

Writing Resistance in Roller Derby

Making the Case for Auto/Ethnographic Writing in Feminist Leisure Research

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Abstract

As an emerging researcher working in the field of leisure studies, I explore auto/ethnographic writing as a valuable methodological approach. Focusing on contemporary roller derby in the Australian context I grapple with the complexities of “resistance” within this women-centred sport, privileging affect as surfaced through the research process and writing. This article explores the possibilities inherent in research that makes visible the paradoxes and ambiguities of resistance in leisure. Shame and hurt—although uncomfortable for the researcher and perhaps for the reader—are important affects to incorporate into feminist analyses if we are to continue to explore new questions, and identify ways to theorise the complexity of gender power relations as they are embodied in leisure.

Keywords: *Affect, auto/ethnography, roller derby, resistance, writing*

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Introduction

In this article I bring writing, as method, to the fore of feminist leisure research. In doing so I examine the concept of resistance in the contemporary version of women's roller derby. I argue that this form of auto/ethnography can be taken up as a way of demonstrating "what the ideas of reading, writing, and text might contribute to social and cultural analysis" (Game, 1991, p. 3). Belonging and friendship are key themes in feminist leisure research (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012; Glover & Parry, 2008), yet the experiences of the researcher and those who have "not belonged" have been marginal in these studies (for notable exceptions see Axelsen, 2009; Olive & Thorpe, 2011). And so my task has been to bring these experiences, and their related affects, into feminist leisure research as a way of revealing what is not often voiced in the field and as an example of writing women's bodies through relations of affect. This type of work is limited in the field of leisure studies broadly. Yet there are opportunities to question the relations of power that are so often taken for granted, both within the institutional setting of the university and within the leisure spaces occupied by women. Taking an auto/ethnographic approach to research makes explicit the multiplicities of identity that need to be negotiated in this marginal space. I am a researcher, a feminist, a participant. I am also a student and a writer. Through the use of personal narrative, my writing opposes singularity and the positivist assumption of a singular truth (Rinehart, 2005, p. 500) and in doing so moves away from debates about agency and structure to think differently about academic writing, resistance and empowerment in leisure research.

To the question "What is auto/ethnography?" Ellis responds, "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (2004, p. xix). Auto/ethnography and roller derby go well together. Both are risky, at times painful, at times immensely satisfying, and both allow the participant to know more about themselves, those around them, and the broader society they live in. Both roller derby and auto/ethnography are "in progress." Roller derby is a "new," albeit revived version of an older sport, and there are several ways the sport is being played with different rules, governing bodies and philosophies. Auto/ethnography too can be understood and practiced in multiple ways. There is "no canned method" (Rinehart, 2005, p. 501) for writing auto/ethnographic research. This type of writing can be used as a mediation of affect to explore notions of "resistance" and "belonging" that are so often tied up with "alternative" sports and leisure practices (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). At the same time, I demonstrate the power relations at play for those of us, like myself, at the margins of academic research, and the potential of this marginal position to enable different and multiple notions of "researcher" and "feminist" identities. Masculine experiences (in leisure, the academy, and society more broadly) have been represented as the universal norm, marginalising women's experiences and identities (Irigaray, 1993, 2007). Scholars of feminist leisure studies have implicitly and explicitly sought to change this, bringing women's experiences to the fore and it is to these debates that I add my contribution.

The use of auto/ethnography in leisure studies has been limited to a few key articles. In the UK journal *Leisure Studies*, I uncovered nine articles with "auto ethnography" listed as one of their key words. And in Henderson and Gibson's (2013) recent integrative review they found 9% of articles with a feminist leisure focus used auto/ethnography or ethnography. I do not aim to map out occurrences of the use of auto/ethnography in the wider literature (see Anderson & Austin, 2011 for an overview of auto-ethnography in leisure studies more broadly), but simply wish to point out the lack of research within the key leisure studies journals internationally. Barbara Humberstone has been one notable exception (2011), however her approach is just *one* way auto/ethnography can be written and as yet the potential of auto/ethnographic writing in

feminist leisure research has not been extended further. Roller derby, as a “women’s only” leisure practice, is a prime site for using a different style of auto/ethnographic writing to explore the complexity of women’s resistance through leisure. To explore these ideas and highlight the complexity of power relations between women in roller derby, an introduction to the sport and some of the ideas influencing its growth are included in the next section. Next, theories of resistance and feminism[s] are unpacked, leading the reader to the specific methodology of auto/ethnographic writing. The section “My ‘failed’ roller derby career? Writing resistance” follows, where contemporary feminist texts are written and read alongside my auto/ethnographic writing. Then finally, the conclusion discusses some of the possibilities this type of research might present for the future of feminist leisure studies and its researchers.

