

Laurendeau, Jason

2008

"Women could be every bit as good as  
guys" Reproductive and resistant  
agency in the two "action" sports

Sociology Department

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/10133/3140>

*Downloaded from OPUS, University of Lethbridge Research Repository*

---

# “Women Could Be Every Bit As Good As Guys”

## Reproductive and Resistant Agency in Two “Action” Sports

Jason Laurendeau

*University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*

Nancy Sharara

*University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada*

This article examines two action sports—skydiving and snowboarding—as cases of women on men’s turf and explores the construction of gender in the ways women negotiate space in these male-dominated arenas. It investigates some of the ways in which women’s participation in these activities is constrained and the strategies women employ to carve out spaces for themselves in these sporting contexts. Women in both sports tend to engage in strategies rooted in middle-class and liberal notions of resistance. Most of these exemplify what researchers have called “reproductive agency.” Some strategies, however, seem to exemplify “resistant agency.” The article explores the potential of these strategies to bring about meaningful social change.

**Keywords:** *agency; gender; risk sports; women*

Recently, women have made inroads into the former male preserve of sport, providing some reason for optimism that institutions and individual behaviors might be undergoing an important shift (Kane & Buysse, 2005). In addition, with the relatively recent emergence of alternative sports, several ostensibly gender-neutral “action” sports have proliferated.<sup>1</sup> As some observers suggest, these activities are sites potentially ripe for the construction of more progressive gender relations (Rinehart, 2005; Thorpe, 2005). Part of the basis for this optimism is rooted in the logic of liberal feminism, which advocates the same opportunities (in this case sporting opportunities) for women as men. As some commentators have contended, however, these discourses are also problematic in the sense that these liberal ideas frame structural problems as individual troubles, and often fail to recognize the multiplicity of femininities and masculinities at play in sporting arenas (as they are elsewhere; see Cooky & McDonald, 2005; Dworkin & Messner, 1999). As action sports have

---

**Authors’ Note:** A portion of this article was presented at the annual meetings of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, October 2005, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jason Laurendeau, Department of Sociology, University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Dr. W., Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada; e-mail: [jason.laurendeau@uleth.ca](mailto:jason.laurendeau@uleth.ca)

become mainstreamed in certain ways (Wheaton, 2004), it is important to reexamine some of these activities and assess the transformative potential of women's participation in these arenas.

In this article, we explore two action sports as examples of male-dominated activities. So-called "risk" sports have been and continue to be considered male domain, as both risk and sport have come to be associated with particular notions of masculinity (P. Donnelly, 2004; Kusz, 2004). We examine skydiving and snowboarding as cases of women on men's turf and problematize the construction of gender in the ways women negotiate space in these male-dominated settings. We investigate some of the ways in which women's participation in these activities is constrained, and the strategies women employ to carve out spaces for themselves in these sporting contexts. In so doing, we explore the relationship between women's individual strategies (i.e., their ways of making sense of their social locations) and women's collective positions. In sporting contexts not subject to government regulation (as many "mainstream" sports fall under the auspices of Title IX legislation, for instance) or surveillance by educational institutions, it is imperative to examine the ways women are exercising agency to evaluate the likelihood of this potential being realized (Rinehart, 2005).

To address these issues, we first consider previous work exploring gender in action sports, and notions of gender, class, and recent examinations of the influence of liberal-feminist ideology on mainstream sporting contexts. We then outline our research methods before turning to a discussion of some of the ways women's participation is constrained in skydiving and snowboarding, and the strategies in which women engage as they negotiate this terrain. Finally, we consider the potentials and limitations of these strategies, and reflect on how our findings add to current discussions of how middle-class liberal notions of "progress" in sport play out "on the ground."

## **Gender and Action Sports**

A number of studies have examined issues of gender with respect to a variety of action sports (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Beal, 1996; Laurendeau, 2004; Rinehart, 2005; Thorpe, 2005). As several of these authors have observed, there is some evidence to suggest that we should have a degree of optimism about the potential for women to make inroads into these sports. Kay and Laberge (2004), for instance, found that in Adventure Racing, participants place a strong emphasis on the value of women's "teaming" skills (e.g., emotional support of other team members) to the overall performance in events. Looking at snowboarding, Heino (2000) suggests that the gender gap is closing more quickly than other sports, with "female participation welcomed and celebrated" (p. 188) on the hill. Among other things, she points to the loose, baggy clothing popular among boarders as a way of diverting "the gaze from the body and resist[ing] the dominant social constructions of gendered bodies" (p. 179). In a similar vein, Thorpe (2005) outlines some important evidence that women are making inroads into snowboarding, noting, for example, that at many competitive events women and men may earn the same prizes for victory and that there have been many strong women as role models in the

sport. Rinehart (2005), meanwhile, suggests that "millennium" sports present unique opportunities for shifts in gender equity, as the organization and values embedded in these sports are constantly up for negotiation.

Almost universally, however, the kinds of studies outlined above also suggest that there are important reasons to critically examine whether women are making real inroads into these sports. As Thorpe (2005) points out, with respect to snowboarding, "Much of the evidence of positive progress is superficial" (p. 83). A common theme reiterated throughout the various sports is that there are contradictions that arise with the negotiation of masculinities and femininities. Whereas many of these sports show some evidence of resistance to dominant or mainstream notions of how masculinity is accomplished, the participants in the sports also reproduced constructions of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy through framing these activities as proving grounds for particular kinds of masculinity. Beal (1996), for example, outlines how young men in skateboarding emphasized differences between males and females as justification for creating different roles for them, with the female role marginalized. Similarly, Kay and Laberge (2004) discuss how women in Adventure Racing are valued for their "teaming" skills, and simultaneously constructed as "mandatory equipment" on mixed gender teams. Though participants discursively construct women as important team members, they also frame them as the baseline of a team—a team is only as strong as its weakest link. In the case of snowboarding, Anderson (1999) suggests that snowboarders use a variety of different techniques to naturalize the idea of gender differences and shore up masculine hegemony. Similarly, Thorpe (2005) discusses extensive evidence that women are still marginalized in snowboarding, including being sexualized in media reporting, isolated in their work for magazines and snowboard companies, and infantilized by some event organizers who exclude them from "big-air" competitions on the grounds that they might get hurt. Little research has examined gender in skydiving, but Laurendeau (2004) discusses evidence that women are sexualized and trivialized in the sport, particularly in certain social practices that take place outside of jumping hours. Taken together, this work points out that, despite the potentials outlined above, women in many action sports continue to face an uphill battle in these activities. We now turn to a consideration of recent work exploring the growth and limitations of middle-class and liberal-feminist discourses of "progress" in sport.

### **Gender, Class, and Liberal–Feminist Notions of “Progress”**

Because of the historical association of sport with masculinity, women's entrance onto the "playing fields" has the potential to challenge dominant understandings of masculinity and femininity in important ways:

The dramatic movement of girls and women into sport . . . makes sport an impressive example of a previously almost entirely masculine terrain that is now gender contested. The very existence of skilled and strong women athletes demanding recognition and

equal access to resources is a destabilizing tendency in the current gender order. (Dworkin & Messner, 1999, p. 346)

As women show themselves as interested in sport and often as highly capable athletes, there have been important shifts in various gender regimes (Connell, 2002). In the United States, for instance, women's demands for increased collegiate athletic opportunities resulted in legislation requiring schools to devote equal resources to men's and women's athletics (Shaw, 1995).

