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Citation: Roderick, Martin, Smith, Andy and Potrac, Paul (2017) The Sociology of Sports Work, Emotions and Mental Health: Scoping the Field and Future Directions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 34 (2). pp. 99-107. ISSN 0741-1235

Published by: UNSPECIFIED

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Published by: Human Kinetics

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2017-0082> <<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2017-0082>>

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**The sociology of sports work, emotions and mental health:  
scoping the field and future directions**

Journal:	<i>Sociology of Sport Journal</i>
Manuscript ID	ssj.2017-0082
Manuscript Type:	Editorial
Keywords:	Mental Illness, Sports work, health, Employment, Careers, Wellbeing

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## **The sociology of sports work, emotions and mental health: scoping the field and future directions**

### **Introduction**

The central object of this introductory essay, and of this Special Issue more broadly, is to explore relations between the study of work and the continuing evolution of the sociology of sport with a particular focus on the mental health of sports workers. In particular, we argue that revitalizing the study of sports work, and eschewing the highly individualized and reductionist approaches most often demonstrated by dominating quantitative and psychological approaches, is essential if we are to understand more adequately the complex interdependencies which characterize the lives of sports workers and have often profound impacts on health and wellbeing. We also argue that there has been a relative neglect – until recently – among sociologists of sport to systematically research the benefits and costs to mental health of sports work, and that there is much to be gained from broader sociological investigations of work in pursuing this research agenda. In doing so, we examine: (i) social trends in work and employment; (ii) work and labour as key areas of sociological investigation; and (iii) the implications of work and sport for mental health.

Before we consider these issues, however, it is worth noting that here sports workers include employees of the sports industry, and people for whom a key element of the job is the production, or support for the production, of 'sport' at all levels of performance. Sports workers may also be people who 'work' for sports organizations voluntarily and receive (however ill-defined) a psychic rather than economic remuneration. As with all other forms of work,

people employed in the sports industry work not only to make a living but also to acquire self-respect, to fulfill a desire, and achieve self-actualization. These types of sports workers are variously represented in the articles in this Special Issue, which involve high-level and professional athletes, coaches, student volunteers, and higher education academics. There are of course other types of workers for whom 'sport' represents an important occupation, including those in related domains such as the leisure and hospitality industries, and understanding the work situations of these groups is no less important than those we have been able to include here.

### **Social trends in work and employment**

In his seminal text, *Good jobs, bad jobs: The rise of polarised and precarious employment systems in the United States, 1970s-2000s*, Arne Kalleberg (2011) identified major trends that have had a significant impact upon contemporary job quality in the USA. These included growing inequalities in many job rewards, the recognition of 'bad jobs' as a central feature of ongoing employment, and greater 'precarity for all workers' (Kalleberg, 2011, p.XX). These trends, he argued, are of international relevance given

economic, political, and social forces such as the intensification of global competition, rapid technological innovation and change, deregulation of markets, increased mobility of capital and growing financialisation of the economy, the decline in Unions and worker

power, and the continued rise of the service sector. (Kalleberg, 2012, p.429)

In addition to these macrostructural dynamics, Kalleberg (2012) argued, are demographic changes associated with increased labour force diversity, including the creation of a larger group of non-White, non-male, workers said to be especially vulnerable to exploitation. Kalleberg (2012) also noted how highly individualised, market-oriented, neoliberal policy making prioritises short-term financial performance and encourages private and public sector organisations to adopt increasingly flexible employment relations. This is perhaps most visible in the use of temporary, often zero-hour contracts, independent contracting, and the rise in low-pay, low-benefit, work roles in liberal market economies such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA (Kalleberg, 2012, 2016). The changes to employment conditions have not been limited to low skilled and/or blue-collar occupations. Indeed, corporate restructuring and other organisational changes (e.g., downsizing, technological control) have also 'produced a deterioration in working conditions in white collar jobs ... that is reflected in an increase in workloads and hence time pressures, lower salaries, an erosion of pension and health benefits, and greater insecurity' (Kalleberg, 2016, p.121). We shall return to the relationship between work and mental health later, but it is clear that the interdependence between macro socio-economic relations and more localized labour market conditions, and between the working and personal lives of workers, have clear impacts on health and wellbeing (Tausig, 2013) which

emphasise the need for sociologists of sport to better engage with work as a longstanding feature of sociological investigation.

