

# **“Wandering and Wondering”: Theory and Representation in Feminist Physical Cultural Studies**

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In this paper we explore the potential of physical cultural studies for collaborative, interdisciplinary, theoretically-informed, reflexive research on the physically active female body. We use the metaphors of “wandering and wondering” to interrogate our experiences of movement within and across physical cultural fields and academic borders. Grounded in an ethnographic narrative approach, we revisit the ways in which different aspects of our identities were highlighted during our waka ama, snowboarding and basketball experiences. Drawing upon feminist readings of Bourdieu’s work, we challenged each other to reflect critically upon previously unquestioned or unexplored aspects of our subjectivities. While the paper focuses on the results of these discussions, we also offer insights into the collaborative process. Ultimately we argue that sharing narratives of our experiences and exploring them further with theory offers a good place to begin new interdisciplinary conversations that may push physical cultural studies research in new directions.

Dans cet article, nous explorons le potentiel des études culturelles physiques dans le cadre d’une étude sur le corps féminin physiquement actif dont la recherche est conduite de manière collaborative, interdisciplinaire, réflexive et s’inspirant des théories. Nous utilisons les métaphores de l’égarement et de l’émerveillement « wandering and wondering » pour interroger nos expériences du mouvement à l’intérieur et à travers les champs culturels physiques et les frontières académiques. Nous basant sur une approche narrative ethnographique, nous revisitons les manières dont les aspects différents de nos identités sont mis en valeur pendant notre waka ama, nos expériences de snowboard et de basketball. En nous inspirant des lectures féministes de l’œuvre de Bourdieu, nous nous sommes défiés d’aborder de manière critique des aspects incontestés ou inexplorés de nos subjectivités. Alors que l’article se concentre sur les résultats de ces discussions, nous offrons également un aperçu du processus collaboratif. En fin de compte, nous soutenons que le fait d’échanger les récits de nos expériences et de recourir à la théorie pour les explorer plus en détail, constitue une occasion propice pour lancer de nouvelles conversations interdisciplinaires qui pourraient faire avancer la recherche en études culturelles physiques et l’orienter dans de nouvelles directions.

As three feminist scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds who are researching, teaching and practicing various forms of sport and physical culture, we have long considered how we might engage in collaborative work that extends our own and others' understandings of the practices and politics of physically active female bodies. Arguably, the emergent field of physical cultural studies has the potential to invigorate such conversations. Andrews (2008) describes physical cultural studies as "dedicated to the contextually based understanding of the corporeal practices, discourses, and subjectivities through which active bodies become organized, represented and experienced in relation to the operations of social power" (p. 54). Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, physical cultural studies seeks to identify "the role played by physical culture in reproducing, and sometimes challenging, particular class, ethnic, gender, ability, generational, national, racial, and/or sexual norms and differences" (Andrews, 2008, p. 54). In this paper we explore the potential of physical cultural studies for collaborative, interdisciplinary, theoretically-informed, reflexive research on the physically active female body.<sup>1</sup> We use the metaphors of "wandering and wondering" to theoretically interrogate our cognitive and embodied experiences of movement within and across physical cultural fields and academic borders. Grounded in a collaborative (see Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Flemons & Green, 2002; Gale & Wyatt, 2009) and ethnographic narrative approach (see Bochner & Hocker Rushing, 2002; Denison & Markula, 2003; Denison & Rinehart, 2000; Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Markula, 2003; Markula & Denison, 2005; Richardson, 2005, 2000, 1998), we *revisit* the ways in which different aspects of our identities were highlighted during our wanderings in the Pacific and North America. As women of New Zealand/Aotearoa, who are now living "at home", we use our narratives as triggers for engaging in theoretically-informed conversations about the meanings of our waka ama<sup>2</sup>, back-country snowboarding and basketball experiences. Drawing upon feminist readings of Pierre Bourdieu, we were challenged to ask new questions about our experiences and to reflect critically upon previously unquestioned or unexplored aspects of our past and present subjectivities.

To illustrate our individual and shared wanderings across temporal, physical, virtual, and disciplinary fields, we present this material in three main parts. The first contains the narratives that served as the starting points for our reflexive theorizing and conversations.<sup>3</sup> While auto-ethnographic in nature, they do not represent fully-formed and polished "stories"; rather they are "takes" on physical cultural experiences about which we wished to reflect further, and were intended specifically as beginnings rather than end products in themselves. We chose these narratives after informal conversations revealed some interesting commonalities in our experiences even though the contexts were markedly different: one as a Pakeha<sup>4</sup> paddler in the Polynesian sport of waka ama in the South Pacific, one as a female in the male-dominated domain of back-country snowboarding in Canada, and one as a heterosexual woman playing on a lesbian basketball team in the United States. Seeking to make meaning of our "different kinds of movement and belonging" (Knowles, 1999, pp. 62–3), each narrative introduces our lived experiences as we negotiated our ways as female athletes through different fields and the readings others made of us through our bodies in various locations (e.g., the beach and ocean, mountain, gym, locker-room, basketball court, bar).

In the second part we begin our methodological, theoretical and representational wondering by offering comments on the representational intentions underpinning this project, followed by an overview of the theoretical framework that informed our individual and collective reflections. Recognizing the constraints of sharing both the process and outcomes of our collaborative reflections within a standard manuscript, we offer some insights from our experiences in the endnotes, or what we have renamed “process notes”. In the third part we focus on the outcomes of our conversations as we explored our connections, the theoretical possibilities of feminist engagements with Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital and habitus, and challenged each other to open up and interrogate the silences or absences in our stories. In this part, it is the results of our collaborative process of theoretically interrogating our previously written personal narratives that is the focus.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to advance feminist physical cultural studies in at least two ways. As well as centering the lived experiences of physically active women and the myriad forms of power operating on and through our bodies, we attempt to blur the divide between “researcher and researched, between reflection and experience” (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003, p. 164) while contributing to the emerging ethnographic work in the social sciences and humanities involving collaborative rather than individual reflection (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Gale & Wyatt, 2009). As Pratt and Yeoh (2003) explain, “collaborating across worlds—despite its discomforts, messiness and power politics—allows us to make full use of situated knowledges and at the same time creates often unplanned opportunities to destabilize vantage points, and to improvise different, variegated perspectives in producing and performing knowledges” (p. 164).