Roller Derby

Roller derby is a contact sport where speed, skill, and strength are vital to winning. Played mostly indoors on an oval track, two teams compete to score the highest points. Jammers (the players who can score points) attempt to pass the blockers (whose role it is to stop the opposing team’s jammer scoring by strategically placing themselves in the way or using their bodies to knock down either the jammer or blockers from the other team) and injuries are common. It is a challenging game, where players not only need to be skilled roller skaters, but also confident in their ability to give and take “blocks.” It is a space where women can enact different femininities, where they can present themselves as tough, mean, sexy, rough, and strong. It is a team sport, yet, like many “lifestyle” sports, the expression of identity and status is central to the experience (Wheaton, 2004). It is a space where women can express pariah identities (Finley, 2010) and where they can perform alternative femininities, although, as Carlson (2010) found, this is not as inclusive as it might be thought. Ideas of feminine subjectivity and “women’s sport,” of what and who can be considered “derby,” are ongoing and ripe for analysis.

In the U.S. there are several “versions” of the sport, each vying for authority to claim the status of the “real” roller derby. These “versions” are multiple and differ in terms of their relation to ideas around sport, governance, management, the “mainstream,” music, and subculture. There are a number of leagues who revel in roller derby’s past relationships to rock n’ wrestling (for more on the history of the revival of roller derby see Mabe, 2008; Ray, 2008; Storms, 2010) and who choose to promote the sport as risqué, dangerous, and sexy, while also explicitly allowing space for parody and “play,” for example, Texas Roller Derby (<http://www.txrd.com/>). There are other leagues, such as the Charlotte Speed Demons (<http://charlottespeeddemons.com/>), that have a very different approach, privileging a corporate and competitive structure, “its players compete using their legal names and wear a traditional sports uniform (Charlotte Speed Demons, 2012). This league, like the Texas Roller Derby, is a profit-run business and there are several leagues in the U.S. that align themselves with either of these two “versions.”

However, by far the most common “version” is that supported, promoted, and claimed by those leagues that are members of the Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA). WFTDA’s mission states, “The governing philosophy of the WFTDA is ‘by the skaters, for the skaters’” (Women’s Flat Track Derby Association, 2012) and the organization explicitly privileges the participation of women—as players and in management. Yet there has been a “rebellion” against the WFTDA, including the formal activities of a break away league, aptly named, “The Renegade Rollergirls.”

The Renegade Rollergirls were formed...by a group of derby girls dissatisfied with the direction the sport was going...[They] desired a faster-paced game that highlighted a

skater's skill. Going against the beliefs of the league they had been skating for and the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA), they quit and created their own 'renegade' league not bound by any of the conventional regulations put on the sport. (Renegade Rollergirls of San Diego, 2012)

WFTDA and the Renegade Rollergirls are committed to remaining skater-owned and -operated and embrace a DIY (Do It Yourself) ethos in ways inspired by Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s where women and girls were encouraged to take control of the means of cultural production (Schilt, 2004, p. 115). This DIY ethos is also embraced by most leagues in Australia and is a defining feature, promoting the sport as "alternative," "resistant," and "different" to mainstream sports. However, like in the U.S., there are multiple agendas being pursued by the women involved. Some aim to "legitimize" the sport and want to be taken "seriously." While others want to keep roller derby "underground"—though this, too, is a contentious and complex idea—and maintain a strong focus on DIY, music, and creativity made available through the sport.

This focus on DIY has been celebrated in both popular (Barbee & Cohen, 2010; Joulwan, 2007) and academic writing (Beaver, 2012) as revolutionary, giving women power and control. Indeed, WFTDA—based in the U.S. and the largest international governing body of the sport—states that one of its core values is "revolutionary." This emphasis on roller derby as revolutionary and uniting women with a common aim of empowerment alludes to the sport as a global project, something feminists using Foucault warned against (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1991; Game, 1991) In sport, bodies are central. In roller derby, bodies move, they sweat, they bruise, they hit each other, and help each other back up again. Bodies also do the work of management and control; they organise, dictate, guide, coach. And so, as a space of "resistance," the question remains as to who and what women resist. Are they resisting outside pressures to conform to gender stereotypes of passive femininity? What about power relations within roller derby? What happens when women feel pressures from other women in positions of leadership? How then is resistance thought of? And so I write resistance. I do not write *about* resistance, but rather I write resistance, as hopeful, futile, complex, and ultimately, unknowable as "truth" of any given practice, besides perhaps writing.