### **Sociology, work and labour**

The study of work has historically been at the axis of sociology from its classical foundations. For example, the organization and experience of (paid) work was key to Emile Durkheim's thinking about social change, Karl Marx's ideas about class and the capitalist mode of production, and Max Weber's accounts of bureaucracy and rationality (Edgell, Gottfried, & Gartner, 2015; Grint, 2005). However, since the early 1980s, the centrality of the study of work and labour to the academic discipline of sociology has become somewhat disengaged from in-vogue sociological theorizing. From our perspective, it has perhaps been eclipsed by other now more mainstream concerns including globalization, risk, identities and consumption. Instead, work as a core focus has become progressively more central among social science sub-disciplines such as management studies and organizational behaviour (Strangleman and Warren, 2008).

These ideas connected to work, labour and employment still count, and not just to those of us who spend time as sociologists investigating working lives in sport. In sport, as in other social domains, it is certainly not the case that the problem of work has been relegated from everyday life and forms of (social) media and political attention. We are reminded routinely on media platforms for example of the centrality of work, or lack of it, to individuals, families and communities, to cultures of profit and risk, and to rising rates of unemployment among school leavers. These are all social issues that



stimulate sociological deliberations about the morality of salary bonuses for city bankers and, for that matter, the pay of top athletes, and how best to provide for the long-term unemployed. This regular attention requires us to continue to comprehend working conditions and workplace relations that are related to broader sociological concerns which have recently risen in disciplinary status. We are drawn in this connection to themes that have found regular attention from social scientists such as work-life balance, gender and family, and the reconfiguration of communication technologies.

As we noted earlier, our central motivation for developing this Special Issue is to stimulate much needed sociological analyses on the relationships between sport, work and the mental health of sports workers. This is not to undermine or devalue existing work that has continued to take place within and beyond the sociology of sport – for example the insightful narrative analyses of Kitrina Douglas (2009) – but we want to re-invigorate the study of work such that it no longer cowers beneath newer, more fashionable topics. The study of work and organization thrives currently in business schools and occupational psychology in addition to dedicated sociological outlets, and is often organized around classical ideas connected to power, control, and subordination/insubordination in economic life (Halford and Strangleman, 2009; Stewart, 2004). These themes draw on sociological traditions associated with work and we feel they are overdue attention in empirical research on, and the sociological theorizing of, (global) patterns of sports work. More specifically, there has been a mixture of historical forgetfulness coupled with an often-blinkered view of sports work and, for example, the careers of professional athletes. Their performances at work are almost

entirely, and somewhat irrationally, truncated from the major concerns professional athletes characteristically bring to their jobs, namely: security, opportunity, pay and (an absence of a) sense of occupational community (Roderick, 2014). The psychological notion of mental toughness in the context of individualized performance (although rarely acknowledged as situated in the workplace) has been vastly over-examined in contrast to basic material human needs such as confidence in employment status, well-being, and the right to be treated in non-discriminatory and dignified ways. This psychological phenomenon has also been routinely divorced from the relational, cultural contexts in which it is grounded (one exception to this is Coulter et al., 2016). In any academic moral order, how can quantifiable performance anxiety measures become such a pre-occupation, prioritized over the relatively neglected concerns of occupational rights and justice or feelings of workplace dignity, protection and safety? And how does the apparent concern with performance enhancement, resilience building and psychological robustness square with the almost innumerable (public known) cases of mental illness (and other wellbeing matters) among sports workers, particularly professional athletes, which point to the significant costs paid by pursuing performance-oriented goals?

