
SPORT, GENDER AND POWER

Gender, Bodies and Transformation

Series editor: Meredith Jones,
University of Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) Technology, Sydney, Australia

This series explores the intersection of two key themes in relation to scholarship on bodies: gender and transformation. Bodies are gendered via biology, culture, medicine and society, such that gender, so deeply and intimately connected to identity, is a crucial part of any thorough analysis of the body. At the same time, bodies are – and have always been – sites of transformation, whether through ‘natural’ processes such as pregnancy, illness and ageing, or the more eye-catching, ‘unnatural’ transformations of cosmetic surgery, violence, extreme bodybuilding or dieting, cross-species transplantation, elective amputation or tattooing.

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The Rise of Roller Derby

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Published by

Ashgate Publishing Limited

Wey Court East

Union Road

Farnham

Surrey, GU9 7PT

England

Ashgate Publishing Company

110 Cherry Street

Suite 3-1

Burlington, VT 05401-3818

USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Pavlidis, Adele.

Sport, gender and power : the rise of roller derby / by Adele Pavlidis and Simone Fullagar.

pages cm. – (Gender, bodies and transformation)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-1771-8 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-4724-1773-2 Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) (ebook) – ISBN 978-1-4724-1772-5 (epub) 1. Roller derby. 2. Roller skating. 3. Women roller skaters. Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) I. Fullagar, Simone. II. Title.

GV859.6.P38 2014

796.21–dc23

2014016686

ISBN 9781472417718 (hbk)

ISBN 9781472417725 (ebk-PDF)

ISBN 9781472417732 (ePUB-PDF)

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Preface

This book arose out of our shared interest, and indeed passion, for bringing together sport with feminist cultural theory. What started out as a formal relationship between student and supervisor, transformed into a collaborative inquiry as *Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation)* we worked through the myriad of tensions, challenges, discontinuities, paradoxes, pleasures and excitement that roller derby posed to the field of sport management, the sociology of sport, and cultural studies.

We would like to thank the women who gave their time to participate in this research project and for sharing their pleasures and pains. Together, through this book, we have embodied a type of 'derby ethos': fast, synchronous, 'hard', maneuvering and differentiated. Writing this book has been a team effort. Yet 'winning' has not been our aim. Instead we have wanted to 'play' with the writing of roller derby to create yet different ways of thinking and doing sport research. Privileging women's bodies throughout this book enables a focus on the affective realm of experience, rather than just the interpretive. A focus on affects tells a different story of sport and physical culture, one that is more generous in taking into account bodies sexed as female and their particular challenges in embodying *Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation)* power.

As women come together, in greater and *Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation)* greater numbers, across the globe, to participate in roller derby, they pose the question – who can we become through sport? It is this *we* that is at the heart of this book. We, women who play, watch or research roller derby, and indeed other sports. Focusing on roller derby as a 'new' sport played predominantly by women, we examine the various affects in circulation, both on and off the track, and what these affects *do*. Thinking through affects, we highlight the processes of transformation that women undergo through roller derby and the challenges of sustaining this kind of cultural space into the future.

Chapter 1
Introduction

The whistle blows. The blockers push off their skates together, manoeuvring slowly round the track as Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) they hustle, edging in front of the opposing team. The second whistle blows. The solo Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) jammers¹ burst out of the pack skating faster and faster. BANG. A blocker shifts directly into the path of a jammer at full speed. In a split second she dodges the hit and rebalances while skating along on one foot. I am in awe. 'How does she Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) skate like that?'

Waiting for my turn. Waiting for the bench manager to call me on, wishing I was a better skater. Let me out there to play! But what if I let my team down? I want to impress my team, contribute my embodied effort, be needed. Butterflies flit from my stomach into my scattered thoughts. The risk of injury briefly crosses my mind. If it happens, it happens. It wouldn't be too bad to break a bone. I have discovered amazing capacities – what my body can do – so I push through the lingering fear. Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) Derby bodies Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) suffer, experience extreme pleasure, euphoric highs, deep lows, and closeness to death even. My body is scarred, marked by sporting desires. I inhabit a woman's body that is transforming through the movement and relations of sport. And it has so far served me well.