## “Wanderings”: Narratives of the Past

### Waka Ama Racing

“*Kia kaha*” calls a fellow paddler from Aotearoa as we leave the shelter of our tent.<sup>5</sup> Swigging habitually from my drink bottle, I follow the rest of our crew along the hot Hawaiian sand, wiping away the sweat that accumulates with every step. We pass in our ID cards at the registration table and slip gratefully into the shade of the marquee. Moana and the other four girls seem relaxed and unperturbed as we wait for our semifinal, comparing notes in *te reo Maori* about cute boys they saw earlier in the day. In another context, I suspect they might seem more like teenagers ready for a day at the beach. But I know different. As I focus on mentally rehearsing the race calls I have to give our crew, their chatter blends in with the swirling voices of the announcers calling paddlers to races in Hawaiian, French and English. I drop into a deep lunge, searching for a way to calm my own nerves.

Distracted from my mental rehearsal, I hear low voices nearby discussing race tactics. Looking discretely sideways, I see long, bare legs encased in tiny, tight-fitting Lycra shorts, leading up to pink, sunburned arms and shoulders, clad only in skin-tight gold and green tank tops. Limbs scented with sunscreen, immaculate makeup and hair, voices hushed in an effort to be secretive—ahh—this is the Australian team. Now they look like serious athletes—a lot of hours in the gym to get that muscle bulk and definition I speculate. . .

Following my gaze, Moana pokes me in the ribs and whispers, “*Hika!* Better get us some of those shorts to make us go faster.” Moana slides her shorts up her thighs, one hand on her jutting hip. Surreptitious looks from the rest of our crew as they take in Moana’s pose and then our competitors, obviously imagining fitting into those tiny Lycra uniforms. Hine and Mere giggle and resume their chatter but, tugging her oversized race shirt down over her hips, Ripeka responds, “It’s what happens on the water that counts Karen.” Having been on the losing end of stocky Ripeka’s power in trials, I know that body shape and size has very little to do with winning in this sport. This is not the highly technical world of elite rowing after all, but a complex mix of Polynesian canoe traditions, international competition regulations and cultural pride (Barbour, 2007b). My crewmates seem amused by the Australians’ Lycra, apparently not seeing their displayed muscular bodies as markings of competitive athletes quite like I do. Even though I know it might not really help me on the water, I wish I’d done more bicep curls and squats at the gym.

Most of the time, we paddlers don’t worry too much about how we look, being more worried about power than weight, and about technique than body image. And anyway, under the baggy board shorts and oversized race shirts typical of the crews from Aotearoa, who would really notice whether our bodies conformed to the thin, toned, but not too muscular, ideal feminine body?

The blare of a megaphone attracts our attention and we group together, the girls’ chatter pausing as we clasp wrists and run through our land warm up drills automatically. Familiar instructions as the race official briefs us on the 500m race procedure, except for the Hawaiian words substituted for ours. Ahead of us, I watch the tall, muscular Aussies clamber over their *waka* to sit, intense concentration and sharp commands demonstrating their focus.

“Hey Karen, don’t worry about them – we’ll beat them,” whispers Mere. Knowing Mere has raced internationally before, I try to breathe more evenly. I watch as she wades through the knee-high water and efficiently levers herself into her seat and Hine follows. Ducking under the *kiato*, I carefully maneuver myself into my seat, rearranging my now sodden shorts.

Suddenly I sense a change in the breeze. Paddling smoothly past, confident and focused in the *waka* are six women, white shirts emblazoned with the words “Tahiti” in bold red letters. Their small physiques belie legendary power. No unnecessary “muscles for show” on these women, that’s for sure. We’re not the only ones watching them; even the race officials seem to have paused in their barrage of instructions. “Now there’s our competition,” says Mere, serious for once. Tahitian paddlers are revered like wave gods of old, paddling prowess integral to their lifestyle. We straighten up in our seats. “Lucky we’ve been training like the Tahitians do,” Mere says confidently to me. “We might have a chance...come on, let’s get out there!”

Running my tongue over dry lips, I wish I’d had more water but it’s too late. Not long now. . . Trickles of sweat drip down from my temples. Automatically I wipe my face on the sleeve of my racing shirt. I then lock myself into position, knees braced firmly against the hull, one foot anchored under my seat and the other firmly planted. In front of me, two paddlers lock themselves into position, and I know without looking that the three others in our six-person crew are doing the same thing behind me. “*Kua rere?*” yells Moana. “*Ae,*” come the determined

replies of our crew. The familiar grip of my paddle, sun on my back. . . From behind me I hear Moana's familiar instruction, and feel that surge of adrenalin: "Paddle up to the line. *Kia kaha!*"

A prickling down my back, "here we go, here we go" chanting in my head. Ready to set my paddle for the start. . . "*Kia rite!*" Sun darkened skin, muscles tensed, my own paddle set, waiting for the call, eyes on the paddle in front of me, deep breath in, no time now. . . then. . . "*Hoe-a!*"

Driving down, the *waka* lifting up to plane and then we are flying across the waters of Hawaii's Hilo Bay, muscles screaming, lungs gasping for air, just paddling. . . "*Hoe,*" I shout, and we change in unison to the opposite side of the *waka*. I count "fourteen, fifteen, sixteen" in my head. . . "*Hoe,*" and we change sides, and again. Almost at the limits of what my body can do anaerobically, pushing myself "go, go, go—don't die now". "Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen" "*Hoe! Reach!*" and we all shift to lengthen our strokes. "Suck it in" hearing the coach's voice in my head. The longer stroke is a welcome change, but too soon I catch a glimpse of the nearly submerged halfway marker.