A recent line of inquiry that informs the current research is the exploration of how women and girls pick up middle-class and liberal-feminist discourses of participation in sport as they negotiate their sporting bodies and participation (Cooky & McDonald, 2005; Geissler, 2001; McGinnis, McQuillan, & Chapple, 2005). As these researchers argue, the current climate around women's participation in sport is encouraging relative to the pre-Title IX era where women often lacked access to sporting opportunities. Nevertheless, they point out, we must be critical of discourses like those embedded in Nike's "If you let me play" advertising campaign that fail to acknowledge the multiplicity of femininities in sporting arenas and frame social phenomena as individual troubles. In her discussion of "contemporary lifestyle politics," Geissler (2001) notes that although "we are invited to recollect the past oppression of women and girls, the collective female voice of the present assures us that times have changed. . . . Girls are now characterized as autonomous, free, and independent" (p. 326). As a result, problems stemming from macro-level social, economic, and political conditions become framed as individual concerns. This has the effect of depoliticizing the issues:

Corporations have recently seized upon the individualist impulse of female empowerment that underlies liberal feminism, and have sold it back to women as an ideology and bodily practice that largely precludes any actual mobilizing around the concept of "women." Individual women are now implored by Nike to "Just do it"—just like the men "do it." . . . But "doing it" the corporate individualist way involves a radical turning inward of agency . . . in contrast to a turning outward to mobilize for collective political purposes, with the goal of transforming social institutions. (Dworkin & Messner, 1999, pp. 350-352; also see Geissler, 2001)

In this climate, girls and women understandably pick up liberal notions of taking advantage of opportunities, working hard, and exercising individual responsibility in participating in sport and addressing gender inequality (see Cooky & McDonald, 2005). Although this has empowered women in certain respects, it is important that we critically examine the effects of this process on the lived experiences of girls and women in sport, and assess the extent to which these discourses may constrain the potential for real institutional change in sport (Geissler, 2001).

The liberal-feminist agenda of achieving improved sporting access for women has seen some success. A central question, however, is "access to what?" If women are making inroads into sport without challenging assumptions and structures that

privilege men over women and particular kinds of men over others, then the transformative potential of their entrance is limited at best. Exploring this idea, Dworkin and Messner (1999) highlight the difference between “resistant agency” and “reproductive agency.” Resistant agency, they suggest, involves building or transforming institutions so that they speak to the needs and interests of women. Reproductive agency, on the other hand, is when women simply insert themselves into dominant institutions, and “firmly situates women’s actions and bodies within the structural gender order that oppresses them” (p. 349). Women face the complex task of negotiating for themselves a space in a sporting arena that makes sense for them. In the process, though, they often engage in “configurations of practice” (Connell, 2002) that reproduce forms of marginalization and trivialization faced by some or all women (Geissler, 2001; Mennesson, 2000).

Some recent substantive examples will illustrate the ideas around agency referred to above. Cooky and McDonald (2005) describe how the girls in their study espouse liberal ideas connected to their privileges of Whiteness and middle-class status, thereby creating a set of standards of femininity that marginalize other potential embodiments of femininity. They argue that “these girls’ sport experiences are grounded in discourses that celebrate authority and hierarchy, and [the girls] are exposed to ideologies and practices that produce ‘sexed’ bodies while too often devaluing ‘women’ and particular ‘deviant’ expressions of femininity” (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 174). In a similar vein, McGinnis et al. (2005, p. 332) describe how women engage in various strategies to stay involved in recreational golf despite structures and practices that trivialize and marginalize them as athletes. Their interviewees described seeking out “women-friendly” courses, making a point of playing with other women, focusing on the benefits of the activity, and challenging the stereotypes of women golfers. As these researchers highlight, however, when these women find ways to accommodate gender inequity at the individual level, the system that perpetuates that inequity remains unchanged.

### **Not All Action Sports Are the Same: Considering Skydiving and Snowboarding**

Before turning to a discussion of our research methods, it is important to outline the rationale for considering skydiving and snowboarding together here, and to briefly acknowledge points of convergence and divergence between the activities. Previous research has indicated that both skydiving and snowboarding are activities largely dominated by males, and in which men sometimes engage in practices that marginalize, sexualize, and infantilize women participants (Anderson, 1999; Arnold, 1976; Laurendeau, 2004; Thorpe, 2005). Several researchers have begun the task of examining how women in both activities struggle to negotiate space on “men’s turf” in these activities (Anderson, 1999; Laurendeau, 2004; Thorpe, 2005), a project we continue in this

article. We consider data on these two activities together to sketch out some initial connections among the ways women exercise agency in different action sports. We suggest that considering skydiving and snowboarding together will be instructive because of both the similarities and differences in the activities. A central similarity between the sports is that participation in both is considered hazardous (see Laurendeau, 2006; Laurendeau & Gibbs-Van Brunschot, 2006; Thorpe, 2005). Numerous researchers have pointed out the links between gender and risk (e.g., Beal & Wilson, 2004; Kay & Laberge, 2004), making this an important area of convergence. Skydiving and snowboarding are also similar in that participation in both sports requires a good deal of disposable income on the part of participants, and a considerable time investment if one is to achieve a degree of expertise.

Despite the points of similarity, there are important points of divergence between skydiving and snowboarding that we must take into account. Perhaps the most important of these is that the activities have very different histories. Although recreational skydiving has its roots in the post-WWII era and was initially the project of ex-military jumpers (Laurendeau, 2004), snowboarding has a much shorter history, and was influenced by already-existing “alternative” sports, primarily surfing and skateboarding (Anderson, 1999; Heino, 2000; Howe, 1998). Another key area of difference is the demographics of participants. A large number of skydivers are well into their adult years, and many are established in upper-middle-class occupations. Furthermore, more than 80% of participants are men.<sup>2</sup> Snowboarding, on the other hand, seems to be largely the purview of the young. Interview and observational data indicate that the vast majority of snowboarders are under the age of 30 (see also Anderson, 1999).<sup>3</sup>

Another important difference is with respect to the issue of space. Snowboarding takes place, for the most part, in the very public setting of the ski hill, where space is often shared with hundreds of strangers. Within this space, however, there are three main areas where participants snowboard: at the ski resort, in the terrain park, and in the backcountry.<sup>4</sup> Of these three, the terrain park is the most relevant to the current discussion. The terrain park is a semisecluded part of many ski resorts, that consists of obstacles such as jumps, rails, and half-pipes. Jumps vary in height and provide boarders opportunities to demonstrate skills and style by grabbing their boards and spinning in the air. Rails are metal strips that the snowboarder jumps onto and slides down, jumping off at the bottom. The half-pipe is a large half tunnel of snow in which boarders ride up one wall, jump and speed back across to the opposite wall. The terrain park is understood by boarders to be a high-risk space because of the presence of the above mentioned obstacles. Skydiving, meanwhile, generally takes place at a drop zone (DZ), that often consists of little more than a runway, some hangar space, perhaps another building or two, and an area in which skydivers land their parachutes. Smaller DZs normally draw primarily local jumpers, whereas larger ones often host foreign teams and other groups who want to take advantage of state of the art facilities and aircraft fleet. In addition, many skydivers attend events

called "boogies." Boogies are special events hosted by one DZ to draw jumpers from surrounding DZs for jumping and partying (Laurendeau, 2004). They range from the relatively small, which draw jumpers from only a few DZs, to large international boogies such as the World Freefall Convention, which draws thousands of skydivers every year.

