisingly, very few sport, exercise and physical-culture researchers have explored the potential of institutional or standpoint ethnography (though many have engaged a version of institutional ethnography more loosely described as feminist ethnography). Institutional ethnographies, whilst not overly popular, have received considerable attention in sport-policy/management studies of how power in sport institutions may be visible through extant policies, hiring practices, or the treatment of identified groups within the setting (Numerato & Baglioni, 2012). The related feminist/standpoint ethnography has, by contrast, produced a litany of impressive research on the experience of being structurally positioned and located as sexed/gendered women in sport and exercise settings, including sports fandom (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013), running (Flanagan, 2014), martial arts (Velija, Mierzwinski & Fortune, 2013), rowing (Caudwell, 2011) and cycling (Fullagar, 2012). More recently, and taking a conceptual 180-degree turn from realist and institutional ethnographies, autoethnographic methods have grown in popularity within the study of sport and exercise (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; McGannon & Smith, 2015). Autoethnography (see Chapter 23), sometimes phenomenologically inspired, is an approach in which the investigator develops a research question pertaining to a particular cultural process, experience, or personal reality in sport or exercise, and then reflexively fashions a description and analysis of their own account of said process or experience or reality. Autoethnography is an attempt to develop an experiential understanding of the behaviours and work context under consideration, by casting the
investigator as both the informant insider and the analyst outsider. For example, a spate of running autoethnographies has been published within the recent past (Hockey, 2006).

**Audience ethnography** broadens the scope of ethnographic practice by striving to understand how people actively receive, decode and use very specific mass-mediated sport or physical-cultural texts. In the typical scenario, participants in audience ethnography are asked to collectively or individually watch, read or listen to selected sport or exercise media and then react/respond to its content. A researcher acts as a facilitator in these scenarios, prompting questions among respondents about what the messages or symbols in the media might mean to them, and how they actively decode them from a variety of cultural standpoints (e.g. age, race, sexuality, gender, class). The underpinning logic of doing audience ethnography is that by observing and questioning how people make sense of media data ‘live’ and in situ, researchers compile a more valid understanding of the process of immediate cultural reception and cognitive processing of media content; that is, how people visually see media culturally. Wilson and Sparks (1996), for example, illustrate how African-Canadian teenage boys fashion their own constructions of, and lived experiences with, Black masculinity to interpret mass mediations of ‘Blackness’ in basketball shoe advertisements. Wilson and Sparks (1996) attest to how the youth selectively take from the commercials what makes sense to them culturally, and how they negate or resist supposedly preferred images and constructions of ‘Blackness’ in the commercials.

When the ethnographic subject matter itself pertains to visual culture and its reception by audiences, **visual ethnographic** techniques emerge (see also Chapter 11). Visual ethnography is strongly warranted when researchers want subjects to tell their own stories, from their own visual vantage points, as a means of knowing how culture works. ‘Photovoice’, or what is also known as autophotography, is a very specialist visual ethnographic method by which researchers encourage or ask participants in a project to take pictures of, video-record or draw people, places, events or images which mean something to them. I have conducted research with chronically ill recreational athletes – people living with cancer, liver disease, HIV, and other conditions. At one stage of the research process I asked several participants to take one of my video cameras and film their own mini-documentaries of a week in their lives. By having the subjects highlight what they understand to be the relevant day-to-day structures and meanings of their lives I gained a deeper understanding of how illness and physical-cultural identities must be negotiated daily when practising sport and exercise in incredibly ‘health-ist’ social spaces. Similarly, Gibson *et al.* (2013) pursued an integrated ethnographic use of audio diaries, photography and interviews in research with disabled young men, to gain a better understanding of how one’s personal relationship with embodiment is framed along culturally normative lines. These self-produced methods are very clever because the subjects themselves pick and choose the representations to include. Therefore, the produced representations reveal how they wish others to understand their experiences.