"Next set," I shout, counting "nine, ten" in my head. "*Hoe! Go up!*" As we change up to high rating again my calls turn to hoarse screams. Digging deep for the resolve to go on, we automatically switch into over-drive again, burning muscles, lats begging for mercy. . . Then Moana's voice joins mine: "Go – go now!" . . . and then just one more set. . . just two more strokes and over the finish line. We collapse forward, no sound but the heaving of six sets of lungs. Our faces stream with sweat and chests pound too much for speech. Anxiously looking either side to guess where we placed—not last anyway. It's all we can do to grin between gasps. Struggling through the burn of muscle fatigue to straighten up, our jelly-like arms barely grip paddles as we head back to the beach. Eventually as the *waka* reaches the shore, we slide out, clasping hands, standing in the water, relieved.

Just so you know, we did beat them, the muscular Aussie team with the "go-faster" Lycra shorts but unfortunately we didn't come home from Hilo with medals. Those went to our Tahitian competitors. *Kei te pai.* . .

## A Backcountry Rendezvous

The snow crunches under my heavy footsteps. I can barely lift my legs but I must go on. The boys are further ahead, and they don't seem to be slowing. I must keep up. But with each step up this steep mountain face, I know I am getting further and further away from the safety of the resort. No one, except the three guys in front of me, knows I am out here hiking deeper into the Canadian backcountry; the snow is three feet deep, and the terrain is steep and unpredictable. Miles from anywhere and surrounded by looming mountains, I feel very small.

I am here with my good friend Dave who lived and worked in this small Canadian snow town a few years ago. This morning we bumped into a group of his mates who live here. Dave describes these guys as "hard-core locals." They know where the best stashes of powder are hiding and rarely reveal this secret. So, when they invited Dave to join them in their late afternoon adventure, he eagerly accepted. He then tentatively asked if I might also join the expedition. The local guys looked me up and down cautiously, and then looked back at one another. "Well, we don't usually take girls with us, because it's each to their own out there,

and the risks are very real,” warned one. As he spoke, the other locals continued to scan my—suddenly very “female”—body for signs of cultural *savoir faire*. They note the brand of my jacket, the symbol on my beanie, the stickers on my board, the angle of my bindings, the tilt of my goggles, the glint of the studded belt holding up my baggy pants, and the collection of lift-tickets dangling from my jacket. I begin to wish I’d worn my long blonde hair tucked under my beanie like I usually do; my sex may have gone unnoticed, at least for long enough to demonstrate my skills. Standing in lift-lines or sharing chairlift rides, strangers often mistake me for a male snowboarder; while I usually enjoy setting the record straight, today I might have let it slide. Suddenly I feel intimidated by this uninvited corporeal inspection and, attempting to disrupt their lingering stares, proclaim, “Hey, don’t worry Dave, I will just ride last chair, take a lap through the park, maybe hike the pipe, then meet you at the car in an hour or so”. It seems as if their eyes soften slightly when they notice my Kiwi accent. Thankfully, Dave interrupts my nervous rambling by generously assuring them of my abilities, and with a few nods and grumbles, I am in.

A thunder-like boom echoes across the valley. One of the local guys who is hiking ahead of me stops, turns, and states matter-of-factly, “Oh, that’s just an avalanche, don’t sweat it.” Perhaps noticing the fear in my eyes, he then asks me how I am holding-up. Gulping for air, and desperately trying to swallow the unsavory mix of adrenaline and fear that now churns violently in my stomach, I manage to smile, “I’m fine, cheers.” He nods, wipes the sweat from his forehead, and continues hiking. Within minutes, another of the locals exclaims loudly, “We are only half an hour from the sweetest powder run of our entire lives guys. Yeahaa, bring it on!” A chorus of hooting and hollering ensues.

At the conclusion of our hike, I am not alone in my exhaustion. Sweat is trickling down faces, lungs are heaving, and bodies are slumped. I notice one of the locals pull up his shirt to wipe his face, revealing an avalanche transceiver strapped to his chest. A lump forms in my throat as I become very aware that I am out of my league. I am without an avalanche transceiver in avalanche country. I am unprepared and vulnerable in this raw environment. I swear that I will never allow myself to get in such a position again; for a brief moment I consider taking the exit route. But there isn’t one.

Dave defogs his goggles and I can see the anticipation in his face. Not wanting to appear overly anxious, I take a deep breath before casually asking him what I need to do to make it out of here alive. The tone of his reply is a mix of caution and exuberance: “Just make sure you keep up with us, and don’t stop, whatever you do. It’s going to be super steep and the snow is going to be really deep. The trees are going to be tight too. Just keep up, or you might get lost out here, ok? It’s going to be insane!” One of the locals interrupts Dave: “I’m going for it,” he declares. Pushing off, he rides into the trees. Plumes of powder engulf his shadowy figure and he quickly disappears from sight.

The foul mixture of fear and adrenaline has crept up into the back of my throat. My heart pounds violently. I can barely breathe. Dave pats me on the shoulder, and declares, “I’m off too, see you at the bottom,” as he points his board and takes off in the same direction as the others. For a brief moment, I am alone at the top of this Canadian peak, surrounded by majestic beauty. Snowflakes glisten in the day’s last rays of sunlight, and I am momentarily overwhelmed by the silence and

stillness of this environment. It's now or never I tell myself, and forcefully push off into the unknown.

I gather speed and weave in and out of the trees. The snow that whispers beneath my board is light. I feel as if I'm floating, flying, soaring down this mountainside. It's all happening so fast. The trees blur and the snow heaves. The endorphins rush through me when I see a small rock drop ahead of me; I grit my teeth and launch off it. I fill with relief as I stomp the landing and then flow out into the endless powder for a few more turns. An uncontrollable holler of exhilaration escapes my lips. The snow flying all around me quickly fills my mouth and I can't help but snort and laugh aloud. I am part of a beautiful surreal moment and I don't want it to end, ever. But, a few more blissful powder slashes later and I see the guys gathered at the bottom; I point my board in their direction. As I ride toward the group, I notice they are all grinning from ear-to-ear. I too cannot stop smiling. Hiking back toward the resort, we chatter excitedly and animatedly describe our every turn.