Feminism[s] and Resistance

The conceptualization of leisure as political practice and site of resistance has been somewhat "controversial" (Shaw, 2001, p. 187). Henderson (1996) noted this in a review of the literature on feminist leisure studies since 1990:

...leisure may be a context for the empowerment of women as well as a context for the victimization and concomitant disempowerment of women ... leisure is an avenue for conformity to social roles as well as resistance to those roles (pp. 147-148)

Feminist leisure studies focused on resistance and empowerment have oscillated between two dominant views. The first is that leisure is indeed resistant, and that women intentionally set out to challenge dominant ideologies related to gender norms (for example Beal, 1995; Parry, 2005; Wearing, 1990). The second highlights the view that although perhaps "empowering," the possibilities for resistance and the rewriting of gender scripts is overemphasized in leisure (for example Atencio, 2008). In the specific case of roller derby, Finley (2010) writes, "Women can now kick ass, but it might not bring the society any closer to societal support of child care or equal pay, or sports that do not glorify bruises" (p. 384).

Finley drew from the Gramscian inspired concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and hegemonic femininity (Schippers, 2007), as well as emphasized femininity, to analyze what she saw in roller derby. In this theoretical tradition, there was a clear division between dominators and the dominated and, generally, causal priority was given to the sphere of economics (Lears, 1985). In this way, “the task for the working class...was not only to seek control of the state in order to achieve socialism, but also to strive through political struggle in order to win hegemony in the sphere of civil society” (Jarvie & Maguire, 2000, p. 114). Resistance, in this way, could be considered a counter-hegemonic strategy aiming toward the possibility of emancipation. In roller derby this might be seen as the overt expression of tough, hard, sexual femininity. And this may then be thought of as a way toward women’s emancipation from the repressive gender norms that position woman as weak, passive, and inferior to men.

For feminists influenced by Foucault however, this way of thinking about power, and the existence of the dominated and the dominant, was problematic. For them (for example, Diamond & Quinby, 1988; McNay, 1992), power is not something held by some for their use in dominating others. Instead, “power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (Foucault, 1998, p. 94). Both Foucault and feminism “point to local and intimate operations of power rather than focusing exclusively on the supreme power of the state” (Diamond & Quinby, 1988, p. x). In terms of resistance, it is not a case of oppositions, or being “counter” something. Rather,

There is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial...[resistances are] the odd term in relations of power. (Foucault, 1998, p. 95)

And so, in roller derby, it is not a simple case of women united together against “dominating” men “outside” of roller derby. Nor it is simply about competition between women. Instead derby is a complex web of relations: Sport and masculinity, leisure and femininity, power and women, friendship and sport, leadership and democracy. All these and more are played out through the power relations at play in roller derby. Resistance as a counter-hegemonic strategy is just one tool of transformation among many, and not necessarily the “best” one.

Feminism is not a unified theory and there are multiple perspectives, each one conceptualizing resistance differently. Feminine subjectivity is problematic (Grosz, 1994) and the category of “woman” for some theorists is troubling (Butler, 1990). Some of these different types of feminism have been outlined by scholars such as Hargreaves (1990), although the distinctions between the different feminist perspectives have at times been problematized (see Caudwell, 2011). Women are not a unified category and do not have the same experiences, feelings and reactions in a given space. Women’s experiences of a particular leisure practice will be varied. To account for this difference has required an approach to power that is relational. This is not to reject the reality of violence and repression for women around the world, but rather to acknowledge the limits of viewing women as victims, particularly in spaces such as roller derby. Like Ahmed (Ahmed, 1996) I view the coupling of feminist practice and advocacy with humanism, and feminist theory with postmodernism misleading, and prefer to view theory and practice as inter-related and informed by a range of philosophical perspectives. As argued by Wearing (1998), “we do a disservice to our discipline if we rigidly appropriate any one theoretical perspective in our analysis” (p. x). Instead of “making a better world,” my feminist intellectual project so far has been to contribute toward a feminist imaginary of leisure and sport management.