Visual methods are increasingly utilised as a means of representing ethnographic data and breaking down barriers between researchers and potential audiences. Pink (2007) produced intellectually and emotionally engaging visual/written accounts of what it is like to simply walk. Through her use of video recorders and cameras, Pink gives visual life to the joys of walking in space and place, through the use of images taken while walking with others (a form of mobile ethnography). I tried to push the visual envelope even further in a study of fell running in the UK, through the use of ethnographic infographics (Atkinson, 2010). I borrowed the notion of infographics from street/city sign-making, where a simple symbol on a posted sign provides information for a pedestrian or driver. In an account of the existential thrill of fell running, I tacked a dozen pictures of the practice into an article, with excerpts from my field notes framing each of them. The goal in such a method is to invite readers to see and
potentially feel what I have studied, without being influenced by my academic interpretations of the topic.

A relatively new mode of ethnographic inquiry that builds out of visual ethnographies discussed above, called *sensory ethnography*, is described by Pink (2009) as a way of thinking about and doing ethnography that takes, as its starting point, the multisensory (i.e. hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching) essence of human experience, perception, knowing and cultural practice (see also Chapter 26). Pink describes sensory ethnography as an outgrowth of traditional (realist) forms of ethnography, but emphasises the need to account further for how people’s experiences with the senses (i.e. soundscapes, tastescapes, touchscapes, etc.) in the practice of something like sport and exercise is integral. Here, data on how life is sensorially experienced are relevant both to people who make sense of our cultural practices, like a football game or swimming, palpably and in tactile ways (smell of the grasp, sound of a crowd cheering, burning in the legs, feel of the water), and to how ethnographers experience these sensations while collecting data. A number of sport ethnographers have explored the multisensoriality of physical-cultural life, including De Garis (1999) and Spencer (2014), whose respective works have focused on understanding the sensory/sensuous aspects of professional wrestling and mixed martial arts. Through studies of running, Hockey (2006) and Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2007) have produced the most sustained interrogations of the sensuous/haptic aspects of physical culture and how it shapes meaning for participants. The recent works of Sparkes (2003, 2004, 2009) and Vannini, Waskul and Gottshalk (2012) provide the most cogent and intellectually moving calls for ethnography of, by and through the senses.

**Performance** (or **performative**) methodology is an emerging arts-based method of inquiry and representation that presents a tangible opportunity to bridge the gap between scholarly activity and community teaching and learning (see also Chapter 23). After spending time in the field with a group of (usually marginalized) others the ethnographer, generally in conjunction with key informants from the group under study, writes and produces a dramatic play, vignette or short film representing the culture. By using the theatre or the screen as a place of research representation, performance ethnography transforms the site from a place of entertainment to a venue for participatory action research that extends beyond the performance itself (Alexander, 2005; Finley, 2005). As a forum for cultural exchange, the power of performance-based interpretation lies in its potential for illumination and engagement of involved researchers, participants and audience. Thrift (2007) pushes boundaries even further, suggesting that the next stage in the evolution of embodied ethnographic research might very well be ‘non-representational’, meaning, that representational practices which portray embodied realities must themselves emerge from written texts and evolve into fully embodied and visceral performance pieces.

Finally, **ethnographic film-making and documentary analysis** (closely related to other visual ethnographic modalities and arts-based methods; see also Chapter 11) is a powerful medium by which engagements with sport and physical culture may be equally produced and disseminated in order to: capture the experience of sport, exercise and physical culture in more vibrant, embodied, gritty, sensual and kinaesthetic forms; to graphically display aspects of the human condition (such as pleasure and suffering) in an array of everyday settings and contexts; be more inclusive of, and empathic with, participants in the research act; illustrate the importance of ethnography in and of the first person; encourage a different aesthetic to the practice of sport and exercise research; and, enhance the moral validity of the ethnographic research act (i.e. with respect to the medium’s accessibility and potential empathic connection with audiences). It is important to note, as Rose (2012) does, that the use of the visual and of film
in the production of ethnographic research dates back decades (see Crawford & Turton, 1992; Henley, 2000). The mass availability of picture/recording devices, growing legions of students in the social sciences and elsewhere who are interested in more performative and open qualitative methodologies, the opening up of life and the continued demystification of the world in all social spaces, and the ongoing transformation of most Western nations into visual cultures themselves are primary influences.