I can't seem to shake the stress of the sideline. It seems that I can't ever do enough. Research needs to be done. I have Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) teaching to attend to. Family issues, personal issues, emotional, mental. Research! Interviews! Writing! And the ever present demands of skating and derby training. Will I ever get there?

Finally it's my turn. I can't stop smiling: I am so excited and nervous. My face is beaming. Some of my team-mates smile back, others don't. I wish there were more people here to watch me, to witness my 'becoming' a derby grrrr! My ankle aches and I breathe through the pain. Quickly Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) joining the pack, the hustle begins. I slowly skate in front of my opponent, Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) getting down low with

my arse up high, hoping to block Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) her once the game Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) starts. The whistle blows.

There is Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) no more Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) time for doubts. I skate, we merge into Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) play and spectators witness my becoming Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) as derby grrrl.²

Introduction

Speaking (as) woman is not speaking of woman. It is not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject. That said, by speaking (as) woman, one Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) may attempt to provide a place for the 'other' as feminine. (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 135)

This book is a response to the contradictions, Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) pleasures and tensions evoked through the narrative of becoming derby grrrl and the challenge Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) of speaking (as) woman, even among women, in physical cultural spaces. Our challenge has been to articulate a place for the 'other' as feminine, specifically in sociological accounts of sport and leisure cultures. We seek to write through the complexity of women's gendered experiences on their own terms and to draw out the implications for managing, organising, and promoting sport differently. To do this, we refuse a representative account of the 'true' roller derby to instead write through the embodiment and multiplicity of derby as a 'new', 'women only' sport space.

Whether derby is positioned as a form of post-sport, lifestyle sport or post-feminist agency, the physical and digital cultural formation of the game offers a compelling site through which to understand the reinvention of women's sport and gender identity in contemporary culture. The question of how power relations play out among women is central to the dynamics on and off the track. The cultural landscape of derby is saturated with personal narratives, popular images and discourses of Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation) women's empowerment that celebrate what women's sporting bodies can do. As we look more closely, listen more intently and feel our way through the complexity of derby power relations the centrality of embodied affect becomes apparent: love, anger, aggression,

fear, shame, pride, joy. We position our analysis within the 'turn to affect' that connects sociology, cultural studies and social psychology as we explore how the power of affect works upon the gendered subjectivities of derby players (Ahmed 2004; Blackman, 2012; Whetherell 2012).

We aim to illustrate how affects shape sociality for women in very particular ways, and what this tells us about sport as a transformational practice and *Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation)* the responsiveness of sport organisations. It is commonplace to hear sport described in affective terms as a site of passion, desire, pride and love. Yet, everyday sport talk often individualises and psychologises sport. Questions remain about how affects work through different registers of meaning that operate through *Sport, Gender and Power: The Rise of Roller Derby (Gender, Bodies and Transformation)* individual and collective bodies in both physical and digital spaces. In relation to derby we ask, what do affects do? What do they enable or impede in the context of women's sport experiences? Our aim in this book is to demonstrate both the creative and destructive, the possibilities and the normalising ways affects work in roller derby. As noted by Leslie Heywood (2011), the debates in sport are often couched in terms of the macro versus micro, and competition versus participation (see also Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010). Through a focus on affects and emotion we demonstrate a way through some of the tensions created by these binaries. In particular we are interested in the ways love, pride, joy and belonging – all understood as 'good' affects most of the time – can lead to unexpected and sometimes disappointing outcomes, while shame, anger, aggression and even hatred can be productive of transformative, valuable changes for individual subjectivity and collective bodies, specifically in sport and physical cultures.

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