There has been a good deal of sociological examination of labour processes and the place of work in contemporary work environments; social theorizing that points to the richness of working lives. Even so, the development of the division of labour in sport and the acknowledgment of the kinds of work tasks currently being undertaken – often to the direct economic advantage of others in the name of sport – needs now to help sociologists

capture a broader, more reality congruent, picture of how people construct meaning and identity from their sports work, are socialized into and through employment, and subsequently how they communicate workplace cultural values. Crises in sport related to various social problems, which have disrupted the historically entrenched, intelligible 'moral order' in sport, have often been associated with body panics linked to behaviours such as sexual and emotional forms of abuse, violence and (self-) harm, hyper-commodification, performance-enhancing technology, and discrimination. The sports industry has grown immeasurably but in ways that have not always addressed the very behaviours that amplify moral panics most regularly connected to sport. In many respects the development of modern achievement-oriented sport, and the increasing specialization of work roles in professional sport in particular, provides a context in which health and wellbeing problems are becoming progressively more common. With the development of sport science for example we have witnessed a process of the divisioning of labour in the sports industry which has created jobs and careers in a (performance-oriented) occupational field that, to some extent, is resistant of the deskilling trends and manufacturing technological advances so closely scrutinized in other industry-based workplaces. Despite its now naturalized positioning as a seemingly indispensable element of high-level sport, and its apparent dissemination to all levels of sport and coaching, there have been very few meaningful attempts to critically examine the unintended psycho-social consequences of these medico-techno-scientific developments (see Baker 2012).

Leading, early US sociologists of work like Everett C. Hughes (1971) focused theoretical attention on the character of workplaces, management styles and the values attached to work, and explored the way employment shaped identity, academic tasks about which, in sports work, there have been largely only taken-for-granted assumptions. More recent mainstream debates of work have been marked by a series of sociological claims that suggest a detachment of meaning from work for employees. Tim Strangleman (2012) argues, for example, that Catherine Casey's (1995) important research examined how, in her high-tech corporation, ever-greater attempts were made to 'engineer' the subjectivities of staff. The conclusion for Casey (1995) was that there was little space for self – or collective – identity at work other than that designed and 'encouraged', at times 'regulated', by the firm. This type of research championed the idea that, in the so-called neo-liberal, 'new economy', there has been a loss of work identity (Beck, 2000) and a concomitant corrosion of character (Sennett, 1998). This body of theorizing has focused on the way employment has become destabilized, uncertain, subject to unavoidable change, and on how normal life stories are now fragmenting (Bauman, 1998). Even so, while job certainty is no longer an option for the majority, in professional sport, work has never acquired a secure character. Much of what is now experienced and examined in employment spheres, and is hotly debated in the social sciences where the idea of traditional careers and career pathways were formerly more easily discerned, has never been typical in sporting careers. These careers have always been experienced as boundaryless (Cohen and Mallon, 1999), precarious (Roderick, 2006), and often hazardous (Young, 2004). Athletic

careers have also been wrapped tightly around values of privilege, courage, fairness, meritocracy and love, ideological notions which have insulated sports work and its workers from serious critical scrutiny in public domains. Very few academic studies exist that resist the centripetal forces of what Kitrina Douglas and David Carless (2009) refer to as the 'performance narrative', the gravitational effects of which are felt throughout the highly complex sporting networks of interdependencies, and certainly beyond the singular viewpoints, of individual athletes. Aping the work of Richard Sennett (2003), which insightfully addressed how respect is eroded in modern societies, we might legitimately ask whether there have ever been meaningful social spaces for sports workers such as athletes and coaches (and now arguably sport scientists) to develop both as workers and as human beings, free from the ineluctable pull of the dominant logic of performance.

Working conditions for all sports workers, including professional athletes, are 'extreme' (in the sense suggested by Granter et al. 2015), increasingly short-term, producing a category of acquiescent, flexible individuals who come to adopt highly instrumental orientations to their (performance) work (Roderick and Schumacker, 2017). We might hypothesize that high profile, intensely (perhaps intrusively) surveyed athletes can no longer embed themselves in their jobs, in traditionally understood ways, and crucially this denies them the ability to form character, or carve out narrative, in and through their work in ways that are not already (in)formally prescribed. Despite all the critical sociological debate concerning work, employment and labour, there is simply no question for many of sport's 'true believers' (Lapchick, 1989) or 'evangelists' (Coalter, 2007) of whether athletes-as-

workers can find meaning and form identity from their work they do: it is all-but taken-for-granted that athletes love their work and pursue performance perfection relentlessly. Athletes' positions in the structure of this industry are therefore largely passive rather than critical. As the work of John Hughson et al. (2004) attests, the history of work in sport, the sense of nostalgia which surrounds it, the mythical stories of heroes and villains, success, failure and redemption, is far more sociologically complex and potentially critically emotional than has been normally tolerated in popular cultural representation and academic usage. Dramatic ruptures in the life histories of athletes are rationalized, treated as unexceptional, and defended in terms of 'sacrifice', but there have been misunderstandings about athlete attachment, meaning and identity in and around sports work, including the psycho-social aetiology of mental health and illness (Roderick and Gibbons, 2015).