A final difference worthy of note here is the issue of risk. Although both skydiving and snowboarding are understood to be hazardous endeavors, the potential outcomes differ between the two. In skydiving, though the rate of serious injury is not high, the potential for catastrophic injury and even death is present, particularly in the era of extremely high-performance parachutes (see Laurendeau, 2006). In snowboarding, on the other hand, the incidence of relatively minor injuries (e.g., fractures and concussions) is a more serious concern for many boarders than is the relatively small risk of grave injury or death that might occur from collisions, avalanches, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

## Research Method

The first author spent the 1998 skydiving season participating in jumping and social activities at two DZs in Western Canada. Because of weather, a season on the Canadian prairies generally lasts from April or May to October. This particular season, his first jump was in mid-April, and his last in early November. Most weekends, and occasionally during the week, he spent time at one of these DZs, or attending one of a number of boogies. During these months, he completed approximately 130 skydives and attended several get-togethers away from the DZ. House-warming parties and bar nights, for example, are important events in the social network of skydivers. He also conducted 37 in-depth interviews with jumpers, including both men and women; jumpers of low, intermediate, and high experience; recreational, competitive, and semiprofessional (involved in instruction) jumpers; and jumpers with and without experience of serious injury in the sport. Of the 37 interviewees, there were 20 males and 17 females, all white. At the time of the interviews, they ranged in age from 19 years to more than 60 years. They had been involved in the sport anywhere from a few months to almost 30 years, with an average jumping "career" spanning about 8.5 years. A couple of interviewees had fewer than 30 jumps, whereas a number had several thousand to their credit, with an average across the sample of almost 1,100 jumps and a sample median of 560 jumps. Although the interviewees ranged from students to working professionals, all identified themselves as middle class. The interviews covered a range of topics, including subcultural practices and rituals, risk and injury, and gender, and ranged between 45 and 120 minutes, with an average of just short of 72 minutes. The first author also conducted five formal interviews with women between June and November of 2004 to explore some of the ideas in this article. These interviews focused specifically on issues of gender and sexuality in the sport, and ranged from 30 to 45 minutes in

length. At the time of the interviews, these women had between 100 and several thousand jumps, but all had been involved in the sport directly or indirectly for long enough to speak to these issues from a position of expertise.

The second author conducted 34 in-depth interviews with boarders—18 with male boarders and 16 with female boarders. The interviewees' length of involvement in snowboarding ranged from 2 to 13 years. All but one of the interviewees were members of a University Snowboard Club in the Canadian Rockies. The duration of the interviews ranged from 37 minutes to 2 hours. The University Snowboard Club currently has several hundred members, making it one of the largest nonacademic clubs on campus. There were seven major sections in the interview guide: experience level and commitment, appearance and equipment, typical day snowboarding, risk-taking activities, use of safety precautions, pain and injuries, and the snowboarding subculture and identity. The interviews were semistructured with sections and questions, but the second author allowed the respondents' answers to guide the flow of the interview and the sections discussed.

We were, at the time of data collection, full participants in our respective sports. We drew on personal connections to generate the interview and observational data on which this article is based. After generating these data, we each maintained connections with many of our participants, occasionally conferring with them about theoretical and substantive issues. As one of us is a man relatively unfamiliar with snowboarding, and the other a woman with no skydiving experience, we took advantage of opportunities to bring both insider and outsider perspectives, and experiences as members of dominant and subordinate groups to bear on the themes and issues examined in the article. In the analysis that follows, all names reported in both field note and interview excerpts are pseudonyms.

We each worked back and forth between observational and interview data, first coding in very general terms, and then working within these broad areas to develop and refine analytical ideas. As we refined these ideas, we consulted with a number of key informants in each sport for participant validation. As the analysis neared completion, we shared these ideas with several jumpers and boarders, asking them to verify, challenge, or suggest amendments to the analysis of gender and agency in the skydiving and snowboarding community. Finally, we invited and received feedback on a draft of this manuscript from several participants.<sup>6</sup>

In considering the findings presented below, it is important for the reader to bear in mind that we are not in a position to claim that these results are widely generalizable. Rather, we have endeavored to examine important processes at play in both skydiving and snowboarding as a way of continuing the discussion of gender construction in action sports, and inviting future contributions to flesh out this as yet under-explored area of research. It is also important to note that the authors generated data on "core" members of skydiving and snowboarding respectively, members engaged in what Stebbins (1992) has called "serious leisure." Very few skydivers, however, and no boarders, were involved in their sports to the exclusion of most

other activities. Thorpe (2005), for instance, had special entrée into the world of professional boarders, and was able to generate important data on participants whose social world revolved around their involvement in snowboarding. This article, on the other hand, focuses primarily on the experiences and perspectives of those who spend many weekends at the DZ or the ski hill, but return to school or work during the week.<sup>7</sup>

## Constraint

We begin with a brief consideration of some of the subtle and overt ways that women's participation is constrained in skydiving and snowboarding. We outline discursive constructions and behaviors that often frame women as the Other, sometimes trivializing, marginalizing and/or sexualizing them. Our preliminary interest here is in setting the stage for our discussion of agency. For more in-depth discussion of the ways women's participation in skydiving and snowboarding is constrained, see Laurendeau (2004) and Thorpe (2005), respectively.

Though it is much less pronounced than the sexism described by Arnold (1976), there seems, from some of the stories told by women in this study, to still be a small degree of overtly sexist behavior present in skydiving.<sup>8</sup> Sara (900 jumps) related that she has encountered sexist attitudes from a small minority of coaches and competitors who have been around for some time. Once, when she was training for Canopy Formation Skydiving (formerly known as Canopy Relative Work; commonly referred to as "crew"), a male coach told her that "cracks can't do crew." This kind of blanket statement, combined with the sexist language, certainly suggest that sexism has not disappeared from the sport altogether. Similarly, Leanne (400 jumps) says,

There are people that I will not jump with, because they've come up to me, and told me that I will never be as good as a man. And I will not jump with them. Ever. But, I mean that's only certain ones.

Though Leanne highlights sexism that she has personally encountered in skydiving, she (and other interviewees) suggest that it is limited to relatively few men in the sport, and does not have a tremendous impact on their participation.