Like Markula (2006) I struggle to identify what resistance might mean (p. 29) when confronted with the ongoing subjugation of women despite their increasing participation in sport and leisure. And so I am concerned with a different type of leisure studies, a break from the critical feminist interpretations of women's leisure. In doing so my argument is not against the field, but instead brings to the fore ideas of writing and affect in an effort to demonstrate possible futures for leisure research. In the auto/ethnographic writing below, contemporary feminist theories of emotion and affect are used. Feelings do not orientate from the inside and come out, and are not "caught" from the outside and brought in. Instead, emotion and affect are relations between self and others (for background debates on theories of affect and emotion see Blackman, 2012; Gorton, 2007; Probyn, 1996; Wetherell, 2012); "emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4). Rather than differentiate between emotions and affects, the terms can be used interchangeably to highlight the complex relation between them. As Probyn notes, affect and emotion are inextricably entwined: "emotion as the social expression of affect, and affect in turn is the biological and physiological experience of it" (2005, p. 25). Emotions and affects are relational and always intersubjective—there is always "something or somebody" to whom the feelings are related, "although that something or somebody does not necessarily pre-exist the emotion" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 49). In this way, writing "negative", or not-so-pleasurable emotions can be productive, important, and interesting.

In writing about one specific "negative" emotion—namely shame—Probyn (2005, p. 3) states that, "by denying or denigrating it or trying to eradicate it (as in the countless self-help books against various strains of shame), we impoverish ourselves and our attempts to understand human life." Rather than deny or attempt to eradicate aggression, hate, shame, anger, hurt, and competitiveness among the women in roller derby, I have chosen to focus on these aspects. This is not to undermine the sport in any way. In a sport that prides itself on embracing difference and accepting the unaccepted, those affects relegated to the margins and rejected from roller derby are explored. This is not just a theoretical activity, although that is part of it; it is also practical (and personal) in attempting to think differently about sport and leisure management for those sports so often labeled "alternative", specifically in the case of roller derby. Explored are the relations of power among women—in particular for myself as a participant and researcher—and the role of affect in these relations and the continued significance of contemporary feminism for leisure research more broadly.

As noted by Heather Gibson (2012), the continued relevance of gender and leisure scholarship seems at times questionable, particularly as women's participation in leisure has increased substantially. Even within the academy, champions for feminist leisure studies are dwindling, as indicated by the declining membership of the World Leisure Commission on Women and Gender (Gibson, 2012, p. 364) and the disappearance of university courses focused on gender (Humberstone, 2009). Researchers, such as Angela McRobbie (2009), have written about the "aftermath of feminism" which she describes as a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment (p. 1). She notes, "the abandonment of feminism...is amply rewarded with the promise of freedom and independence, most apparent through wage earning capacity" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 2), and, I would argue, access to leisure. This "aftermath of feminism" sees words such as "empowerment" and "choice"—words so often central to feminist leisure studies—taken up and used as instruments of marketeers and the state (McRobbie, 2009). In my own research into roller derby, a sport played and governed almost exclusively by women except in a few instances, many participants rejected outright any connections between roller derby and feminism. Of course there are

women involved in roller derby who see their participation as inherently feminist and political, yet many did not. As an emerging researcher pursuing what a reinvented feminist politics might offer the study of leisure, and as the pioneers of feminist leisure research retire, I was, and am, confronted by this “aftermath of feminism.” Roller derby, as a sport and leisure practice open to women, offers a particularly fruitful arena to explore feminism and leisure in this contemporary time. Derby is full of contradictions and paradoxes. It draws from hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine cultures; it is rough, raunchy, playful, and serious all at once. This special edition of the *Journal of Leisure Research* is an opportunity to demonstrate contemporary feminist theory and what it can bring to the study of leisure through an analysis of roller derby and resistance, as it is embodied through writing.

Methodology

The method of this article is auto/ethnographic writing. Like Game, I argue for “a form of analysis understood as a reading and writing of texts, that breaks with the reality-fiction opposition” (Game, 1991, p. 3). Using auto/ethnographic writing, I have created a text that illuminates some of the tensions, complexities, and challenges related to questions of subjectivity and resistance in roller derby. Rather than view academic writing as a “science,” I understand it to be a practice, an “art.” Markula (2003) wrote, “If we think of our lives as works of art, we regain the ability to think creatively and challenge the limitations of the “natural” identities formed through the games of truth” (p. 102). In moving away from assumptions about gender and subjectivity that are deemed “natural,” limits are opened up and new questions can be asked. The coupling of roller derby—and indeed other “alternative” sports—with an overarching notion of feminist resistance can be questioned.

I focus on “writing” as opposed to “writing up research” (Probyn, 2005, p. 132). Game wrote, “method becomes part of the writing, rather than the occasion for putting off writing until a result has been found.” The mediation of my experience of roller derby, in the form of writing, aims to evoke the imagination of my readers into another world, that of roller derby—a sacred world to the women who inhabit it—and to the complexities of emotion surfaced via my experiences as an emerging researcher. As Law argues, methods do not “discover and depict realities”; rather they “participate in the *enactment* of those realities” (Law, 2004, pp. 45, original italics). And so my writing is a creative process, participating in the enactment of roller derby and feminist research. My work is written explicitly from my lived perspective—the perspective of an interested, at times ambivalent, at times deeply passionate woman with a desire to think differently about the self, women, the body, and writing. As Probyn (1996, p. 153) states, “being deeply interested in life ... may help to renew the energy we need now and in the future if we are to encourage relations of belonging that peacefully and joyously coexist.”