Upon entering the ski resort bar, we are greeted by another group of locals. Slinging his arm casually over my shoulder, one of my new riding buddies introduces me to this group and proudly declares that I have just been riding "out west" with "the boys." We share knowing looks, and they nod in approval. Another of the local guys buys me a beer and slaps me on the back: "You were awesome out there girl. I could tell you were pretty scared, aye, but you put some killer lines in. I could hear you laughing all the way." I am buzzing with pride and joy. Not only did I face my fears and experience the most amazing run of my life, I also proved to myself and my peers that I can keep pace with the locals, and as a result I am now being warmly embraced as "one of the boys". Another pitcher of beer is placed on the table, and the conversation continues to meander through all the usual topics—favorite snowboarding destinations, the latest magazines and videos, snow conditions and weather patterns, snowboarding injuries. Unlike earlier in the day, I find space to voice my thoughts and opinions, and my male peers hold my gaze when I speak.

As with many local mountain-town bars there are few women in this smoky dimly lit room. The barmaid proceeds to pour beer after beer, while three middle-aged women, wearing form-fitting one-piece ski suits and painted lips, perch on stools at the bar. Other than a few dismissive glances, they ignore me—we inhabit different worlds—the four men gathered around the pool table seem to be attracting most of their attention. The room is mostly filled with white men—skiers, snowboarders, resort employees, and local laborers. I try to be inconspicuous as I walk toward the bathroom. But with my wet snowboard boots squelching and long baggy snow-proof pants scuffing loudly on the wooden floor, heads inevitably turn. Passing a group of men wearing overalls and hard-capped work boots covered in snow-crust, I do my best to ignore their derogatory slurs. "Hey snowboard Betty, how bout you come and sit over here with some *real* men", "Yeah, you can sit on my lap babe", followed by muffled laughter. In the bathroom I am largely oblivious to the water-logged toilet rolls littering the floor and graffiti scrawled across the walls; anger begins to brew in my stomach and my jaw muscles tighten. I realize that, despite the maleness of this environment, I feel surprisingly safe in the company of my new group of friends. Exiting the bathroom, I stride across the bar, this time making all the noise I want and confronting the group of smirking men in the booth with a steely glare.

When a hockey game replaces the snowboarding video on the television in the corner, we take it as our cue to leave. Stepping out into the cold night air, I am surprised to see heavy clouds wrapping around the shadowy mountain peaks. With a blizzard threatening, we grab our boards and backpacks, and hurry toward the car park. Dave and I make a beeline for his car. I am scraping the frozen windscreen with a plastic CD cover when one of the locals yells: “Hey, if you guys wanna join us tomorrow, we are meeting in front of the cafe at 8:15. It’s gonna dump tonight. We will ride pow again in the morning, and then maybe build a jump in the afternoon, so make sure you bring your trannies and shovels. A couple of other local shredders are coming and maybe one of our photographer mates too”. Neither Dave nor I need to think twice about missing our Monday classes at university; we both know that opportunities like this are not to be passed up. “See you tomorrow boys!”

### **My Basketball Home**

I am standing on the baseline, out wide, poised for action. I feint toward the top of the key, trying to delude my opponent into giving me enough space to cut behind her for a layup. Unfortunately, she’s too experienced to fall for it. So I change tactics, back into her and post up, all five foot four inches of me against her towering six foot two inch frame. We negotiate for position, communicating through our bodies, thighs braced to hold the desired spot, arms constantly repositioning in search of space to catch the ball; a dance of power and balance, subtlety and force. No words are spoken, none are needed. We both know she has the upper hand in size and strength but she can’t ignore me. Our team is winning and she has to respect the possibility that I will pop out for another successful long distance shot.

Instead, I cut to the top of the key to receive the ball, then rifle a no-look pass over my shoulder to an empty spot under the basket. Don’t ask me how, but I know Diana will be there. No one else would have anticipated a pass like that and probably no one else would have caught it. It’s something about the way we see the game; an almost eerie connection that I’ve experienced with only one or two other players in my entire basketball career. As she scores, our teammates high-five and Diana mouths “I love you”. I give her the double thumbs up. We don’t even care that the other team has scored. A pass like that needs savoring.

The final score, 35–25, is well below our usual average of 60 but satisfying nonetheless. Even though it’s a Thursday night, we head out of the gym to our usual bar. No one showers or changes. We just pull on sweatshirts and trackpants in deference to the snow outside. We know the bar will be warm, and celebratory beer and pizza are calling. As I carefully pick my way along the icy path—basketball shoes aren’t the most appropriate for the outside conditions—I think how lucky I am to have found this group of women. It took almost a year to hook up with them when I moved to the United States for graduate study. In a country without sports clubs, I couldn’t figure out where to go to meet other players, to try out for teams, to make contacts. At one point I even took a basketball “class” just to get some court time, and once I got past the annoyance of having to prove myself to the guys, I had some fun games. But where were the other highly skilled women? Where were the ones I could test myself against, the ones who would understand the ecstasy of a pinpoint pass, who loved the physical push and pull, the ones in whose company I could find community . . . security . . . home?



Pushing open the scratched wooden door to the bar, I realize that at this moment, for the first time in a long time, I simply feel happy, even content. The familiar odors welcome us in. It never smells that great—testament to years of spilled beer and fried food—but neither do we. Thursdays are obviously a lot busier than our regular Sunday afternoon gatherings after the all-women pick-up games that Diana organizes at the Uni gym so we have a guaranteed place to play. Almost all the regulars are highly skilled. Women with little experience are welcome and a few play occasionally but most of them realize they don't really fit in. We play for the full hour, no matter how many turn up. Then, covered in sweat and replete with the warmth of muscles well-used, we have to give up the court. And we always choose even teams because it's not about winning. All we want is a close game, a chance to run around and test ourselves against others who feel the same way about the joy of playing basketball.

In our excitement we're all talking at once but somehow we manage to order beer and pizzas. We relive the game, point by point, cheerfully harassing each other for missed shots and crazy passes to nobody. Five pitchers later, feeling relaxed and cozy, Diana nudges me. "You know you're the only one don't you?" The question hangs in the sudden quiet at our table. I look around at my friends. "The only what?" I respond, considering the possibilities. After all, I am the only non-American on the team. "You're the first straight woman who's ever played for us." Butterflies start up in my stomach as I process the information. I knew I was in the minority but the only one? This is a surprise and I'm not sure how to react. "So how come you let me play?" I venture. "Well, you could play and we thought you had potential," Diana says with a smile. "We still do."