What is evident in data from this study, however, is that certain sexist behaviors and practices are embedded in some of the social practices in skydiving. Skydivers tend to not only jump together, but also to socialize together at the end of a day of jumping, and sometimes on days when there is no skydiving (e.g., because of weather). During these social affairs, there are a number of practices centered around (hetero)sexuality—almost invariably that of women. Occasionally this involves greeting a woman with a chant [several men] of "show us your tits!" For some young and/or shy women, the request progresses from a one-off chant to a genuine attempt

to convince her to comply. In a very public display, some of these women then lift their tops for all to see. At one boogie attended by the first author, a regular ritual involves a number of women taking turns, one after the other, ascending a bar, removing their tops, and jumping into the crowd to be caught by a group of men. A number of women in this study described being encouraged by men in the bar to participate in this ritual. Leanne described how some women feel uncomfortable in the face of this explicit sexualization. She recounted a scenario in which two women who had just completed their first jumps were hanging around the fire at the end of the day with a group of experienced jumpers:

There's two first jump students . . . hanging out. And they've got two guys, one on each side of them. And the guys are just screaming at them, "Show us your boobs, show us your boobs! You've got to do it. If you want to hang out with us, you've got to," and these girls are like terrified. . . . [But] the perception of what skydiving, like males think that women should be doing is hanging around the fire pit, taking off our tops. I mean, that's what we're good for.

Although the kinds of practices described above are not everyday occurrences at most DZs, they are certainly embedded in the culture of skydiving. Clearly, they point to the othering of women that sometimes takes place in the sport.

There is also some evidence of constraint within snowboarding, albeit of a different kind. Some women boarders believe that their participation in boarding is trivialized because male boarders do not take them seriously (for discussions of a similar phenomenon in skateboarding, see Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; Pomerantz, Currie, & Kelly, 2004). Women often feel uncomfortable and inadequate snowboarding in certain areas—especially areas that demand advanced snowboarding skills and style. The space where this is the most prominent is in the terrain park. According to interviewees, there is a large difference between the percentages of men to women participating in the park, particularly with respect to the use of big jumps. Many men and some women argue that the difference between participation levels of men and women is a product of women's unwillingness to take risks in comparison to men. The accounts of a number of women, however, suggest that there is more at play than simply boarders' willingness to assume the risks of the terrain park. Some women suggest that they feel unwelcome in the terrain park, particularly feeling the sense that men do not think women belong in this space. Men suggest that this is not about gender, but about whether boarders are able to "handle themselves" in the somewhat hazardous space of the terrain park. Some women feel that this is an excuse, however, maintaining that men make assumptions that women are not skilled enough to perform well in the park. As Leah points out, "guys have the idea that snowboarding is more for guys than it is for girls, and that guys are better at it than girls" (7 seasons). Jessica elaborates on this idea:

Yeah, you definitely feel it in the park, even when you're just kind of standing in the park when you're waiting to go and there's all these people around you and they're all boys and maybe like one other girl. And it's definitely like, sometimes the other girl will go first and you will hear people are like "oh watch the girl," . . . and then if the girl's good they are like "oh awesome, the girl's good" and then if the girl's bad it's like nothing, it's like "oh whatever, the girl's bad, nothing new," you know. (Jessica, 7 seasons)

Jessica feels judged as a woman snowboarder in the park, and senses that men expect her to be unskilled simply because she is a woman. This points to women being surveilled to a greater degree than are men in this space, much as Kelly and her colleagues (2005) described with respect to "skater girls" in skateboarding parks. These kinds of expectations constrain the ways some women use areas of the ski hill, as we discuss below. Similarly, Jolene elaborates on her experiences in the park, suggesting that she sometimes picks up a negative vibe: "Sometimes I get the vibe like, 'Oh she's gonna be slow' or 'I would just rather go before her because she is gonna suck [perform poorly]'" (Jolene, 13 seasons). As expressed by some (but not all) women, Jessica and Jolene often felt judged as inadequate, that they are not taken seriously as female boarders in the terrain park.<sup>9</sup>

## Reproductive Agency

As discussed above, a number of the female skydivers and boarders related experiences in which they felt sexualized, marginalized, trivialized, or judged as inadequate in comparison to their male counterparts. In this section, we explore three main strategies women employ to negotiate space in these sports—avoidance, downplaying gender, and underscoring benefits. These strategies, we maintain, are limited in their transformative potential, and exemplify "reproductive agency" (Dworkin & Messner, 1999).

### Avoidance

One strategy employed by women in snowboarding, but not in skydiving, is the avoidance of particular spaces. Men and women boarders tend to frequent different areas of the ski hill, although many of the interviewees refused to acknowledge the influence of gender on their decisions. The area most relevant to the current discussion is the terrain park, where some women are reluctant to go, often avoiding that particular space. For instance, Aimee argues,

I don't like the park. At **PLEASE DRAW LINE** I have ridden the pipe sometimes, but I am very selective of when I go in it. I would never go in it if there is a big crowd. I don't like the idea of trying something that I have never done before when there is a lot

of people watching me. Especially when people in that group are experienced, I feel like they just kind of look at me and be like “This girl is trying to go in here and she doesn’t belong here,” not because I am a girl but because of my ability in the pipe. (Aimee, 6 seasons)

Aimee feels reluctant to snowboard in the terrain park, which she explains as a product of lacking the needed skills to attempt the obstacles within that space, rather than feeling judged as a woman snowboarder. Aimee therefore describes a sense that boarders have to earn the right to snowboard in the park, which is accomplished by possessing the required skills to perform skillfully in that space. Bonnie similarly described feeling reluctant to snowboard in the park and claimed to avoid snowboarding in that area:

It is not my style and I don’t care to impress people anymore, like, “I am a girl and I can do jumps and stuff,” no. . . . So yeah it is the people watching, it’s like the atmosphere of the park that I don’t really like. I guess maybe I feel inadequate when I am in there because I can’t do much and there is not really an opportunity to learn. (Bonnie, 6 seasons)

Bonnie avoids the terrain park because she does not feel the need to impress other boarders, does not like to be watched, and does not feel she has skills to snowboard in the park. It is therefore evident that some women do not feel comfortable snowboarding in the terrain park, although Aimee and Bonnie specifically argue that it is not a factor of their gender. McGinnis et al. (2005, pp. 331-333) found that female golfers perceive that they have lower “golf-worthiness” than men, particularly because they have shorter driving distances. Similarly, women like Aimee and Bonnie feel inadequate snowboarding in the park because of their skill levels. Interestingly, however, Aimee and Bonnie are more experienced and more skilled than many of the men interviewed in this study that attempted the park and who did not describe similar feelings. We suggest that some women recognize the assumption that women are poorly skilled boarders, but refrain from casting this as an issue of gender discrimination, instead framing it in terms of skill and expertise.

## **Downplaying Gender**

The central strategy women in skydiving (and to a lesser extent those in snowboarding) employ is to try to downplay gender altogether—to construct it as irrelevant. Women skydivers recognize that women are trivialized in certain respects in the sport, but discursively discount the relevance of gender. Athena (25 jumps) said, “I don’t believe gender matters at all.” Zoe (550 jumps) notes that women are sometimes treated poorly but suggests she is much happier when gender disappears:

I mean, sometimes you've just got that, "Oh, she's a chick, she doesn't know what she's doing, she's stupid, yada yada yada." I mean, you get that in all aspects of life, not just in jumping. . . . If I can meet, you know, males in the sport that just accept me as, as is, as a jumper, and they don't look at me as female or male, I enjoy that far more.