**Data collection and analytics**

Ethnographic data analysis is perhaps the most daunting task for the neophyte researcher. What does one observe, record, attend to or process and given the diversity of ethnographic modes outlined above, how do we even begin to standardize data collection? First and fundamentally, it depends on the sort of access, involvement and role one has ethnographically. Ethnographies, in any manifestation, thrive or fizzle out depending on the researcher’s ability to gain access to the setting or culture of their choice. Access to the core networks of lifestyle participants in a sport or physical culture is only the beginning. Several weeks or months may pass before one secures a role in the group, or gains enough trust among them to conduct a study with their active support. Why is this important in ethnography? Because one actually becomes what we call the ‘instrument of data collection’ (i.e. you are the recorder of data every day in the field): how you access the group, what roles you play therein and how other people position you as a person in the group substantially influences the volume and depth of the information you are able to gather over time. Who you are partially determines what you see, what you are told, and what you eventually know.

The next stage of data collection is the long haul in ethnographic projects. This involves the day-to-day collection of empirical data in a huge variety of forms. Empirical data to an ethnographer could be everything and anything one hears, feels, sees and reads in the field. Most of the time, a researcher will only have a vague understanding of what is important at first (i.e. for answering one’s initial research question), and so everything is noted, recorded and reflected upon until a dominant theoretical idea or set of main conceptual foci emerge in the study. Conversations with others, descriptions of interaction, artefacts gathered in the field and places visited need to be recorded in meticulous detail. Interviews with key informants may be inserted into the ethnographic act to provide focused data on conceptual and substantive curiosities coming to the fore, and the research focus is narrowed further. What generally starts as a broad and overwhelming venture into the sport and exercise dark transforms into a tightly defined research venture. There are no magic templates, tricks, tips or steps one may employ in order to develop conceptual clarity in a project.

The arduous part of any ethnography commences with the processes of data interpretation, since anything and everything in an ethnographic project is data (at least at first), and the process of whittling down one’s study into a paper or even a book-length report can be overwhelming. One commences the data-analysis process from day one; reviewing and making interpretive/analytic notes about things one has heard, experienced, videoed, read, witnessed or discovered in the field with others. As time progresses, one learns to connect discoveries to conceptual ideas, and perhaps even, a new theoretical framework. Field notes, observations, interview data and artefacts gathered serve as partial indicators of broader processes and structures. As such, the lion’s share of any ethnographic research is interpretive and qualitative in orientation; that is to say, researchers are not so concerned with testing formal hypotheses derived from theory against data, in most cases. So, it is fair to suggest that ethnographic analysis is based more on the use of field data to generate, explore, probe and extend the empirical applicability of particular concepts, axioms or ideas.
Notwithstanding the above, ethnographic analyses form the basis of classic inductive inquiry, and initiate a programme of investigation intended to flesh out a tentative or working understanding (not explanation) of a phenomenon in the study of sport and exercise cultures. Here, one might only have a general theoretical or substantive clue about what is going on with respect to a sport-related phenomenon (no past theories or studies accurately account for it or provide us with direction), and therefore a researcher embarks on a very loosely structured programme of data collection and analysis to arrive at a tentative understanding. Examples of exploratory questions include: ‘Is there a relationship between gender and violence in sport?’ ‘What is it like to be an athlete with an injury?’ ‘What is it like to experience depression in an elite level athlete culture’ ‘How do disabled athletes experience barriers to participation in sport?’ or, ‘How do people construct the joys of physical activity participation?’

