4C Tamar Semerjian, San Jose State University

“Measuring Fitness One Step at a Time”

Applications such as Strava, mapmyrun, and Garmin Connect have been gaining in popularity over the past several years. They allow for a level of surveillance of physical activity which was never before possible. Applications can track where we ran, stride length, distance, pace, and maximum speed. Gear tracking reports how many miles we have run in our shoes and when to buy new ones. Users can sign up for “challenges” and set climbing and mileage goals for the month. Users of Strava will see head-to-head comparison analysis when looking at a “friend’s” profile, as well as full accounting of their friends’ activities and statistics. The sociological implications of these applications have thus far received limited attention despite their widespread use within running and cycling communities. Foucault’s frameworks of disciplining the body have clear applications here as our efforts are observable to all and we self-discipline our activities. While surveillance may be viewed as problematic, there is also potential pleasure and utility in this tracking. These applications can help individuals set goals and motivate them to continue in their exercise participation. This paper will explore and discuss the implications of fitness trackers using a Foucauldian framework.

4C Ian MacNairn, University of Calgary

“Stepping Out of the Canyons: An Exploration of the Effusion of Rarámuri Huaraches Outside of Mexico’s Copper Canyons”

Ultrarunning is a sport of extreme long-distance running. Ultramarathons are in excess of 42.2km and are often 100 miles or more. The extreme nature of the sport is mirrored in the extreme alterations to self that are the result of training and in the impact to one’s body with the greatest impact, often, to one’s feet. Ultrarunning has been one of the fastest growing sports, worldwide, since the late 2000s. However, many indigenous cultures have practiced what could be considered ultrarunning since time immemorial. Nearly all ultrarunners encase their feet in running shoes as is the norm in contemporary long-distance running. Indigenous cultures have never relied on such footwear. Rather, most indigenous runners wear some form of sandal. One group, the Rarámuri of northern Mexico, wear open-toed sandals called huaraches constructed from a rubber tyre sole and leather thong. The Rarámuri gained worldwide attention and infamy through the best-selling book Born To Run (McDougall, 2009). An American company, Luna Sandals (named after Rarámuri runner Manuel Luna), started designing and selling huaraches following the book’s publication. Many ultrarunners from the US and Canada have purchased and use Luna huaraches. This paper will explore the diffusion of indigenous practices into broader society with focus on the interaction with and impact on Rarámuri traditional ways that have resulted from ultrarunners who have visited their home, the Copper Canyons, for an annual ultramarathon in Urique, Chihuahua. The paper will discuss merits and limitations of sharing indigenous practices and relationships that have formed through ultrarunning, generally, and feet, in particular.

4C Marianne Clark, University of Waikato

“A Dancer, Rock Climber, and Pilates Instructor Walk into NASSS, and a Researcher asks: Why Do Feet Matter?”

“We’re sorry, your daughter is a beautiful dancer, but she has flat feet, they will never stand up to the demands of a career in ballet:”

This news, broken to me as a 10-year-old at an audition for the Canadian National School of Ballet, was devastating, but also highlighted a previously unrealized importance of feet: of their aesthetics, function
and capacity to affect. Drawing upon multiple conversations and shared movement experiences with an experienced rock climber who coaches new climbers, a Pilates instructor, and my own experiences as a ballet dancer with ‘flat feet’, this paper examines the matter of feet. Specifically, these conversations yield insights into the multiple knowledges that construct understandings of feet in specific movement contexts, their socio-political implications, as well as the materiality and energetic forces of active, dancing, climbing feet. Feet as aesthetic objects and signifiers, commodified feet, feet as initiators of experimental movement, and feet that prompt connections with other matter and forces provide starting points for further analysis and inquiry, in sporting circles and beyond.

4C Pirkko Markula, University of Alberta
“Writing the Feet into Socio-Cultural Analysis of Physical Activity”

There have been several calls to consider embodied experiences and/or the material body as a central aspect of how we know about physical activity as a social and cultural phenomenon in contemporary society. While it is important to expand the social constructionist interpretations, there are few examples of studies that assemble the moving body as biological, psychological, social, cultural, and technological entity. In this talk, I experiment how the force of the body, specifically our feet, can enrich the ways we know about the world.