Zoe's call for gender to be irrelevant was echoed by a number of women who suggested that there was no reason for gender discrimination because women and men have the same potentials in the sport. As Sheryl (560 jumps) succinctly put it, "Women could be every bit as good as guys. There's no gender differences in terms of skydiving. You know, women could be as good or better than the guys, right?" Both Zoe and Sheryl, though they recognize that women are marginalized in skydiving, resist the relevance of gender differences in the sport. This seems to speak to the liberal notion that one's biography should not determine their standing in a particular field. In the interviews, many women suggested that they think of themselves as skydivers first without being especially conscious of gender: "I think of myself as a skydiver. . . . [I'm conscious of it] when things like women's world records come up, and . . . I'm glad then, that I'm a woman in skydiving, but I wouldn't say that I think of myself that way, normally" (Jane, 260 jumps). Again, this relative lack of gender consciousness reinforces the individualization of both successes and troubles.

As mentioned above, avoidance is a central strategy women boarders employ. There is some evidence, however, that some women in snowboarding also draw on a strategy of "blending in" on the hill as a way of downplaying gender. As Heino's (2000) discussion suggests, the clothing style that dominates snowboarding is one that, potentially, at least, diverts attention from gendered bodies. A small number of women in this study seemed to take a degree of refuge in this "blending in." For instance, Andrea states,

I just blend in, like nobody could even, if you were to look twice at me, like I am tall as it is with my helmet on you really couldn't tell the difference so I feel that there is an anonymity which is kind of good because you can just kind of do anything without people judging you. (Andrea, 6 seasons)

Andrea uses the technique of blending to counter the judgmental attitudes she perceives toward female boarders, and argues that she is not judged as much as she would be if her gender were obvious. Similarly Corinne adds, "I have been confused for a guy a lot of times . . . it used to [bother me] but not anymore. . . . I don't, like, dress up to go snowboarding. I don't put on makeup and perfume and go there to like pick up guys. I go there because I want to snowboard" (Corinne, 8 seasons). Like Andrea, Corinne blends in while snowboarding. She does not pursue it as an overt strategy, and in fact initially resisted being confused for a man. Over time, though, she seems to have shifted her position slightly, taking some sanctuary in this confusion. By not dressing up or putting on makeup, she takes the focus off of her heterosexuality, creating a degree of

anonymity that allows her to just snowboard without the attention that she might get if her femininity were more obvious.

### **Underscoring Benefits**

A second strategy women jumpers (but not boarders) employ is to recognize that they are treated differently than men, but highlight the advantages of this treatment. In skydiving, one of the central advantages is that women are likely to get more guidance in the sport than they might otherwise:

Marianne: I know I get coaching more “cause I’m a girl. There’s more friendly people [laughs]. If there’s a young guy on the drop zone, like, since the coaches are all guys, they’re less, they’re more likely to offer help to the girl, right?

Interviewer: Why is that?

Marianne: [sheepishly] ‘Cause I’ve got boobs [laughs]. (Marianne, 100 jumps)

Here, Marianne notes that she has received a good deal of coaching in her time in the sport—more than she would have if she were not a sexually attractive woman. On the whole, Marianne (like many other women) recognizes that she is treated differently, and emphasizes the advantages rather than the downsides of this. She negotiates her way in this male-dominated space by recognizing some of the ways she is privileged.

One strategy that some women in skydiving employ is to take advantage of the fact that they get extra attention in the sport by virtue of being heterosexually attractive women. A number of women recounted engaging in what one interviewee called “nudity for profit.” They would sometimes flash the pilots to gain extra altitude, for instance, or play up their heterosexual attractiveness to ensure access to (usually free) coaching in the early stages of their jumping “careers.”<sup>10</sup> Anna (900 jumps), for instance, recounted that she and other women will sometimes flash the pilot for extra altitude, or as a reward for taxiing the airplane in a way that it doesn’t spray dust over the tents at the DZ. Asked if she does it for any other purposes, she said, “Just to make [the pilots] smile. We try to keep the pilots happy. That’s part of my job.” Zoe (550 jumps) also described taking advantage of the attention she was afforded when she was starting out in the sport:

I very quickly recognized in this sport that being female was gonna get me extra attention with my instructors. You know, and while keeping things harmless and flirtatious, I certainly used that to my advantage. And, because of that, I still try and make sure that even today I don’t whine about being degraded as a woman, or whine about perceptions, and, you know, I try to accept the fact [that women are treated differently].

Here, Zoe highlights that she has capitalized on the differential treatment afforded women in skydiving. She understood early on that women are treated differently than men in the sport, but chose to focus on the ways that this might prove to be

advantageous. Moreover, because she benefited from this differential treatment, she made a conscious choice not to “whine” about degrading treatment or sexist perceptions. Again, we see an example of a structural problem (degrading treatment of women) being framed as an individual trouble with a solution (focusing on benefits) rooted in individual behavior.

## Resistant Agency (?)

Although there is considerable evidence of reproductive agency in both skydiving and snowboarding, women in both sports also engage in strategies that, in certain respects at least, exemplify resistant agency. In this section, we explore the potentials and limitations of these strategies. We examine the ways women in snowboarding negotiate their own feminine image and emphasize their skill in efforts to change perceptions so that women are taken seriously as skilled boarders. We also consider a relatively recent phenomenon in skydiving—all-women formation skydiving attempts—as a collective strategy with potential to challenge hegemonic ideas about gender in skydiving.

### Emphasizing Worthiness

Like McGinnis et al.'s women golfers, the experienced women boarders in this study engage in practices aimed at challenging the stereotype that women boarders are less skilled than their male counterparts. They believe that by changing the image surrounding women in snowboarding, they may subsequently create space and respect for women boarders generally. The way they attempt to change the image surrounding female boarders is by engaging in practices that emphasize their femininity (but not their sexuality) so that others on the hill will know that it is a woman performing with a degree of expertise. Their interest is not in portraying a heterosexually available femininity, but in differentiating themselves from men on the hill. They style their hair in certain ways and wear light colors so that others on the ski hill recognize that they are women (and presumably draw the conclusion that women can be skilled boarders). Aimee claims, “I definitely try to have my hair show . . . I definitely want to be seen when I ride down the hill, so if I am riding and I do something well and there is someone on the lift, I want them to know that I am a girl and that girl riders are, like, progressive and doing well in the sport as well” (Aimee, 6 seasons). It is important for Aimee to be recognized as a female boarder because she feels she can change the perception that female boarders are not skilled. Similarly, Jessica argues,

It's sort of nice because there's not that many girls out there, it's sort of nice to be like, “I'm a girl, look at me go,” but not really at the same time. I don't know, it's weird. I don't do it [portray a feminine image] so people are like “oh look she's a girl” but at

the same time its like “well look she’s a girl and she’s not that bad, either” and just be like “it’s not only guys that are good at snowboarding” because we all know that’s not true. (Jessica, 7 seasons)

Like Aimee, Jessica stresses the importance of being recognized as a woman to change the image of female boarders as less skilled than male boarders. Both Aimee and Jessica resist the perception of female boarders as less skilled, and are attempting to change it through their presentation of self.