In February 2010, I joined a roller derby league and begun my auto/ethnographic writing, noting my experiences, feelings, and links to theory as I participated in roller derby within my own league and those in close geographical proximity. My field notes map my journey from when I first joined the Local Roller Derby League (in February 2010), to the experience of becoming freshmeat,¹ eventually to bouting (in late October 2010), and finally to my resignation from the committee and exit from regular roller derby practice and participation (April 2011). In this time, I was also appointed league secretary. Fleming and Fullagar (2007, p. 239) point out, researchers using their own experience “can problematize the power relations that shape

¹Women new to roller derby are known as “freshmeat” and usually are referred to as such until their first official bout.

their own leisure related identities, performances and managerial authority.” In this way, I constantly questioned my own involvement in roller derby and the subject positions through which I moved during my time with the league. As I was not skating with a roller derby league prior to starting my research, my position as a derby skater has always been marginal to my position as researcher. Therefore, in this research I situate myself as an “outsider within,” drawing on the work of Collins (1986) and others. As Merriam (2001, p. 415) states, “What an insider ‘sees’ and ‘understands’ will be different from, but as valid as, what an outsider understands.” My marginality is my strength in this project, as it provides me with what Hendrix (2011) calls “wide-angle vision.” From the outset it should be made clear that this is not a project aimed at getting to the “real” roller derby; rather, this is a writing project that explores the power relations and multiplicities of resistance in roller derby. Game’s (1991) approach to analysis, as a reading and writing of texts, has been taken up as a way of presenting the auto/ethnographic writing in this article. This writing is affective in that it “leaves its mark or trace” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 6); this “mark” being the text produced.

My “Failed” Roller Derby Career? Writing Resistance

Many of the women who participated in my research, as well as websites and blogs dedicated to roller derby, expressed a view that reflected my own struggles with roller derby. It initially excited and attracted me, yet it then repelled me. Going to watch my first bout. Going to my first training session. Buying my first set of skates and pads. Through these “firsts” I felt a sense of anticipation and excitement about the future. Getting to training early, doing everything my coaches told me, skating regularly outside of training to get my skills up were all part of the process of becoming a derby grrrl. I helped out at events, worked at the merchandise stall, cleaned up afterward, and pushed my body hard. After training once I vomited, having finally achieved what I had initially thought was impossible: skating 25 laps of the track in under five minutes. Putting aside my fears, I attempted to jump over a player lying on the ground, and succeeded! My body started to change; muscles hardened. The intensity of physical activity and the friendships with women from various backgrounds, was a breath of fresh air in my life. But these feelings did not last. At one point, after a year of participation, reading through my interview transcripts or going to watch a bout was a difficult. For a time, feelings of shame, anger, resentment, and failure surfaced. Where once there was enthusiasm about the possibilities roller derby held for rewriting femininity, disillusionment and confusion emerged. I asked myself, “Is there something wrong with me?” I felt judged, “othered,” hurt by some of the women involved in derby. As a “derby grrrl” I may have been resisting passive heteronormative femininity, but it seemed that only certain other types of femininity were accepted. Vacillating between my insides and the outsides of roller derby, staying on the surface, where myself and roller derby and the other women involved touch—sometimes gently, but often forcefully—was a struggle. Ahmed argues that:

Emotions produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects ... objects of emotion take shape as effects of circulation. (2004, p. 10)

My responses to roller derby—excited, fearful, and curious—produced particular boundaries and delineations between my body, the other women’s bodies, and the collective body of roller derby.

I saw roller derby as an opportunity to break open new vistas, to reinvent femininity, and “sport”; a space of “resistance” and freedom from gender norms. These were perhaps ambitious

desires—I admit that now—but I am sure I was not alone in thinking about these possibilities. On March 15, 2010, only weeks into my doctoral candidature, I wrote the following entry in my research journal:

Went to a roller derby bout on Saturday night. I thought it was an amazing experience! I sat right on the edge of the track (they called it suicide line) and I could see everything. I was absolutely enthralled at the way these women competed in front of over 1,600 people and gave it their very best for no financial reward, or any mainstream acknowledgement of their efforts. This was truly a subcultural sporting event. Not only in the sense of windsurfers and skaters as articulated in other research about subcultural sports, but in the way that the spectators were a truly homogenous group of “alternatively” styled men and women (mostly women and predominantly over the age of 24) gathered to revel in other women’s pain and success. I suppose what really stood out to me was the excitement in the room. The music played loudly as one by one the women presented themselves to the crowd. The commentator introduced them using their “derby” name and women did knee slides (an effective way to stop quickly when skating by going down on one knee) to the cheers of the spectators. And then the bout began. Slowly, as I watched, I could get more of an idea of the rules—it wasn’t until halfway through the second half that I noticed the “sin bin” where players were sent as a penalty for breaking the rules.