A few months later, my flatmate Marnie and I are watching the University women's team. At half-time Diana introduces us to a friend from out of town. "This is Toni," she says. "She thinks she's straight." Half-laughing, I respond, "But I am straight." "Hmm," says Diana, "but how can you be sure? You've never tried it."

Another friend reports meeting someone who thinks Marnie and I make a nice couple. "But why would she think that?" I ask. "Well, you share a house, you're athletic and you look like you are," she says, "and what's more, this woman wouldn't believe me until I convinced her I knew you." I know we don't look like the all-American girls who daily pop out of the nearby sorority house dressed in fashionable, color-coordinated, smart-casual outfits, with painted nails, immaculately applied makeup and perfectly coiffed hairstyles but there's something screwy in a country where having short hair and wearing no make-up means that people assume you're a lesbian. All the same Marnie and I sometimes walk around holding hands just to mess with people.

In the bar after a Sunday game, I'm paying little attention to an animated discussion of the summer softball season when a new player asks me "Do you play?" Here we go, I think to myself, another one of those questions. "No. Actually I don't. In fact I don't even like softball." But by now I know this answer won't be enough so I add, "It's too slow for me. All that standing around doing nothing for most of time just isn't my thing." Diana helpfully adds, "Toni's interests don't lie in that direction." The new player is still clearly not quite sure that she's reading the conversation. "You mean...." she begins. "Yep," says Diana. "She's not like the rest of us." "You're right there," I say. "I'm the only one with a decent accent." "You know what I mean," says Diana. "Yeah," I say. The new player takes a long look at me and

apologizes, “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.” I shrug it off with a smile. “No worries. It happens all the time. It’s no big deal.” I turn to the rest of the table: “Don’t get me wrong, you know I love you all, but women just don’t do it for me.” As Diana says, “that’s not how it seems when you’re posting up against me,” I realize she’s right. In the space of the basketball court, there is nothing more pleasurable than bumping body-on-body with another woman, particularly one who is strong, athletic and skilled. Competition and inclusion fused together. The acceptance that you need an opponent to play the game combined with the knowledge that playing against each other only makes you better, and the understanding that only centimeters mark the difference between success and failure. “OK. You got me there. But it’s only on the basketball court, alright.” Everyone laughs and the conversation moves on.

### **“Wonderings”: From Auto-Ethnography to Theoretically-Informed Collaborative Reflection**

While auto-ethnography has carved out a space for itself within the academy, the potential of collaborative narratives for enhancing personal and collective reflexivity has been less often explored (c.f., Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Gale & Wyatt, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Krog, Mpolweni & Ratele, 2009; Kohn & Sydnor, 2006). We draw inspiration from recent innovative works to consider the potential of collaborative reflection for engaging in interdisciplinary feminist physical cultural studies projects. In particular, we were inspired by Gale and Wyatt’s (2009) experimental inquiry into their own subjectivity (which they refer to as their *between-the-tuos*), that combined text boxes, poetry, play script and fiction, to present a beautifully crafted narrative that reveals both their relationship with one another and with Deleuzian concepts. Diversi and Moreira (2009), Brazilian scholars working in the US and studying poverty in Latin America, illustrate the potential of collaborative writing for identifying “experiential betweenness” and “connectedness with others” (p. 21), central to their vision of “possibilities for future decolonizing scholarship” (p. 29). We found their conclusion that “we have thought ideas and reached levels of understanding about the concepts and stories in this book that hadn’t occurred to our individual minds” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 222) especially pertinent to our approach.

Concerned by the current phase of “hyper-fragmentation and hyper-specialization” within human movement studies, Andrews (2008) encourages physical cultural scholars to consider new methods and approaches for transcending “intellectual boundaries and exclusivities” (p. 54). While our own disciplinary backgrounds (i.e., dance studies, sport history, social-psychology of sport, media studies, sociology of sport) and research interests are diverse, we also share many points of connection, including gender, the lived and moving body, feminism, and narrative representation. This paper grew out of a series of informal discussions about what feminist theory could tell us about women’s physical/sporting experiences in the early 21st century (Bruce & Barbour, 2009). Such exchanges were not particularly new for us. What distinguishes this paper from our many other conversations in elevators, corridors, and the staffroom, was the decision to further explore our “experiential betweenness” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 21) via the sharing of our previously written narratives. We engaged in animated discussions in various physical places

(e.g., campus cafes, university staffrooms, offices, hallways) and virtual spaces (e.g., e-mail, Skype): What, if any, were our shared experiences? How might we begin to make meaning of our experiences from a different sociocultural, spatial and temporal location? Our initial questioning challenged each of us to explore elements we had consciously or unconsciously avoided in our initial writing. These exploratory encounters gradually led to a decision to make the most of our privileged positions as female academics to explore theory as a tool for providing deeper layers of interpretation of our own lived experiences. Through our discussions we recognized the potential of recent feminist extensions of Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital for "deepening and developing" our understandings of gender, and the body and embodiment (Walby, 2005, p. 376) and for helping us recognize agency and reflexivity as central to understanding our past, present and future physical cultural experiences (Adkins, 2004; Bottero, 2010; Huppertz, 2009; Kraus, 2006; Lovell, 2000, 2004; McCall, 1992; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). The first author recently argued that, when critically appropriated and advanced from a feminist perspective, Bourdieu's key concepts of capital, field and habitus offer new ways to productively reconceptualize the relationship between gender, power, structure, agency, culture and embodiment expressed in the often-contradictory forms of women's social experience in contemporary sport and physical culture (Thorpe, 2009, 2010, 2011). In our conversations, we explored the possibilities offered by feminist (re)readings of Bourdieu for making meaning of both the prereflexive and conscious dimensions of our experiences as sportswomen and feminist academics.