Whereas the role of theory in ethnographic research is quite clear (at least historically), the role of theory in innovative ethnographic research is murkier. Ethnographic questions are often described by sport and exercise researchers as undertaken in the pursuit of ‘grounded theoretical’ conceptualizations of sport and physical culture’s meaning to people (Atkinson, 2011, 2012). The ideal, typical grounded theory, in methodological terms, is most accurately described as a technique of question formation, data collection and data analysis, in which the eventual conceptualizations or theoretical understanding of people, small groups or other social formations one discovers is developed from the data, rather than the other way around (see Charmaz, 2003; Glaser, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Chapter 3, this volume). Still, we must question, through careful scrutiny of the methods-data-theory link in each study, if sport and exercise research projects flying under the banner of grounded theory are most likely ventures in concept elaboration or straight theory application (Atkinson, 2012). This is particularly the case with critical realist, institutional, feminist, and audience ethnographies. Here, a researcher commences with preconfigured conceptual or theoretical ideas in mind (or their preferred theoretical explanations of the world) and then expands them or (even uncritically applies) them, in whole, to emergent ethnographic data. Our concepts might be expanded, contracted, tightened or partially redefined through so-called ethnographic inquiry, but rarely are new theoretical systems or sets of interconnected conceptually driven questions produced.

**On ethnography, empathy and ‘positive’ ethnographies of sport and exercise**

The social-scientific study sport and exercise drew my awareness as an undergraduate through its relentless focus on the practical, and seemingly banal, matters of everyday physical-cultural life. Although often unwritten as such, ethnography’s enduring contribution to the study of the human condition in sport and exercise cultures (or elsewhere) perhaps rests on its foundational interest in unpacking the ways in which people experience embodied life daily within small groups, institutions and highly organized human figurations. In its essence, ethnography’s general epistemological and ontological mandate is one in which people’s cultural experiences in the world should and must figure up front in theorising what it means to be a person (Wolcott, 1999); stated differently, the most beautiful, engaging, penetrating, moving, enriching and reality congruent ethnography is one in and of the (cultural) first person. Ethnographic research on sport and exercise in and of the first person is a humane, morally guided, 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.
Sport and exercise ethnographers might do well in being both physically and affectively close to their fields of study; and quite confident that the very questions they ask, and why, are framed along consequentialist ethical lines (that is, the outcome of the research act should be scrutinized as morally justifiable in the pursuit of a better world). A person-first, radically empathic sport and exercise ethnography is one predicated on a series of practices. First, it requires a researcher to be personally, affectively, cognitively, physically and socially open with and among people, in order to understand them in rounded, intersubjective manners. Second, it demands co-presence with them in the practice of everyday culture life, wherever possible, to feel how culture binds people together in practice. Third, the practice of ethnography evolves as a concatenated effort to illuminate the commonalities of lived experience and the human condition, in the hope of destabilizing conceptual 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 sport and exercise practices (and not only how sport and exercise cultures work against people and their agency). Fifth, such a vision of ethnography asks researchers to allow themselves to be written, in a liminal way, by and through the ethnographic research act; in short, to be changed quite deeply. Sixth, and finally, it requires new and innovative ethnographic modes of representing the human condition as learned and deciphered through fieldwork.

I stress the above features of a person-first ethnography because I think it is fair to write that sport and exercise ethnographies have almost universally homed in on the ways in which suffering, injustice, power, inequality and cultural alienation are located and expressed through sport. This is understandable, as Thin (2014) notes, because the social sciences have, for quite some time, been the academic study of the personally, culturally and socially ‘pathological’. As a result, remarkably few contributions have been made to the study of culturally positive aspects of sport, exercise and health, including fun, happiness, joy, pleasure and personal satisfaction through physical-cultural participation and experience (Phoenix & Orr, 2014). Stebbins launched a plea for such a positive orientation in ethnographic studies of sport and exercise, drawing explicitly on the inspiration of the positive psychology movement, and defining his proposed 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 sport and exercise ethnographers have, save for Pronger (2002), Pringle (2009), Wellard (2012), explored the intricacies of pleasure in everyday leisure, sport, physical activity and exercise practices.

Recent calls to engage more pleasure or happiness-oriented ethnographies of sport, exercise and physical culture are also timely for another set of reasons. Within the past decade, there has been a renewed, and certainly contested, argument that the research act in sport and exercise studies must become much more civically engaged, applied and culturally meaningful to retain any utility. Such an argument (see Atkinson, 2011; Giardina & Newman, 2011; Silk & Andrews, 2011) hinges upon the related premises that not only does theoretically driven ethnographic research on sport and physical culture offer much insight into a spectrum of problems pertaining to personal struggle and social suffering more generally, it also illustrates how life can be deeply pleasurable. Strangely enough, ethnographically accounting for and documenting the pleasurable aspects of the human condition appears to be a radical conceptual task for ethnographers.