Because of my lack of knowledge of the rules, it did take me a little while to get the hang of what was going on, but that didn’t stop me from having a great time (nor, from the sound of the cheers and looks of excitement on the spectators faces, did it stop anyone else from enjoying themselves). I was inspired. I wanted to go out and buy every bit of merchandise I could—thinking that it would be “cool” to be a part of such a “different” subculture, one that revolved around sport instead of a particular style of music. I am not sure why this is so attractive to me—or to the other spectators—but there is definitely something in it . . . At the end of the bout the women did a victory lap and it was at that point that I decided that I wanted to be a roller derby girl. I wanted to experience the feeling they had when they had escaped injury and won the match. I wanted to know what it was like to have all these “cool” people cheering for you. I heard the couple next to me say, “Oh my god, I love her”; “I am going to get my photo with her!”

I wanted to be like them—to become them: to become strong, fearless, loved even. I wanted to be part of something “different” and exciting such that my first bout presented to me.

But I never felt as though I “belonged.” My “love” for roller derby wasn’t enough, or it wasn’t the right kind, or I wasn’t tough enough, or mean enough. Or perhaps I was too “girly,” too “feminine.” I wanted to be accepted. I wanted to be part of the league, to feel in the center of things, to help the league grow and flourish. I wanted to observe what was happening, but I wanted to be part of the action. I often felt like a fraud, despite the commitment and energy I put into my league. I was experiencing paranoia. Sedgwick (in Gorton, 2007, p. 340) writes that “paranoia proposes both *Anything you can do (to me) I can do worse*, and *Anything you can do (to me) I can do first*—to myself”. Paranoia is a good example of what Ahmed (2004, p. 67) calls the “affective politics of fear.” She writes that “fear creates the very effect of ‘that which I am not’ through *running away from an object*, which nevertheless threatens as it passes by or is displaced” (p.

67). Yet I did not run away: I stuck with it. My desire to become “derby” was still strong for that year—although it did start to wane toward the end of my time. The excitement and possibilities presented by roller derby sustained my commitment and passion. Yet, as noted by Braidotti (2011, p. 158), “the central issue at stake here is how to avoid the repetition of exclusions in the process of legitimating an alternative feminist subject.” Roller derby is attempting to legitimate an alternative feminist subject, but it is struggling to avoid the unifying and fascist tendencies so commonly found within groups and individuals (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977).

Myself, and numerous women I spoke with formally and informally through the course of my research, wanted to belong. As a researcher I wanted roller derby to be a space where new femininities could be enacted, a space where the feminine was not subordinate to the masculine. I also wanted the sport to grow and to be accepted as a legitimate choice for women. I wanted government to help fund venues and training, and I wanted women to have the opportunity to make it to the “top of their” game and to experience the thrill and exhilaration of pushing themselves to their physical limits. But some of these desires contradicted one another. Like the tensions between the multiple roller derby leagues in the U.S. described above, this tension, eventually became part of me. The multiplicities of resistance had an intense affective response. In a way, this was the surfacing of affect. Probyn (1996, p. 138) argues for the flattening out of “inside/outside,” “that we regard the outside as the welding of the interior and exterior” (1996, p. 138). Where affect and emotions are not separate from the structure and organization of roller derby, but are “welded” together. Having just recently been nominated for and accepted the role of league “secretary” I wrote,

Training last night. Kind of glad I have waited until this morning to write this, as I was so angry last night. Angry and scared. As agreed at the last committee meeting, I handed out a short questionnaire to all members with a few questions (basically asking them to point out what they saw were our strengths, weaknesses, and what our priorities should be for the next 12 months). It was short and I had gotten mostly good feedback from most of the members. It seemed as though they appreciated being asked their opinion and being able to have a say in the direction of the league. So that was all fine until I gave a copy of the questionnaire to the ex-secretary (21-year-old, great skater), who responded with remarks such as, “I don’t like this,” “It’s too formal,” “I just want to hurt people.” I reacted to her comments badly (I didn’t say anything, but I was furious and it showed) as I read what she said as meaning that I was being a “party pooper,” a “kill joy” by trying to organize things for the league and by taking the secretary role seriously. I definitely don’t want to take the fun out of roller derby, and I don’t think I am, but there are some things that need to be taken seriously.