Before sharing some of the insights from our theoretical wonderings, we briefly introduce the key concepts—field, capital, habitus—underpinning our interdisciplinary and transnational dialogue, paying particular attention to recent debates surrounding reflexivity and the habitus-field complex.<sup>6</sup> *Field* refers to a structured system of social positions occupied by either individuals or institutions engaged in the same activity. Fields are structured internally in terms of power relations (Bourdieu, 1993). Within these fields individuals and groups constantly struggle to transform or preserve the configuration of power. The concept of *capital* sits at the center of Bourdieu's (1985) construction of social space: "The structure of the social world is defined at every moment by the structure and distribution of the capital and profits characteristic of the different particular fields" (p. 734) and it is important to work out the correct hierarchy "of the different forms of capital" (p. 737). Capital refers to the different forms of power held by social agents. Bourdieu (1986) identifies various forms of capital (power), including economic (e.g., wealth), social (e.g., social connections), cultural (e.g., artistic taste), symbolic (e.g., prestige), linguistic (e.g., vocabulary and pronunciation), academic (e.g., tertiary qualifications), and corporeal (e.g., physical attractiveness, physical prowess). These forms of power structure the social space and determine the relative social positioning of agents. Social fields often have unique valuation systems privileging different forms of capital, as well as distinct practices and strategies for accessing capital. *Habitus* refers to a set of acquired schemes of dispositions, perceptions and appreciations, including tastes, embodied through the process of enculturation into a social field, which orient our practices and give them meaning. Laberge (1995) defines habitus as both "the embodiment of the set of material conditions" and "the structure of social relations that generate and give significance to individual likes (or taste) and

dislikes with regard to practice and action” (p. 136). Bourdieu generally uses the term *hexis* when referring to the embodied nature of the habitus. *Hexis* signifies “deportment, the manner and style in which actors ‘carry themselves’: stance, gait, gesture, etc” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 75). Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and *hexis* help us to understand the ways in which embodied practices construct identity, difference and the given social order in social fields.<sup>7</sup>

While most criticisms of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema invoke structuralism and determinism, some of his later work provides more space for agency and reflexivity. In *State Nobility*, for example, Bourdieu (1998) suggests that moments of disalignment and tension between habitus and field may give rise to increased reflexive awareness. According to Bourdieu, habitus operates at an unconscious level unless individuals with a well-developed habitus find themselves moving across new, unfamiliar fields. It is in such moments that an individual’s habitus may become “divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences” resulting in “a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self” (Bourdieu, 1999, cited in Reay, 2004, p. 436). According to McNay (1999), reflexive awareness is a “piecemeal, discontinuous affair” arising from the “negotiation of discrepancies by individuals in their movement within and across fields of social action” (p. 110). Drawing out these implications, McNay (1999, p. 111) has shown that gender reflexivity may arise from “tensions inherent in the concrete negotiation of increasing conflictual female roles” which occurs when women move between various social fields (e.g., family, work, sport). Of course, the presence of reflexivity does not automatically translate into identity transformation. In some circumstances, “our capacity for reflexive thought can leave us recognizing but unable to do anything about our lack of freedom” (Craib, 1992, p. 150; Adams, 2006; Brooks & Wee, 2008). Thus, even when individuals experience a disjunction between habitus and field leading to reflexivity, these alterations do not necessarily work to undermine the power relations structuring the field (Chambers, 2005).

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that individuals passively embody and practice norms and value systems within the field, and only begin to critically reflect on their experiences upon exiting the field. Rather, individuals frequently encounter differences and problems *within* the field which encourage them to engage in day-to-day negotiations of various aspects of their identity (e.g., gender, culture, race, class, sexuality, nationality, age). Arguably, Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of “regulated liberties” has the potential to help us capture some of the ambiguities, dissonances, and subtle negotiations of power experienced by agents within fields (p. 102). The term regulated liberties refers to the small exercises of power that arise in the context of the existing social order but which resignify it in some way (McNay, 2000). While the various regulated liberties performed by individuals may suggest instabilities within a particular field, they do not guarantee reflexivity or identity transformation. In sum, a feminist turn to Bourdieu suggests that reflexivity is “uneven and discontinuous”, potentially arising as a result of mobility *between* social fields and, to a lesser extent, as a result of the requirements to “reconcile the dissonant experiences that this invokes” *within* fields (Kenway and McLeod, 2004, p. 535; McNay 1999, 2000). Importantly, while most feminist research engaging with the habitus-field complex and regulated liberties concept has focused on gender reflexivity, a few feminist scholars have begun to critically extend and develop Bourdieu’s work to offer intersectional analyses of gender, class and/or sexuality

(see Allard, 2005; Fowler, 2003; McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Skeggs, 2004). In the remainder of this paper we reveal the outcomes of our processes of critical engagement with some of this literature in relation to our lived experiences of moving into, within, and out of, the fields of waka ama, snowboarding and basketball, as well as other social fields (e.g., academia, family, etc).

## **“Wandering and Wondering” Together: Collaborative Reflection in the Present**

Presented as a series of excerpts from our three-way discussions, we highlight key themes that emerged from our shared wondering about each other’s wanderings, including ideas of enculturation into our respective physical cultural fields, and the strategies we employed consciously and subconsciously to negotiate space and capital within these fields. From our current privileged positions as white, well-educated, heterosexual female academics with access to critical material conditions that facilitate our agency and reflexivity—space, time, encouragement, and theoretical and conceptual tools—we reflect upon our past and present experiences of belonging and gender, cultural, national and sexual identity, and the effects/affects of our bodies being “read” differently in different social fields. We also briefly consider some of the regulated liberties we practice within and across our respective physical cultural fields and other social fields (e.g., classroom, university, family, community). Engaging with our previously written narratives in conversation with Bourdieu’s conceptual schema and with one another, we challenge ourselves to find and explore the silences in our earlier writings.