As mentioned above, women’s practice of highlighting their femininity is not simply about being recognized as a woman, but being recognized as a skilled female snowboarder. Bonnie clarified this point when she explained that she doesn’t wear makeup or “do” her hair to attract heterosexual attention: “I don’t wear my ponytail out so that guys are like “check out that girl maybe she is hot.” I just do it so that people know that I am a female snowboarder” (Bonnie, 6 seasons). Bonnie refrains from wearing makeup because she is trying to be recognized as a female snowboarder, not attempting to draw attention to her sexuality. There is a distinction made between styling one’s hair so that it shows underneath a helmet and wearing makeup. These women do not want to sexualize their image or portray themselves as attractive, but do want to draw attention to the fact that they are skilled female boarders that should be taken seriously. Furthermore, many of the women interviewed were quite critical of female boarders who overdo their image and attempt to portray themselves as attractive. In fact, many women expressed disappointment with women who enact what Connell (1987) calls “emphasized femininity.” For instance, Judy argues,

It’s also become a whole era of fashion, and admittedly, those girls who are all the snowboard bunnies, who are all like, done up like, 100%. Like, you look at them and you go, “Your makeup will be off of your face within 45 minutes of riding because you don’t have goggles and your eyes are going to water.” . . . It’s things like that, it’s obvious, you know, people, everybody sees that. (Judy, 5 seasons)

Judy expressed annoyance with women who attempt to portray themselves as attractive. Many of the other women expressed similar irritation, which, we suggest, is indicative of more than a disagreement over the right motivation to snowboard. As mentioned earlier, many of the women want to be recognized as skilled female boarders who snowboard because they are passionate and love the sport. Women who sexualize their image shore up, rather than challenge, images of women on the hill as sexual beings rather than serious boarders, undermining the efforts of women trying to transform these perceptions. Andrea argues,

A lot of female snowboarders, they are good role models for girls nowadays because they are not out there trying to flash or present themselves to guys or anything. They are actually out there trying to do something and having fun and they are good at it. So I think it is good in that sense because they are good role models for the girls of today. (Andrea, 6 seasons)

The skilled women boarders who make a point of being recognized as women are setting a positive example because they are emphasizing their expertise and simultaneously rejecting the image of women as sexual objects. Although there seems to be a fine line between working on your image as a woman, and looking attractive, the women interviewed were adamant that there is a clear difference. While creating space for themselves on the hill, these women are also working on transforming social relations, even though their strategies are individual in nature.

Some of the most experienced boarders in this study, beyond simply accentuating the fact that they are skilled women, take particular pleasure in demonstrating skills and proving their snowboarding worthiness. For instance, in response to the sexism Jolene encounters in the park she argues, "I get a thrill out of proving them [men] wrong, or when I get like 'Oh you're pretty good'; I really like when I can be at par with guys" (Jolene, 13 seasons). Although women like Jolene feel judged as inadequate when entering the terrain park, they enjoy disproving notions that women are unskilled. Many women enjoy being able to perform at a similar level as men and get a thrill out of changing perceptions surrounding women in snowboarding:

You always just think that they don't think you're as good as them or something. I felt that a lot because there was a lot of regular guys who went up there who were from **PLEASE DRAW LINE** who we didn't know but would always see just from being up on the hill. And it always felt like they thought you were not as good as them, but then it would be fine once you did do something and kind of proved that you were as good. (Lanna, 10 seasons)

Lanna also described feeling judged as less skilled, but the reluctance she felt when she entered the park disappeared once she proved that she was indeed a skilled snowboarder. Highly skilled women, such as Jolene and Lanna, create space for themselves in the park and prove their snowboarding worthiness by demonstrating that they are skilled boarders that should be taken seriously.

### Collective Strategies

An important recent change in the terrain of recreational skydiving has been the emergence of organized all-women skydives. One of the earliest was a 24-way formation in California in 1979 (Poynter, 1989, p. 104).<sup>11</sup> Although many of the early all-women skydives may have been organized simply to provide opportunities for women to jump together in a male-dominated setting, some have recently tackled social and political issues as well. Jump for the Cause (JFTC), for example, is a corporation that has organized a series of high-profile, all-women skydives that have raised money for a number of issues salient to women. JFTC's first event, in 1997, involved 48 jumpers, and "raised over \$11,000 [US] for a local Battered Women's Shelter" (JFTC, 2002). From 1997 to 2002, five JFTC events were organized, raising several hundred thousand dollars for various social issues (primarily breast cancer research), and setting multiple

world records for the largest all-women skydive in the process (JFTC, 2002). The event has become so prominent, in fact, that JFTC has become virtually synonymous with the women's world record (WWR). On the JFTC website, the three goals for the organization are listed. In addition to raising money for breast cancer and setting a WWR, the event aims "to be role models for other women and young ladies" (JFTC, 2005).

One of the ways that these WWR attempts challenge dominant practices is through fostering an emotional environment that differs from that which often dominates the regular DZ. Speaking of her experiences with JFTC, Sophia (more than 1,000 skydives) said,

In a mixed gender group, I would see a lot more of men criticizing somebody else's, the way they're jumping, or their skydives. Where women, if somebody did screw up, they're a lot more supportive. . . . *Part of the attraction, and part of the whole experience is just women supporting each other in an environment where you don't always get a lot of support.* Not, I mean, you get a lot of help, but emotional support.

The way Sophia describes the WWR experience highlights that it is a strategy that does more than simply insert women into dominant institutions. Instead, it is ostensibly organized around a different way of skydiving. In addition to raising money for "women's" issues, these jumps provide opportunities for women to support each other "in an environment where [they] don't always get a lot of support." Moreover, some women acknowledged that the impacts of the event may extend beyond the parameters of the event itself:

I've heard or read on the Net that a lot of guys think it's stupid, and there shouldn't be a women's world record attempt, and the guys should be able to go out and do the same thing. But, I don't know, I think it does need to be there. I think. Most, a lot of people don't think that skydiving is a women's sport. They think it's too extreme for women. They think it's a macho thing to do. . . . It's not a macho sport, but that's kinda how some people perceive it. So I think it does need to be there. (Anna, 900 jumps)

Here, Anna highlights the resistance to the WWR events on the part of some men in the sport, and points to the potential for these jumps to accomplish real change. She maintains that there is a perception "out there" that skydiving is a "macho" sport—perhaps one that's inappropriate for women. The WWR has the potential to generate a degree of awareness, both through the advocacy of the women involved and through various media outlets (see JFTC, n.d.) for several examples of major media coverage of the event). This awareness, Anna points out, may challenge these common sense assumptions about skydiving.

Despite the potential outlined above for the WWR jumps to be part of a resistant agency, there are some signs that this potential is limited. Among the women interviewed for this project, there were a number who are either ambivalent about the WWR project or are adamantly opposed to it. Amanda, for example, objects to the

very idea of a WWR. There is no reason, as far as she is concerned, for women to mark themselves as different:

I don't see any reason on the face of this planet why there should be a women's record category . . . there's no reason in this world that there's anything more special about 100 women than there is about 100 men, except that there are fewer women in the sport. But that, in my mind, doesn't justify having a women's world record. I think they're dumb (Amanda, 1400 jumps).

On the other end of the experience continuum, Marianne (100 jumps) also expresses some doubts about the WWR attempts:

Marianne: I don't know too much about them. I haven't been. . . . Well, especially for JFTC, it's a different thing because it raises money for cancer, but, yeah, other than that, I don't see the point.

Interviewer: Why do you think women get involved?