My multiple desires—to be accepted, to belong, to organize, to “take charge,” to “take things seriously”—were contradictory, and left me in a place that felt unsafe and fearful. I continued to write that day:

My fear in this situation comes from fearing the repercussions of standing up to some of these women. That they may target me in scrimmages and bouts and aim to hurt me (separate to when they are trying to block me in the game). There have been a few times in my life where I have been subject to violence and they have stayed in my memory as times to avoid. The feeling of bearing the brunt of other people’s anger and dissatisfaction, their distrust and mistrust, is probably one of the worst things I have experienced.

Yet in my fear I was producing a unified “other”—I, too, was perpetuating the unifying tendencies and struggling to acknowledge difference. Complex questions about the problematic of the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject (Butler, 1990, p. 5) drove my writing, yet it seemed that I could not help myself; I needed a simple “answer” to and relief from my fear.

The challenges of acknowledging difference and accounting for multiple points of resistance produced an affective reaction. The frustration, anger, hurt, shame, and pain were what produced, for me and some of the other women involved, a view of roller derby as “other,” as a unified entity in a power struggle with my own subjectivity. But I read that “there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary” (Foucault, 1998, pp. 95-96). But in feeling judged and hurt, I could write only “one”: the “other” women. I could not acknowledge what was the “plurality of resistances,” though I did try. Through the fear, hurt, guilt, and shame I felt, all the women melded into one. It felt as though “they” were against me, when more likely they each had their own points of “resistance.” I felt separate from the other women in my league, although I knew I was not alone in feeling this way. This affective response was my own strategy of resistance in roller derby, and to the tendency towards professionalization and exclusion, and the privileging of certain femininities over others. In my last month of roller derby, I wrote the following entry in my research journal:

I was dreading going. Every part of me didn't want to go. My stomach was churning; my head was spinning with all the reasons why I didn't want to go. “It's not fair,” “I don't feel as if I belong,” “I don't want to belong there,” and so on. I pushed through and drove myself to the venue, thinking that the feeling and thoughts would pass once I was there. Unfortunately this was not the case. I felt miserable and I looked it, too. I couldn't hide my ambivalence. One of the women who I felt was somewhat of a friend thought I looked exhausted. When I told her I wasn't, she looked at me strangely. I suppose she was wondering what the hell was wrong with me if I wasn't tired (02/13/11).

It was a struggle to continue my involvement in roller derby, as I felt as if everyone were against me. Other women I interviewed and spoke with also felt uneasy and even angry at their treatment by some of the women involved.

In the production of the subject position “roller derby girl,” that same “girl” is restrained as well as liberated. Butler (1990) notes that “feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of ‘women,’ the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (p. 2). As a predominantly “women's only” sport, roller derby is a site where emancipation may be sought, yet it is also a site of struggle, restriction and the marginalisation of certain femininities. In her discussion of shame, Probyn (2005, p. 21) writes that “the dynamics of “being good,” the fear of disappointing others, and the interplay between shame and the desire for connection, then, are not just a matter of theory” (2005, p. 21). And so this is not just a matter of theory, but also an exploration of subjectivity—not just textually, but also of my own subjectivity as a feminist researcher. I was implicated in a range of complex relationships through my research where the “dynamics of ‘being good’” were strong. I had a desire for connection, to belong to this “resistant” leisure practice. Yet I was undertaking a feminist critique of roller derby and so was interrogating the very notion resistance and power that I desired.

My roller derby subjectivity—that “socially mediated process of entitlement and negotiations with power relations” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 18)—in some ways “failed.” My desire for and

movement toward roller derby as a collective experience was halted and the reverberations shifted my sense of belonging, as it did for many other women involved. Perhaps this was all women's experience of roller derby? Probyn (1996, p. 8) writes of the "impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and sanctity of belongings are forever past." I was constantly aware of my role as a researcher and of the issues involved in the subjectivity enabled via roller derby—in becoming hard, tough derby girls, many women rejected different versions of femininity in order to authenticate their subjectivity. In roller derby, "femininity" was something to be rid of, one had to "toughen up" and "shut up and skate"—except for the adornments of hyperfemininity, such as fishnets and garter belts that were meant to operate as a parody. Yet, as Markula argues:

It is thus important to reconceptualise femininity from a symptom, effect, or product of patriarchal culture into an intensity exerting its own force. Femininity therefore should be understood as positive and enabling, not something to get rid of. (2006, p. 36)

In roller derby, most forms of femininity—whether restrictive or not—were not seen as positive and enabling. Femininity was to be countered, opposed, rejected. To "belong" and be accepted myself—and this also applied to other women who struggled with their "derby" selves—would have required ignoring the differences among and within women, which we all struggled to do.