Forward thinking, ethnographically based, studies of sport and exercise in and of the first person, may see the possibility of human pleasure through movement as a (if not the) core substantive focus. Such an ethnographic enterprise requires researchers of sport, exercise and
physical culture to break new ground, transgress disciplinary boundaries, pursue theoretically driven research with much vigour, and research beyond the comfortable subjects we so regularly study. 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), to make suggestions, to be morally grounded, and attempt to rekindle a sort of (dare we even say) positivism in ethnographic research often decried as non-value neutral, biased or unscientific. It may require, only as a small list of possible topics, an invested and concerted interest in matters of sport, exercise and physical-culture activity for/as social development, personal growth and self-realization, mental-health improvement, sport and exercise for vulnerable or ageing persons, movement cultures as potential solutions to broad gauge social problems like racism and sexism, human rights in sport and leisure contexts, places to promote inclusively healthy notions of the body, visions of democratic humanism across sport and physical cultures, physical-cultural pastimes outside of the sporting realm, post-sport physical cultures, issues in sport and exercise bioethics and technology, youth development through mainstream and non-mainstream physical activities, experiences of health, wellness, varied (dis)abilities, illness as/in sport and exercise, global sport, leisure and recreation management, and the sensual aspects of sport and exercise; all as vehicles for better seeing how pleasure (and suffering) play out through movement in everyday life.

While generally not written explicitly in sport and exercise texts, there is a growing optimism, even if it remains a whisper, that ethnographic research can and likely should be conducted for the moral and civic good of society. Such sport and exercise ethnographies are to be intextuated with different sensibilities regarding the methodological process. They require a slow and meticulous approach to the ethnographic research act (Silk, Francombe & Andrews, 2014), a willingness to live among and like those we study, and as such, become an emplaced presence in the practice of cultural life with others (Pink, 2009; Giardina & Newman, 2011). I would add that a person-first, humanistic sport and exercise ethnography is one in which both interpersonal empathy (between researchers and subjects) and moral validity (of the very research process itself) are deeply engrained in and through the emplaced/embodied research act (see Smith, 2008). As Thin (2014) reminds us, if the goal of interpretive methods like ethnography is to grasp the world through intersubjective connections with others and write culture, human empathy is paramount in the research act (see Wolcott, 1999).

The role of ethnographic empathy in achieving a substantive, let alone theoretical understanding, of others in the research act is gaining considerable attention in contemporary qualitative research (Smith, 2008), but has been a central tenet of phenomenological research for quite some time. Heidegger’s thoughts (1997), through his philosophical assertion that simply being close to and present in the world with others (what he refers to as ‘being-with’, or Mistsein), are invaluable for achieving empathy-based, intersubjective understandings of them. Co-presence and the close sharing of time and space, to Heidegger, is an important bridge toward mutual recognition and empathic connection. Merleau-Ponty (1996) offers additional inspiration by stressing how an empathic kinship is created when people physically meet and phenomenologically react to/with one another in time and space. Truly understanding the essence or the self of the other is not as important as simply sharing embodied presence and developing sui generis constructions of one another. More recently, Ratcliffe (2012) suggests that the most radical phenomenological studies are ones in which (personal and cultural) empathy figures centrally in the research act. Clearly, I would argue, ethnographic empathy is precisely a tipping point in the development of a person-first and positive ethnographic study of sport and exercise. As Ratcliffe reminds us, ‘Radical empathy, like empathy more generally, incorporates a stance of openness to others, a willingness to be affected by them, to have one’s own experience shaped
by them’ (2012, p. 488f). I hope this chapter lays some ground for researchers in sport and exercise to not only be open to ethnography, but also to be affected and shaped by this tradition in ways that enhance our research (whatever that might be) and work with cultural members.

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