Marianne: Maybe some of them, I suppose some of them are from the older generation, and they might feel that they need to set themselves apart from guys, and do their own thing.

Interviewer: You don't feel that way?

Marianne: No. I really don't. . . . Because the record attempt should be about getting the best people out there. If you're not there yet, if you're not at the caliber, then you wait, you get better, and then you're part of it. But it should just be about the best people.

Although Amanda acknowledges that there are fewer women in the sport, she contends that this is not enough reason to justify having a WWR. Similarly, Marianne recognizes that JFTC raises money for a good cause (though fails to specify that the cause is breast cancer), but does not "see the point" beyond that. She suggests that perhaps some women need to set themselves apart from men in the sport—elsewhere she expressed her perception that women represented about one quarter of the population of skydivers. She emphasizes that records are about being at a certain "caliber," about "the best people" making these formations. The positions of both women (and others) on the WWR jumps seem to be grounded in notions of hard work and individual achievement, ideas clearly grounded in middle-class and liberal notions of earning one's position through personal responsibility. They resist the idea of mobilizing around the concept of "women," despite acknowledging that there are many fewer women than men in the sport (in fact, elsewhere in the interview, Amanda mentioned that she frequently wonders why there are not more women in the sport).

## Discussion and Conclusions

As Geissler's discussion suggests, what we see in our investigation of women on "men's turf" in skydiving and snowboarding is a pronounced turning inward of

agency. Women in both sports recognize that there is a gender imbalance, and tend to focus on individual strategies to negotiate this terrain. Women skydivers and boarders both draw on a strategy of discounting gender, with skydivers discursively negating the relevance of gender, and a number of boarders taking a degree of refuge in blending in. Meanwhile, skydivers, but not boarders, also emphasized the benefits of being treated differently, particularly with respect to obtaining access to free coaching or extra altitude for jumps. Because the differential treatment of women in snowboarding is most tangible in the terrain park, many women simply avoid this space altogether, again framing this as an individual trouble rather than a structural issue. All three strategies hint at a reluctance, even resistance, to mobilize around the concept of “women,” and reflect middle-class and liberal ideas of opportunity and individual responsibility. This kind of gender negotiation is what Dworkin and Messner (1999) are referring to when they outline “reproductive agency.”

There are some strategies employed by women in both sports that seem, to some extent at least, to exemplify “resistant agency.” For boarders, women used body techniques to underscore the fact that there are skilled women in the sport and thereby promote the image that women are worthy of consideration as capable snowboarders. As with the tactics of McGinnis et al.’s golfers, these strategies remain limited to the individual level, with women reluctant to mobilize as a marginalized group. As Thorpe’s (2005) discussion illuminated though, there is some evidence of these kinds of collective strategies in snowboarding. For example, she describes events like the “Queen of the Mountain” competition that “encourage participation on the basis of feminist sporting principles such as recreation, fun, and friendship [and] allow women to define and shape their own boarding experiences” (p. 94). In the case of skydiving, the recent growth in all-women formation skydives seems to challenge social relations in certain respects, advocating a way of skydiving that ostensibly speaks to the emotional need of women jumpers. In addition, the kind of publicity generated by these jumps may go some way toward challenging assumptions that skydiving is more the purview of men than women. There is considerable ambivalence, however, around these collective strategies. Some women resist the idea of a WWR, suggesting that mobilization is unnecessary, or that world records should be about expertise rather than about gender. Although women in snowboarding and skydiving have found strategies that resonate with them for negotiating their way in these male-dominated settings, they have not, for the most part, engaged in strategies that fundamentally challenge the institutional context that sometimes marginalizes and trivializes them, and may very well do the same to future generations of women in these sports.

What our findings also point toward is the fluidity of reproductive and resistant agency. As women continue to make inroads into the terrain of (in this case action) sports, they employ strategies that often show elements of both resistance and reproduction. Our data show more evidence of resistance in skydiving, which may be the result of a number of factors. First, skydiving has a longer history of somewhat contentious social relations between men and women, which may provide some degree

of impetus for women to keep an eye on transforming social relations. Second, women in skydiving tend to be slightly older and more established professionally than those in snowboarding. Perhaps, then, they have more experience with and confidence around exercising this kind of agency. It may be that younger women and girls, as they move into these sporting spaces, draw on feminist politics rooted more in third-wave feminist ideas than in those of second-wave feminism (Pomerantz et al., 2004). Nevertheless, the agency of women in both sports is constrained by the gender regimes (Connell, 2002) of the two sports, and also by middle-class notions of resistance. As Cooky and McDonald (2005) point out, these ideas have been important in a number of important gains for women in sport (for example, the reduction in overt sexism in skydiving). It is also limited, though, in that there is little evidence of "in your face" resistance to gender discrimination (McGinnis et al., 2005) or radical resistance likely to result in sweeping change. However, it may very well be that the kinds of sweeping change for which many second-wave feminists struggled are not on the horizon in these arenas. Perhaps, instead, we are witnessing a shift toward "new and diverse possibilities that will bring new and diverse subjects into the fore" (Pomerantz et al., 2004, p. 555). As Pomerantz and her colleagues highlight, we need to more closely examine the transformations of (embodied) enactments of feminism, even (and perhaps especially) in these emerging sporting sites. A promising avenue for further examination is to explore the longer term impacts of the kinds of strategies we have documented in this article. In activities with well-entrenched patterns of social relations, perhaps change comes about only incrementally, through "mundane" everyday practices (Pomerantz et al., 2004, p. 555; for a theorization of this idea with respect to the household division of labor, see Sullivan, 2004). Looking at social change with this kind of longer-term focus might allow us to understand the ways in which strategies that appear to be reproductive may still go some way toward bringing about the kinds of social change many scholars and activists advocate.

## Notes

1. As Rinehart (2005) suggests, there are some issues around using terms such as *alternative* and *extreme* to describe sports such as snowboarding, skydiving, and other action sports—not the least of which is some practitioners' resistance to the use of these terms and the recent commercial cooptation of the term *extreme*. In this article, we will generally use the broader *action sports* to describe these activities.

2. According to the U.S. Parachute Association (USPA, n.d.) survey conducted in 2002, just more than 15% of jumpers are women and 58% are between 30 and 49 years of age. Unfortunately, similarly comprehensive data are not available from the Canadian Sport Parachuting Association (CSPA), nor does the USPA have data from earlier than 2001. The editor of *Canpara*, the regular CSPA publication, informed us that, as of February 2004, there were 400 female and 1,872 male members of the of CSPA (N. Ambrus, personal communication, June 10, 2004). The survey results indicate that military personnel, who were instrumental in the advent of recreational skydiving (Laurendeau & Wamsley, 1998), still represent a significant percentage of skydivers, at just more than 10%. The five best-represented occupations after the military are business management, building trades, the computer industry, engineering, and medicine.

3. It is important to recognize that Anderson's (1999) work draws on American data and the Southern Californian cultural context. As Popovic (2005) suggests, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that the Canadian "scene" may have developed on a slightly different trajectory. This question, however, is beyond the scope of our article.

4. The space of the backcountry refers to areas that are not patrolled by the ski patrol and therefore includes areas that are out of bounds of the ski resort and areas that are not part of a ski hill operation.

