

“If I could bottle this feeling...”:
Channel swimming, pleasure and
positive deviance







Housework workout

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Becoming a Channel swimmer



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Becoming a Channel swimmer: embodiment and identity in an extreme sporting culture



My name is [Karen Throsby](#) and I am Sociology lecturer at The University of Warwick.

Welcome to the website for "Becoming a Channel swimmer" - an ESRC-funded project, running from April 2010 to September 2012, exploring the social and bodily processes involved in becoming (or trying to become) a Channel swimmer.

The project draws on data based on my own experiences of training for, and ultimately competing, a Channel swim, as well as published accounts, blogs, media reports, and interviews with swimmers, family members, coaches, pilots, observers and officials. Through the research I'm hoping to explore what motivates people to swim the Channel, what is involved in trying to accomplish that goal, and how those experiences can help us to think about the role of physical activity, and particularly endurance sport, in contemporary society.

Join the debate

The purpose of this research is to foster debate and discussion - within the swimming community, and with other researchers and policy makers. In this spirit, each week, I'm going to post a quote from the research data that highlights an issue for discussion. You can join in the debate by adding to the Comments at the bottom of this page.

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Jennifer

- “And it was a long straight swim, I could just see into the distance for hours and it looked like I was getting nowhere. But I was, I was, I was swimming fine, absolutely fine. Had I known then what I know now about how to just carry on and not even think about it, I would finish absolutely fine. I was swimming fine...”

Jennifer

- “What it feels like, what it takes and what you, what you can bear actually, and the fact that actually, just get on with it, you would be fine.”

Reischer 2001: 23

- “...this dynamic, in which a physical act profoundly and powerfully impacts one’s self-experience, suggests that this physical act is indexing an overarching meaning system, and establishes the body as a concrete medium between the symbolic order and the self”

Reischer 2001: 27

- “Like other sports, the marathon serves a certain social utility, as a ritualized public celebration of social values such as strength, endurance and fortitude”

Sally

- “It was just part of it, I suppose, like you have got to...sometimes you just accept it and like that is what it is and that is why I am swimming. Other times, especially when you are trying to buy clothes [laughs] it is when... you are just like ‘I hate it, hate it’. And erm...it’s something hard to get round [...] I remember trying to buy a dress for the sports ball and just being like, ‘I cannot have strappy dresses, I cannot have strapless dresses because of my shoulders’, and I have this huge long list [...] and I got to the ball and was talking to a few of the other girls, and they were, like, I cannot do this, and that... and I was like ‘hang on – we are all swimmers, all part of the swimming club, so we are all going to have quite big shoulders. So that was quite a reassuring thought. Definitely, though, it was my shoulder getting considerably bigger and yes, just having to buy tops in a bigger size, especially fitted tops just to come round your shoulders. Yes definitely - that was the biggest change for me.

Greg

- I wasn't going to do it for a charity because it was sort of personal reasons why I did it. But my mum said, well, people would think it's a bit weird if you don't do it for charity...

Greg

- What I object to [...] is when this kind of thing is trumpeted about, and presented as someone doing something because they have a calling to do something, to do with charity: ‘I’m not swimming the Channel because I want to swim the Channel because I want a personal challenge; I’m swimming because I want to raise money for this cause or that cause’. And it really irritates me. There’s this person at my [swimming club] who sends e-mails about three times a year saying ‘I’m doing this now. The reason I’m doing it is for this cause’. And my response is “Bollocks. The reason you’re doing it is because you want to swim the Channel.’