Deciding upon a representational approach that adequately reflected our multi-layered, many-stranded and sometimes meandering theoretical dialogue raised many challenges.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately we decided to focus on the outcomes of the collaboration rather than the process that led to them; that is, the theoretical reflections rather than the conversations that helped us focus on commonalities and differences. In sharing a selection of the personal insights, theoretical revelations, embodied negotiations, and ethical conundrums that emerged from this process, we hope others may also see the potential of collaboratively revisiting narratives for enhancing individual and collective reflexivity, and identifying the various forms of power operating on and through bodies in physical cultural fields. The theoretically-informed discussion presented in italics in the final part of this paper, however, cannot be separated from the collaborative process of reading, reflecting, and writing separately and together, discussing and debating theoretical, methodological and representational issues, and responding to editorial and reviewer feedback. Thus, the “process notes” at the end of this paper reveal insights into our experiences of coordinating collaborative writing across countries and time-zones,<sup>9</sup> the affective dimensions of coauthor relationships and responsibilities,<sup>10</sup> issues related to representation of collaborative reflection,<sup>11</sup> and the value of interdisciplinary collaboration.<sup>12</sup>

### **Entering the Field**

Many of our early discussions explored our enculturation into physical cultural fields. We examined the processes through which we embodied and practiced the

norms and values within our fields, and the conscious and subconscious strategies we employed to gain access to culturally valued forms of capital. For each of us, our physical prowess and skill was central. For Karen, *“when I first joined the waka ama club, I came with some recognizable corporeal capital: I had been a whitewater canoeist and I quickly transferred existing skills to this new sport, as well as easily demonstrating my familiarity with being on the water. So my entry to the field was via my corporeal capital, although I had some social capital as I knew a few paddlers.”* Holly suspects that snowboarding initially appealed to her because of *“the board-sport aesthetic deeply instilled in my habitus from childhood—my parents were passionate windsurfers, and surfing and skateboarding were regular family activities. I was young and athletic, and seemed to pick it up quickly; I was able to ride with a group of more experienced male and female snowboarders within weeks”*.

As we challenged each other to think more deeply about this aspect of our experiences, we realized that not only did prolonged participation lead to a tacit understanding of the highly nuanced and distinctive rules, norms and values of our respective physical cultural fields, but that, despite the fact that our physical skills helped us gain access to some space and resources within the field, there were other forms of capital that were much more difficult to access. In Karen’s words, *“the reality for me was that I obviously looked very different, being Pakeha, tall, blonde, with olive skin and having unshaven legs and armpits. Despite the echo of Germaine Greer’s (1999) words in my ears – ‘the millennial feminist has to be aware that oppression exerts itself in and through her most intimate relationships, beginning with the most intimate, her relationship with her body’ (p. 424)—I started shaving my legs and armpits again because I noticed they drew unwanted attention to me. I was also the one person basically alone, without children, parents and extended family within the club or even within the sport. This lack of family ties, arguably more than anything, set me apart from everyone else. I really wanted to be accepted, because I could see that this meant that I could be considered for the top crews, would be invited on trips away, and could participate more comfortably in social events of the club.”* Upon reflection, Holly also recognized that she employed various strategies to gain less accessible forms of symbolic capital and gain the respect of her snowboarding peers: *“As I engaged in prolonged periods of enculturation into, and sustained participation within, the snowboarding field, I embodied many aspects of the (masculine) snowboarding habitus (e.g., risk-taking, clothing). By demonstrating physical prowess and commitment, I earned symbolic and cultural capital, and thus a place among my male peers. I was invited on road-trips to local resorts, on hiking excursions in search of fresh powder, and into the backcountry to build jumps, when other less proficient and committed male and female snowboarders were not. For many years I prioritized masculine capital and positioned myself in opposition to the stereotypical femininity valued in other social fields (e.g., high school). Along with many of my core female and male snowboarder friends, I dismissed those female snowboarders who privileged feminine capital (e.g., wearing lots of make-up, tight snowboarding outfits) as ‘snow bunnies’, uncommitted to the activity itself. I was not one of those girls!”*

## Field-Crossing and Reflexivity

The valuation systems and “rules” structuring our respective fields differed from other fields in which we were more familiar. As suggested above, entry into our fields resulted in a disjunction between some aspects of our habitus and field as we were temporarily distanced from constitutive structures (e.g., family, workforce, country of origin, other sports). For each of us, reflecting on these disjunctures led us to identify some discomforts in this process. Toni points out that *“I think being the only (apparently) heterosexual woman on an all-lesbian team, with women who thought I ‘had potential’ to be one of them, meant that I was regularly challenged to consider whether and how I knew I was ‘straight’.* I spent a significant period questioning—in the context of being at graduate school and developing academic capital by questioning many taken-for-granted dominant discourses such as heteronormativity—whether my heterosexuality was innate, biologically-derived or (only) a direct result of social conditioning. As with many such periods of questioning in my life, much of my thinking was worked out publicly in conversation with anyone who would listen, including my teammates and fellow graduate students, often late at night and after a few too many cheap American beers.” In contrast, Holly entered the field of academia after the expedition in the Canadian backcountry described in her narrative: *“After four years immersed in the snowboarding field, I returned to university in New Zealand with the goal of pursuing graduate studies. As I started reading critical sport studies research and feminist literature I began to reflect back on my Canadian snowboarding experiences with a new sociological consciousness: Why did I have to gain the approval of ‘the boys’ in order to participate in some snowboarding adventures? How do other women negotiate gender within the male-dominated snowboarding culture? My movement out of the snowboarding culture and into the new field of academe prompted me to reflect upon some of the gender norms and rules in the snowboarding field I previously accepted as common-sense”.* Continuing, she offered the following caveat: *“But my movement out of the snowboarding field was not in a one-way direction. My research methodology involved constant movement between the fields of snowboarding and the university. For the first two years of my research this resulted in a ‘habitus clivé’ of sorts (Bourdieu, 2003, cited in Kraus, 2006, p. 130): How do I dress, talk, and walk, and with whom do I socialize, if I am no longer a snowboarder? Simultaneously, I was learning the unique norms and values inherent in the academic field: How should I dress, talk, and walk on campus or at a conference? While this ‘split habitus’ (Kraus, 2006, p. 130) facilitated my ability to ‘make the familiar strange’ and ask new questions of the embodied practices and power relations in the snowboarding culture, I occasionally struggled to negotiate my multiple subjectivities”.*

For Toni, participation in basketball and the broader US university context encouraged her to reconsider how her “normal” physically active, sporting New Zealand habitus was read in new ways in the United States. *“I realize that when I first joined the team, I was operating through ‘an embodied “sense” of how to behave rather than through conscious calculation’ (Bottero, 2010, p. 4). My hexis in the field of basketball, which had developed intersubjectively in New Zealand in multiple spaces and places, was something that I did not question and tacitly assumed would ‘fit’ in my new basketball field in the United States. I was surprised to find that my New Zealand sportswoman hexis, which included various embodied*