Both sport fans and workers often hark back to a lost amateur golden age that is now understood as fading from memory. Strangleman (2012) draws attention to the classic writing of Raymond Williams, who he claims stresses the importance of recognizing the continuity within accounts of work in the recent past, and how this informs us of the 'structure of feeling' in those who produce it. Williams (1977, p.132) defines the structure of feeling (and experience) as 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt ... characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships'. He argues that a recurring appeal to a golden age could be understood as a reaction to the accelerating capitalist developments (Williams, 1977) and, in the context of sport specifically, we might point to the perceived erosion of creativity and

autonomy in athletes' lives and the diminishing of, however ill-defined, a sense of the beauty of sport. Understanding the structure of feeling is important in terms of the purchase it offers in theorizing the dynamic character of – managerial, political, scientific – ideas and their bearing on generations of sports workers. For example, the fast pace of technological, commercial and politico-economic developments in the sports industry have impacted on working lives in sport, which have been anything but slow, in the sense offered originally for these ideas by Carl Honoré (2004). The 'slow movement' invites a re-focused reflection of neo-liberal agendas, including the unbridled marketization and managerialism, which have in part been associated with a fast, merciless drive for performance management and, ultimately, results in the context of sport. There has been however very little critical engagement with ideas associated with the value of measurement in sport, the production of 'big data', or their human costs (Baerg, 2017). In contrast to the idea of 'fast' (Honoré, 2004), what therefore might be the merits of slow sport? If fast (neo-liberal) sport has brought about iron cage approaches to athlete coaching and management (Thompson et al., 2015), ineluctable sports worker production/productivity (Beamish and Borowy, 1988; Beamish and Ritchie, 2006), and an over-riding need for scientists to contain anxiety in sports organizations and workplaces (Hoberman, 1992), what are the unintended threats to, and is there evidence to substantiate, health, well-being and mental illness implications in particular? Could slow sport mean a return to, or perhaps a re-connection with, a humanistic framework for sports work that subsequently might be a catalyst for, or valorize, athlete creativity, authenticity and a genuine spirit of play and exploration? A sports industry based mainly

on the achievement of profit from results in the global sports marketplace has brought about an interdependence between 'greedy' (sports) institutions (Coser, 1974) and 'technically-trained docility' (Shogun, 1999) which helps to perpetuate a 'structure of feeling' among sports workers in which anxiety becomes anticipated and routinized.

We have witnessed in sport the rise of psychological techniques and practices for dealing with problems like workplace stress, performance anxiety, and distracting motivations (Hanton and Mellalieu, 2012), and these have been utilized increasingly in an industry characterized by a cult-like hardening approach to accountability, measurement and quantification. These are conditions of work that lie at the heart of the production of anxiety (and related conditions) itself. Some (sport) psychologists have become revered for their work in tackling so-called 'negative' athlete emotions and enhancing performance via various emotional management techniques, yet ironically they are part of a wider system of sport science that has been an essential component in delivering the neo-liberal drive for perfection in sport, which underpins in the first instance the generation of anxiety. Little scrutiny has been afforded to the forms of shame, humiliation and fear for those entangled in the process of 'measuring up'. Examining the structure of feeling in sports work might help expose the hidden injuries of the neo-liberal sports industry and offer a starting point to slow down the dehumanization of high level athletes-as-workers who remain largely silent behind the veil of the dominant cultural ideology of sport: a part of which is that they love what it is that they do and consider themselves privileged. Resisting the centripetal forces of the performance narrative, breaking the silence and the implicit acceptance of the



current, fast, quantified sports industry is so difficult though as it requires sports workers to labour against the grain, to fight the relentless pull of forces acting on them, and to comprehend the resulting anxieties and existential worries as an outcome of the structure of feeling to which sport so readily gives rise.

