



Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance

lisahunter

To cite this article: lisahunter (2011) Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance, *Sport, Education and Society*, 16:2, 255-257, DOI: [10.1080/13573322.2011.546990](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.546990)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.546990>



Published online: 16 Feb 2011.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 577



View related articles [↗](#)

Book reviews

Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance

T. Tara Magdalinski, 2009

Abingdon, Oxon & New York, Routledge

ISBN13 978-0-415-37877-2 (hbk)

£25.99 (pbk), 190 pp.

ISBN13 978-0-415-37876-5 (pbk)

ISBN13 978-0-203-09938-4 (ebk)

You need not look far for evidence of technology in sport, physical activity, exercise, leisure, physical education or even play. Whether it is the casual jogger with the latest design in running shoes, the seasonal snowboarder on the re-released banana board, the coffee circuit weekend warrior cyclist sporting a carbon fibre frame or Silvana Lima demonstrating new moves on a surfboard that can sustain aerial landings, technology often has prime importance. It might be in the development of equipment design, the use of new forms of equipment, clothing, external body modification, ingested and injected substances and perhaps even genetic modification. While some of these technologies have changed the way we might experience life, many are designed to enhance performance, to find the winning edge in one way or another, sometimes sanctioned, but other times not. Many of these technologies interact directly with us as humans, with our physicality and with cultural meanings drawn from society.

In *Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance*, Tara Magdalinski takes up the notion of performance enhancement in relation to sport, technology and the body, not to take a particular stance about performance enhancement but instead to explore ‘the cultural resistance to the application of technology to the athletic body’ (13). Like her previous book *With God on their side: sport in the service of religion* (2002, written with Tim Chandler) it was a good read from front to back. Tara’s clear writing style and carefully laid out manuscript makes for easy reading, as does a well-scaffolded argument about the nature of athletic performance and the role of technology in enhancing such performance. The separate chapters can be read as stand along works with internal cohesion but also with useful references to other chapters and within a well-summarised frame in the introduction and concluding chapters.

A succinct yet comprehensive introductory chapter provides a framework that incorporates technology, the body and sport and presents a summary of what lies ahead in the chapters that follow. The next four chapters unpack the nature of sport, body, performance and health in that order. Magdalinski argues that the very nature of sport, including: competition; disciplinary regulation of space and time; and performance augmentation, means that technology is employed in nearly all forms of

sport. She also notes the role of technology in the discipline of sport science and exercise science, a significant player in performance enhancement. She marks debates, controversies and tensions around moral or health reasons for some forms of technology to be considered inappropriate or not, without submitting to argue for a particular position.

Magdalinski contends that the body is where the application of technology is realised, visual evidence of illicit performance enhancement that the public learns to 'read'. The nature of sport is described as socially constructed with technology artificially juxtaposed against the natural (and morally superior) human body. Magdalinski argues, however, that the 'neat binary couplet' of artifice/nature is 'disrupted by the elite athletic body, an entity that is neither wholly natural nor completely technological' (8). In dismantling the nature/artifice binary, she explores the flexible and interconnected relationship between body, sport, health and morality and the integral part technology plays in performance within such relationships. She argues that at the margins of fixed categories 'the discord between natural and unnatural is revealed' (161). She exposes the limitations of such essentialist binaries and points to the liminal space of practice and performance as sites for challenge to conventional views of performance—perhaps the next *breakthrough* in elite sport! Given the centrality of performance enhancement of the body to sport, Magdalinski examines inconsistencies and assumptions in relation to health and sport and the body of athletes. For example, the prohibition of performance enhancement drugs, under the guise of fair play and athlete health, has meant unhealthy practices have been taken up for athletes' to gain an edge, practices such as blood doping or the use of more harmful substances to mask the performance-enhancing drug.

In Chapter 6, Magdalinski uses gender as a lens to throw more light on boundary surveillance and maintenance of sport and bodies that evoke dominant discourses of dichotomised and hierarchical sexes, hegemonic hyperfemininity and heterosexuality. Chapters 8 and 9 refer to the Australian context as a case site where Magdalinski explores the construction of social identities and the national identity of Australianness being 'clean' and 'natural' as illustrated in her analysis of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

The book is relevant to those interested in human performance or the body from various perspective including coaching, sport and exercise science, health, physical education, sports management and human movement studies more generally. The book is relevant to readers in sports studies, elite sport and ethics, particularly where performance enhancement and technology throw up many ethical dilemmas for debate. Arguably it will prove useful for those in exercise science and sports science wishing to move beyond the hegemonic ontological and epistemological positivist frame where I suspect the real (conceptual) breakthroughs are to be had. Although the book may be written for tertiary undergraduate students, research higher degree students and academics, I believe it is also quite a readable book for those in sports-related industries and even the general public willing to go beyond popular press commentary on sport, ethics and performance.

Reference

Magdalinski, T. & Chandler, T. (2002) *With God on their side: sport in the service of religion*. (London, New York, Routledge).

lisahunter, Department of Sport & Leisure Studies, Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Email: lisahunter@waikato.ac.nz

© lisahunter, 2011

DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2011.546990

Fathering through sport and leisure

Tess Kay (Ed), 2009

New York, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Europe

US\$49.95 (pbk), 288 pp.

ISBN 978-0-415-43870-4

As an academic with a primary research interest around men, masculinities and sport, I was particularly interested in reviewing this book. Additionally as a father of an 11-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son, I was keen to explore how my own fathering style around engaging my children in sport and leisure compares with what is occurring globally.

My wife and I purposely share the parental sporting engagement role with our children. It is often during my children's sports training that I sit and read student papers, PhD drafts or academic literature for up to several hours while they partake in their sporting pursuits. This book, more so than others that I have read, peaked the interest of fellow parents within my vicinity. Consequently, we engaged in conversations about contemporary fatherhood and the roles that fathers now play as compared to the roles that they played in years gone by. It became clear that this book on *fathering through sport and leisure* is timely and certainly has a content area that is appealing to wide and varied audience.

From an academic perspective I found *Fathering through sport and leisure* to be engaging, scholarly and accessible. The breadth of issues that are covered and the manner in which the chapters are written means that it will appeal to a wide audience. The book is ideal for all levels of scholars from undergraduate to postgraduate and beyond. I particularly enjoyed the way in which the book was structured to enable the reader to develop an understanding, early on, of the historical elements of fathering and how these elements have come to influence fathering today. This was achieved through Tess Kay's first chapter that discusses 'the landscape of fathering' and in so doing provides relevant statistical data that is then reflected and analysed to provide an important backdrop to the ensuing chapters of the book.

Chapter 2 provides insight into the American pastime of 'playing catch' and the manner in which it came about as being not only a father and son pursuit, but also father and daughter activity. It also provides discussion around the capacity of 'playing