Conclusions

The challenges of acknowledging the "plurality of resistances," of writing myself in roller derby, of acknowledging my struggles and emotions in research put me in a precarious position. Heyes writes:

To confess one's own participation in these dynamics—to acknowledge oneself as at once critic and subject—is to invite others' patronizing disappointment or disdain. It is also to invite the very crystallization of experience that fixes identities and defines the individual in relation to the norm. (2007, p. 13)

In relation to the "norm" in roller derby, I felt marginalized. In relation to the "norm" in research, I also, at times, felt marginalized. Yet in being up front about my struggles in roller derby—my feelings of rejection and experience of judgment by some of the other women involved—I illuminate the complex workings of power confronted when researching women's leisure practices such as roller derby. My struggles and feelings of rejection at some points of the research process have forced me to rethink ideas around resistance and empowerment, and the use of auto/ethnographic writing in leisure studies.

Fleming and Fullagar (2007, p. 251) argue that the "analytic utility" of auto/ethnographic writing "relates to how gender norms are shown as significant in mediating how others within society, and more specifically how women themselves, make 'thinkable' their involvement in non-traditional sport." In the auto/ethnographic writing above I have highlighted how I came to know myself as hurt, fearful, and a "failure" in roller derby. As a sport played, managed, and watched predominantly by women (Women's Flat Track Derby Association, 2011), it is the differences between and among women that are central, demonstrating the challenges for overcoming oppressive gender norms when at times it is ourselves, as women, who perpetuate and reinforce these. Heyes (2007, p. 9) writes that "thinking ourselves differently is important, but

even more so is practicing ourselves into something new.” I tried to practice myself into something new; however, it may be through writing myself into something new that transformation and alternative feminine subjectivities can be experienced. To have space, such as in this special edition of the *Journal of Leisure Research*, to write failure and fear in feminist leisure research, is an opportunity to map “realms that are yet to come” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

It is often believed that feminism’s ambition is to transform gendered power relations, yet it is frequently forgotten that these power relations include the relations *between* women, not only between men and women. Differences *between* women have been acknowledged as an important area for feminist leisure research (Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Scraton, 1994), yet so far these differences have often focused on ethnicity and class (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1987; Watson & Scraton, 2001), rather than the multiple types of femininity available to many women. As a woman researching women I have written what is often “unthinkable,” or at least “unspeakable.” I have written an academic “fiction” of failure: my own failure to be become “empowered” and my failure to identify roller derby as “resistant.” In wanting to become a space where women can “kick arse,” it seemed that some women in roller derby negated the multiplicity of ways “resistance” could be performed. Hence, I argue that assumptions of leisure as empowering and resistant need to be further interrogated if we, as leisure researchers, are to continue questioning feminine subjectivity and the multiple ways possible of “being a woman.”

French feminist Luce Irigaray writes, “It may be that, in wanting to throw off the physical and spiritual clothing of oppression, we destroy ourselves, too. Instead of being reborn, we annihilate ourselves” (2007, p. 102). Perhaps, out of the ashes of this annihilation, we can recreate ourselves as women anew. Perhaps. I see feminist leisure studies as a space of action and positive transformation. Because of its emphasis on theory and everyday life feminist leisure studies has the ability to influence and even reconceptualise leisure and sport management. My auto/ethnographic writing may move others to write their own experiences of “failure” in leisure, which may then inspire others to think about their own experiences and the ways in which those experiences may have been mediated via policy or practice. Alternative forms of participation, multiple pathways for entry, and more transparent conflict-resolution processes, easier models of governance for volunteers could all change women’s experiences of leisure. All these “micro” strategies and alternative approaches influence the way power and affects surface in leisure, providing women with the possibilities of thinking themselves, feeling themselves, and practicing themselves differently. For feminist scholars researching leisure, there is also the possibility of recreating ourselves anew, practicing a more rigorous form of reflexivity about how power can be examined in multiple ways. Situating power as “everywhere” and mobile, the differences *between women*, as well as between men and women, can be explored. Instead of focusing on a singular notion of resistance, we can deal with the complexity of power relations embedded within our everyday practices as researchers, and as participants in leisure.

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