### **The trouble with work, sport and mental health**

As we noted earlier, a particular motivation for this Special Issue was to revitalize the study of sports work and reclaim it from the dominant, but arguably homo clausus, reductionist tendencies most often used by positivistic-oriented researchers, for whom the inclination is to divide up psycho-social elements of human performance and their behavioural outcomes and subject them to singular, quantifiable attention. There exist emerging and influential psychological literatures for instance related to conceptual ideas all of which originate from interpretive, sociological labour or work-based studies, conceptual ideas which have been 'reduced' in character such that they can be measure by a research instrument in sport contexts, including orientations and attitudes to work, work identity, career passages, occupational health, and emotional labour. Lying at the heart of our misgivings of the use of blunt quantitative research instruments is the sociological idea of interdependence. We argue that, for example, (individual and collective) work-identities are worked at in front and back stage interactions in which people overtly comply with role expectations, and acquiesce in the circumstances in which they find themselves, yet covertly deliberate about what constitutes for them an authentic way of being in their worlds (Goffman, 1959). Employees

must consider how they want (or have) to live their lives in and beyond the workplace. Our approach draws attention to the way subjectivities are continuously made and remade: a social process that occurs in concert with our self-dialogues with imagined others who inhabit our thoughts and whose perceptions we use as we narrate our past, present and anticipated experiences and possible selves (Ezzy, 1998; Hickey and Roderick, 2017).

In contrast to such a monadic (reductionist) approach we propose a reorientation to an alternative conceptualisation of work offered by Miriam Glucksmann (1995, 2005), a framework she refers to as 'the total social organization of labour'. Glucksmann (1995, p.63) argues that:

By focusing on the relational organization of all labour, however and wherever it is undertaken, the concept of work as economic activity is recovered but no longer restricted by the boundaries of separating institutional spaces and spheres or the constraints demarcating traditional academic disciplines.

Likewise, we are keen to incorporate the links between, for instance, work at home and in paid employment. We want to move forward with a conceptual framework that is capable of recognizing and encompassing the interdependencies of both life domains 'rather than viewing them as either independent and autonomous or functional of, and reducible to, each other' (Glucksmann, 1995, p.63). The problem of how to theorize activities and relations in sport that span different spheres relates to: (i) the diversity of areas in which work is conducted; and (ii) from 'the simultaneous

embeddedness' (Glucksmann, 1995, p.93) of work tasks and relationships in other activities from which they are not easily made distinct. We might include here activities connected to the formal economy of sport, but also family relations bound up with the development of interest and motivation, with the provision of opportunities, and with the (in)formal management and politics of sport.

In the context of understanding sports work, there have been very few academic attempts made to overcome the dichotomy between, for instance, the so-called public and private spheres of sports workers' lives and the degree to which they are enmeshed. Yet the total social organization of labour is a framework that may assist an analysis of labour of this kind undertaken in related spheres, though these spheres may be categorized as different. It concurrently attempts therefore to make redundant the problem of defining work and the issue of establishing what it does, and certainly does not, constitute. Since a range of activities undertaken in domestic and more formal economic and domestic institutions are bound together, we agree with Glucksmann's (2005) consideration that they are most adequately understood as fitting to a wider system of work conducted under conditions that binds related fields together. Glucksmann (2005) argues that any analysis of the total social organization of labour should involve the distribution of labour between different sorts of function, for example production, service, welfare, education, and with the institutions and types of labour in which they are undertaken. In the context of understanding the development of modern sport, it could help an investigation of the emergence of new forms of work – e.g., the role and function of sports scientists – that could be incorporated within

the framework which also seeks to explain the consequences for athletes of hyper-commodification, a social process which has profound implications for health, well-being and, what we might refer to as, a 'work-life' complex. What can happen in one sphere of the sports industry is thus affected by, and in turn affects, another so that they must be recognized as interdependent. Approaching work using this conceptual framework restricts the possibility of there being such a constant and debilitating overemphasis on autonomous spheres of production – we might consider the production of mental toughness in this connection (Gucciardi et al., 2017) – and assist a cessation of the established disciplinary carve up based on pre-set, but faux-agendas: agendas which informally legitimize who comments on what and whom, and which types of voice count.