5. This is not to suggest that serious injury is rare in snowboarding. However, when we consider the number of participants in each sport and the time of risk exposure, skydiving may be conceived of as a much riskier undertaking (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993).

6. In addition to seeking participant feedback on the analyses themselves, this consultation strategy was one way in which the first author attempted to address the issue of a man conducting research into the ways women exercise agency in a male-dominated sport. By inviting several women to offer their feedback on these analyses, we tried to avoid disempowering the women whose struggles we consider in this article.

7. As M. Donnelly (2006) points out, there is a need for researchers to also consider the perspectives, experiences, and consumption practices of subcultural participants who are not "core members." We are not, however, in a position to address this need in this article.

8. Part of the difference between Arnold's (1976) results and those of the current study may be because of the political incorrectness of articulating sexist attitudes, which would have been much less pronounced at the time of Arnold's study.

9. It is important to acknowledge that there are some male boarders who also feel uncomfortable snowboarding in the park. Some of the men expressed making strategic decisions on when to snowboard in the park because they did not enjoy being watched by skilled male boarders. Even skilled women stress that they felt judged on entering the park without trying any of the obstacles, whereas some of the men felt uneasy because they knew they could not compete with the skilled men.

10. Jumpers are often expected or required to pay for their coach's skydive and may be charged a fee over and above this, depending on the type of skydive, the expertise of the coach in question, and so on.

11. Formation skydiving, in which jumpers form preplanned shapes by linking up in free fall, is the most common discipline for recreational jumpers. The number of jumpers in the formation is indicated by the description of the jump. In this case, 24 women formed a "24-way."

## References

- Anderson, K. (1999). Snowboarding: The construction of gender in an emerging sport. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 23(1), 55-79.
- Arnold, D. (1976). A sociologist looks at sport parachuting. In A. Yiannakis, T. D. McIntyre, M. J. Melnick, & D. P. Hart (Eds.), *Sport sociology: Contemporary themes* (pp. 302-305). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Beal, B. (1996). Alternative masculinity and its effects on gender relations in the subculture of skateboarding. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 19(3), 204-220.
- Beal, B., & Wilson, C. (2004). "Chicks dig scars": Commercialisation and the transformations of skateboarders' identities. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 31-54). New York: Routledge.
- Celsi, R. L., Rose, R. L., & Leigh, T. W. (1993). An exploration of high-risk leisure consumption through skydiving. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(1), 1-23.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2002). *Gender*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Cooley, C., & McDonald, M. (2005). "If you let me play": Young girls' inside-other narratives of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22(2), 158-177.

- Donnelly, M. (2006). Studying extreme sports: Beyond the core participants. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 30*(2), 219-224.
- Donnelly, P. (2004). Sport and risk culture. In K. Young (Ed.), *Sporting bodies, damaged selves: Sociological studies of sports-related injuries* (pp. 29-57). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.
- Dworkin, S., & Messner, M. (1999). Just do . . . what? Sport, bodies, gender. In M. Marx Ferree, J. Lorber, & B. Hess (Eds.), *Revisoning gender* (pp. 341-361). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Geissler, D. (2001). Generation "g." *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 25*(3), 324-331.
- Heino, R. (2000). New sport: What is so punk about snowboarding? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 24*(1), 176-191.
- Howe, S. (1998). *(Sick): A cultural history of snowboarding*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Jump for the Cause. (2002). *A brief history of Jump for the Cause*. Retrieved December 12, 2005, from <http://www.jumpforthecause.com/archive/jfte2000.htm#history>
- Jump for the Cause. (2005). *Jump for the Cause 2005*. Retrieved December 12, 2005, from <http://jumpforthecause.com/>
- Jump for the Cause. (n.d.). *Jump for the Cause press room*. Retrieved December 12, 2005, from [http://jumpforthecause.com/in\\_the\\_news.html](http://jumpforthecause.com/in_the_news.html)
- Kane, M. J., & Buysse, J. (2005). Intercollegiate media guides as contested terrain: A longitudinal analysis. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 22*(2), 214-238.
- Kay, J., & Laberge, S. (2004). "Mandatory equipment": Women in adventure racing. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 154-174). New York: Routledge.
- Kelly, D., Pomerantz, S., & Currie, D. (2005). Skater girlhood and emphasized femininity: "You can't land an ollie properly in heels." *Gender and Education, 17*(3), 229-248.
- Kusz, K. (2004). Extreme America: The cultural politics of extreme sports in 1990s America. In B. Wheaton (Ed.), *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference* (pp. 197-213). New York: Routledge.
- Laurendeau, J. (2004). The "crack choir" and the "cock chorus": The intersection of gender and sexuality in skydiving texts. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 21*(4), 397-417.
- Laurendeau, J. (2006). "He didn't go in doing a skydive": Sustaining the "illusion" of control in an edge-work activity. *Sociological Perspectives, 49*(4), 583-605.
- Laurendeau, J., & Gibbs-Van Brunschot, E. (2006). Policing the edge: Risk and social control in skydiving. *Deviant Behavior, 27*(2), 173-201.
- Laurendeau, J., & Wamsley, K. (1998, May). *Masculinity and the military technology complex: The emergence of sport parachuting*. Paper presented at the 26th annual meetings of the North American Society for Sport History, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.
- McGinnis, L., McQuillan, J., & Chapple, C. (2005). I just want to play: Women, sexism, and persistence in golf. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 29*(3), 313-337.
- Mennesson, C. (2000). "Hard" women and "soft" women: The social construction of identities among female boxers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 35*(1), 21-33.
- Miller, W., & Frey, J. H. (1996). Skydivers as risk takers: An examination. *Humanity and Society, 20*, 3-15.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D., & Kelly, D. (2004). Sk8er girls: Skateboarders, girlhood and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum, 27*(5-6), 547-557.
- Popovic, M. (2005, October). *From A to be: The evolution of the Canadian snowboarding subculture*. Paper presented at the 2005 annual meetings of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Winston-Salem, NC.
- Rinehart, R. (2005). "Babes" & boards: Opportunities in a new millennium sport? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 29*(3), 232-255.
- Shaw, P. (1995). Achieving Title IX gender equity in college athletics in an era of fiscal austerity. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 19*(1), 6-27.

- Stebbins, R. (1992). *Amateurs, professionals, and serious leisure*. Montreal, Quebec, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Sullivan, O. (2004). Changing gender practices within the household: A theoretical perspective. *Gender & Society, 18*(2), 207-222.
- Thorpe, H. (2005). Jibbing the gender order: Females in the snowboarding culture. *Sport in Society, 8*(1), 76-100.
- U.S. Parachute Association. (n.d.). *2002 membership survey results*. Retrieved January 31, 2004, from <http://www.U.S.P.A.org/about/images/memsurvey02.pdf>
- Wheaton, B. (Ed.). (2004). *Understanding lifestyle sports: Consumption, identity and difference*. New York: Routledge.

**Jason Laurendeau** is an assistant professor in the Sociology Department at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. His research interests include voluntary risk activities, risk theory, and gender. His current research projects include an examination of “radical” environmental activism and an ethnographic study of B.A.S.E. jumping.

**Nancy Sharara PLS PROVIDE A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY.**