

Reviews

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Emmanuelle Tulle, *Ageing, the Body and Social Change: Running in Later Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2008, 200 pp., hbk £50.00, ISBN 13: 978 0 230 51759 2.

This book begins with a question: ‘Can we really change the world by running?’ It seems almost ludicrous but Tulle actually has a point. Her central thesis is that through an appreciation of the interweaving of embodied action and structural affordances it is possible to discern change and therefore to help bring it about. Her empirical focus on ‘embodied action’ comprises an exploration into the experiences of veteran elite runners in the context of the structural factors, such as class, gender and age, that constrain and facilitate their running careers. The book has two parts. The first half provides an overview of three extant sociological literatures, on ageing, the body and sport. The second half reports the findings of Tulle’s qualitative study of veteran runners. In addition to participant observation, Tulle carried out in-depth interviews with seven women and 14 men whose ages ranged from 48 to 86 years. All had achieved competitive success but were not, as she puts it, ‘stars’, because she wanted to focus on ‘ordinary runners’. Three chapters on findings give voice to the runners themselves, with one reporting running careers, the second analysing the deployment of techniques in order to achieve an athletic body, and the third examining the realisation and management of the runners’ ageing bodies.

The literature review is comprehensive and clear, making the book ideal for teaching sociology students. The work of authors such as Hepworth, Shilling, Leder, Crossely and others are effectively used so as not to ‘reinvent the wheels they have so creatively set in motion’ (p. xiii). Tulle’s overall approach is explicitly Bourdieusian and the notions of habitus, dispositions, capital and social field are successfully used to gain analytic purchase on the body-work required for effective running, the social context of the runners’ cultural milieu, and the formation of athletic identities. These three dimensions form key analytic concerns for her subsequent empirical analysis of the bodies of older runners and the potential for change. ‘The whole point of this book’, Tulle writes, ‘is to craft a theoretical frame which would precisely guide our understanding of resistant embodiment, at the confluence of the intimate experience of the body and social, cultural and discursive structures’ (p. 39). The culture and structures of the ‘social field’ of running relate to the social hierarchies of class and gender which have permeated the sport.

There are many types of running, but perhaps the most notable division is between track-and-field and distance running. While the middle classes have historically dominated the former, the latter has long been a working man’s sport. Neither type of event was accessible to women who, until the 1970s, were excluded from participation and limited to short-distance events. It was not until 1984, for

example, that the International Olympic Committee permitted a women's marathon at the Olympics. Women were perceived to be too frail and fragile. Tulle explains that since the late 1980s three transformations in the organisation of running have enhanced the opportunities for, and relaxed some structural barriers to, running. First, there was the 'popularisation' of the sport and, more recently, the rise of high profile, mass participation running events. Secondly, there was a process of 'gentrification' with runners participating from a wider range of social backgrounds. Thirdly, there was a 'feminisation' of the sport with women becoming involved. In terms of older runners, a major organisational change was the formation of the Veteran Movement – and the establishment of the *World Association of Veteran Athletics* (WAVA). A social movement that makes older runners visible provides opportunities for participation and competition within age categories and thus may contribute to 'a reconstruction of the ageing experience'. Vets' (to use the colloquial term) events provide an institutional context wherein 'ageing bodies' can successfully compete and gain physical capital. The tyranny of youth dissipates. In fact, some runners may even look forward to moving into older age categories precisely because this will mean new opportunities for competition and success. And this is the crucial point, where the 'social field' – the institutional, cultural and structural contexts – allows for bodily reproduction and competence to become normalised, the tensions between ageing and maintenance of the body may become easier to manage. The veterans' athletic field fosters a positive habitus for older people thereby transforming their cultural position. In sum, institutional, cultural and structural contexts that facilitate ageing processes really can change the world for older people. This does not mean that older people have to take up running but rather, her book concludes, social policies that facilitate and normalise ageing processes can indeed change the worlds of older people. I urge anyone interested in the body, ageing, sport or social policy to read this book. It is insightful, clearly written and its relevance extends beyond running.

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Elizabeth MacKinlay (ed.), *Ageing, Disability and Spirituality: Addressing the Challenge of Disability in Later Life*, Jessica Kingsley, London, 2008, 272 pp., pbk £19.99, ISBN 13: 978 1 84310 584 8.

Elizabeth MacKinlay has established herself as a leading voice in the area of the pastoral care of older people. She combines her work as an Anglican priest with that of the Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies in Canberra, Australia. She is also chair of the Australian Capital Territory Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. Her book *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age*, also published by Jessica Kingsley, won the 2006 *Australasian Journal of Ageing* book award. The genre of this book is familiar to British readers, in gathering together the papers from a national conference on 'Ageing and Spirituality' hosted by MacKinlay's centre. The aim of the book is to explore the effects of disability on people in later life and it focuses on how people with either life-long disabilities or