So any revitalized relational examination of 'work' in the wider sports industry should acknowledge unpaid domestic labour but also caring work, voluntary work, and community and youth work, and how the emotionality of such work impacts on the health and wellbeing of those involved. These ideas to some extent offer up a critique of a narrowly defined production economy of performance in sport. Paid employment must be understood as signifying only one form of work. While there exist questions about where to draw the line between work and non-work, there is an interesting discussion here in relation to the production of athletes and of collapsing all (emotional) activities bound up with this long-term process into modes of work. For example, we are drawn to Shona Thompson's (1999) classic study, *Mother's Taxi*, and the insightful research of Stephen Ortiz (2006) on the wives of professional athletes. As many other social scientists have indicated, 'work' is not solely

tioned to economic production, but for example, a parent 'taxiing' and 'supporting' a young athlete may help the employment prospects of a coach and, potentially, the production line of a future professional athlete. Work in the context of a broader sports industry is, as Glucksmann (1998, p.65) notes,

embedded in, entangled with, conducted and expressed through other activities and relations which may be social, political, kinship, sexual or familial – it may also be economic of course – but it may be impossible to separate out a pure 'work' aspect that is not also always something else as well.

Adopting the total social organization of labour as a framework through which to analyse various features of sports work also holds out the possibility of addressing the relative failure of sociologists of sport to engage with broader (sociological) work on the connections between work, mental health and well-being. This is crucial since mental illness (particularly depression, anxiety and work-related stress) is now the leading cause of sickness absence and long-term work incapacity (Harvey et al., 2017). The rising costs of mental illness among the working population, it has been argued, 'has created a major public health problem, with policymakers and health professionals increasingly demanding a better understanding of the links between modern work and mental health' (Harvey et al., 2017, p.301). We would argue that sports work should be regarded no differently and that there is a very real need to examine the occupational and public health risks of working in sport, including in relation to issues such as the stigma and

experience of mental illness and suicide. Both topics have been variously investigated by classical sociologists (e.g. Becker, 1963; Durkheim, 2002 [1897]; Goffman, 1961, 1963; Scheff, 1970, 2000), though the ideas in these works have not yet received significant attention among sociologists with an interest in sport and (mental) health.

Sociologists of sport have, of course, investigated mental health related topics, including: cultures of thinness and weight management practices (e.g. Atkinson, 2011), eating disorders (e.g. Atkinson, 2012; Markula, 2003), body image and physicality (e.g. Monaghan, 2001), and suicide (Malcolm and Scott, 2012). The complex and contradictory relationships between sport, health and medicine more broadly have also received significant attention from sociologists (e.g. Malcolm, 2017; Waddington, 2000; Waddington and Smith, 2009). However, it can properly be said that there is much scope for sociologists of sport to expand significantly their investigations into the complex relations that exist between sport, work and mental health and illness, and how these interconnected fields coalesce around broader social inequalities. The future growth of sociological interest in these areas might be facilitated by broader natio-specific and global concerns about a variety of interrelated processes within and outside sports worlds. These include: the rising incidence and global disease burden of mental illness (e.g. Marmot, 2010, 2015; Pickett and Wilkinson, 2015; WHO, 2015; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010); the increasing prevalence of suicide, especially among mental health patients, middle-aged men and those who self-harm (Health Select Committee, 2017); the revelation by growing numbers of athletes (usually at the end of their careers) of their (and others') experience of mental illness

(Platts and Smith, 2016; Roderick and Gibbons, 2015) and associated concerns about athlete welfare; and the growth of community-based sports programmes, and associated policies, which seek to promote good mental health and assist in the treatment and management of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety and bi-polar disorder (Smith et al., 2016).

### **Papers in this special issue**

The papers included in this Special Issue begin to address some of the key sociological problems associated with sports work, emotion and mental health we outline above. In the first paper, Jenny McMahon, Kerry McGannon and Chris Zehntner draw upon ethnodrama and Goffman's 'presentation of self' to examine how three elite swimmers routinely engage in, and negotiate, the 'presentation of self' in relation to what they call the 'dominant ideology of "slim to win"'. The authors conclude that the particular 'impressions' sports workers such as elite swimmers may present to others in relation to 'slim to win' can, and often does, impact negatively on the social, emotional, physical and mental dimensions of health.

The second paper, by Deborah Butler, uses autophenomenography to offer a theoretical and methodological account of the interrelatedness of the personal and working life of a sports worker in horse racing who, through emotional trauma and mental ill-health, loses her 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1992). Butler argues that the notion of the 'feel for the game', which she uses to refer to the unconscious bodily dispositions and automatic performance of sports work, helps illuminate how practically embodied attitudes and dispositions can be reclaimed through working with and

exercising racehorses, that is, through human-non-human animal intercorporeality acts. The theme of emotional regulation, feeling and expression is further explored in the third contribution by John Hayton which draws upon the work of Arlie Hochschild in a study of undergraduate student volunteer sports workers in north-east England. Hayton notes that while there is an expanding literature on job insecurity among those currently in work or seeking work, little work exists on the emotional experiences of those preparing to enter the labour market after higher education. The study illustrates how a sample of volunteers who deliver sports coaching to hard-to-reach groups engage in emotional labour strategies which contribute to feelings of anxiety, frustration and other emotions that threaten mental health. These emotions and experiences are managed through the use of personal control systems, the display of feeling rules, and surface and deep acting, among other strategies adopted by students.

The next paper is by John Fry and Daniel Bloyce who examine the effects of globalization on the well-being of migrant professional athletes via interviews conducted with 20 touring professional golfers. The findings reveal how golfers experience a variety of work-related and personal pressures which are known risk factors to poor mental health and illness, including loneliness, isolation, low social support, and difficulties in maintaining effective work-life and effort-reward balances. Collectively, these experiences shed light on the importance of locating athlete migrants' anxieties, vulnerabilities and career contingencies within the broader interdependency networks of which they and significant others are a part.



In the penultimate paper, Brian Gearity and Lynette Henderson Metzger draw upon the concept of microaggressions, which has been widely used in psychology, to demonstrate how its application in the sociology of sport can assist in the development of a socio-cultural understanding of sport coaching, mental health, and social identities. Using three creative nonfiction stories in men's sports coaching, they argue that microaggressions are exercised as disciplinary power to control athletes' bodies and that an understanding of power-knowledge produces coach and athlete identities and practices. Given the importance of these to the mental health and illness of sports workers, Gearity and Henderson Metzger suggest that there is a clear need to make coaches and other sports workers more aware of microaggressions to work more effectively and help safeguard their health and wellbeing. The final contribution to the collection is a research note by Jayne Caudwell with John Sugden which offers an important contribution to methodological discussions of researching mental health and illness in a particular sports-based setting: higher education in the UK. The paper reports the insights of conversations and a formal interview held between Caudwell and Sugden about the latter's mental health following a stroke. In the first part, the paper considers some of the opportunities and challenges of researching the mental health of a work colleague, while in the second the importance of co-constructing knowledge of post-stroke mental health recovery requires significant researcher reflexivity among other strategies.

## Conclusion

The papers in this Special Issue begin to address the complex linkages between sport, emotion and mental health, though as we noted earlier work in this increasingly important area remains considerably under-developed and under-valued. In future, researchers might wish to explore some of the key issues examined in the papers included here, including: the strategies workers adopt in relation to presentations of the self; the comingling and blurring of workers' public and private lives; the emotionality and experiences of volunteering in community-based sports work; the links between global sports work, migration and performance-related health costs; and the methodological difficulties of undertaking research on mental health and illness among those known (and unknown) to the researcher.

There is moreover considerable scope for more empirical, theoretical, conceptual and methodological sociological work which engages in the realities of sports work, and which questions the rather uncritical acceptance of high-level sport, in particular, as an unambiguously and unproblematically healthy workplace. In doing so, there is a clear need for more research that explores how sports workers navigate the problems of their interdependence with others inside and outside of modern sports worlds, how working in sport comes to impact on (mental) health and wellbeing, and how workers encounter stigma and discrimination of other kinds which compromise (mental) health and wellbeing. We hope that the papers included in this issue of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, and the issues explored in this introductory essay, serve as a clarion call to sociologists of sport with an interest in work, health and wellbeing to engage in such research.

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