*practices such as playing sport, avoiding dresses and makeup, and paying little attention to hair styling, was more intelligible as lesbian than heterosexual in the US. It took me some time to realize that being skilled at sport, and especially at basketball, marked me out as different. Not only how I dressed, but how I carried myself with the unconscious physicality of an athlete and, perhaps, the pleasure I gained from physical contact with other women players, led many of the Americans I encountered—men and women, ‘straight’ and ‘gay’—to assume I was a lesbian” (see Bruce, 2003).*

As Chambers (2005) reminds us, however, “even when women experience a disjunction between habitus and field” leading to reflexivity, these alterations do not necessarily work to “undermine” power relations within the field (p. 343). As we engaged in our sporting fields, certain norms, rules and power relations were destabilized, yet other aspects were further entrenched (McNay, 1999). According to Chambers (2005), when women enter male-dominated fields, as Holly did, many make adaptations and adopt strategies to “manage the masculine culture into which they are entering” (p. 342). Upon reflection, we recognized that each of us also made adaptations and adopted strategies to negotiate space within our fields. Through our conversations, Karen realized that as she learned the “rules” of the field of waka ama, some aspects of her embodied dispositions or hexis changed. Through the process of enculturation, she learned “what is acceptable” and came to understand that although some elements of her hexis (tattoos, dreadlocks) were not uncommon in the field, other aspects of her Pakeha feminist habitus did not fit. With this knowledge, she (mostly subconsciously) modified some of her behaviors in an attempt to negotiate space within the waka ama field: *“In my desire to be accepted, I became aware that there were culturally specific behaviors that would be more appropriate for me to adopt and might help me gain acceptance. Some of my typical behaviors, like being outspoken, wearing bikini tops to training, openly admiring other paddler’s physiques, and confidently chatting with men... were accentuating my difference. I learned to wear t-shirts and to listen and watch discretely rather than being vocally assertive as I usually would as a feminist in the field of academia or within my Pakeha family. And I learned to speak tactfully about others because there was always someone listening who would likely turn out to be family of the person I was talking about. The more I became immersed in this Maori context, the more I realized the depth and significance of genealogical links and relationships. I stood out even more because I was not embedded in these complexities—I was not so-and-so’s cousin or daughter. I did not have knowledge of the culture based on genealogy, and was only beginning a sort of “systematic cultural apprenticeship” into the unique field of waka ama (Thorpe, 2009, p. 499; Wacquant, 2003). Eventually, and significantly, I learned to do what the collective group was doing, even when I did not totally understand why. I learned to suppress my feminist, Pakeha individuality and immerse myself in the collective, to increase the chances that others would look past my embodied physical differences and accept me. Now, I read Lois McNay (1999) who comments that, ‘Bourdieu’s notion of habitus yields a more dynamic theory of embodiment’ and ‘the “field” provides a more differentiated analysis of the social context in which the reflexive transformation of identity unfolds’ (p. 95). Understanding some of the processes of my enculturation in the field helps me understand my own identity transformations.”*



Similarly, Holly reflected upon some of her early strategies to gain capital and negotiate space before developing a feminist sensibility: *“While I always invested most strongly in symbolic capital by demonstrating the traditionally-defined masculine traits of physical prowess, risk, and commitment, perhaps there were times when I employed or benefitted from my femininity as a form of capital. Drawing upon the work of feminist scholars who argue that women possess their own forms of feminine capital (McCall, 1992; Huppertz, 2009; Lovell, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004), I recognize that in some snowboarding-related spaces my femininity was a form of capital, providing access to some opportunities but also limiting me from others. My first snowboard sponsor admitted that they initially offered me support because I was ‘a cute snowboarder chick’ and would ‘look good’ in their clothes. At the time, I recall being devastated by this comment. I desperately wanted to be recognized for my talent on a snowboard, not my gender or femininity. However, I was also grateful for the financial and product support which was unavailable to most female snowboarders at the time. Representing this company on the mountain while training and competing, I subtly embraced my femininity and femaleness, I made sure my blonde hair was visible underneath my beanie, and occasionally wore a pink snowboard belt or a pink pair of goggles; not only had I gained a ‘sense of the game’ and learned the ‘rules’ of the snowboarding field, and particularly the snowboarding industry, I was also starting to ‘play the game’; that is, I was employing strategies to gain access to limited forms of material and economic capital (Lamaison with Bourdieu 1986, p. 120). Admittedly, when I began reflecting upon my past snowboarding experiences with a new feminist consciousness, I felt a bit uneasy about some of the investment strategies I employed. But now I recognize these experiences as invaluable for understanding the multiple and complex ways power operates on and through our bodies and how easily we can become complicit in reproducing problematic power relations within social fields. Our conversations and my theoretically-informed reflections of my own movement within and across various social fields have helped me rethink problematic binaries between us/them, insider/outsider, uncritical athlete/critical scholar, feminist/apolitical athlete: I was one of those (uncritical, apolitical) girls (who colluded in reproducing existing power relations and structural inequalities)!”*

Reflecting upon our experiences of enculturation, we came to recognize the value of Bourdieu’s work on embodiment, and particularly the concepts of habitus and the field, for “understanding the effects of the intersection of symbolic and material dimensions of power upon the body” (McNay, 2000, p. 26). Our conversations and reflections reinforced that our physical cultural identities were not natural but involved “the inscription of dominant social norms or the ‘cultural arbitrary’ upon the body” (McNay, 2000, p. 26). For Bourdieu, the temporality inherent in the concept of habitus denotes not just the processes through which norms are inculcated upon the body but also the “moments of praxis or living through of these norms by the individual” (McNay, 2000, p. 26). The relationship between individual habitus and the social circumstances, or field, from which it emerges is “double and obscure” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 127). Certainly, through our prolonged participation we, mostly subconsciously, internalized aspects of our sporting habitus, and became deeply invested in the structure of these fields, as well as our positioning within them.

According to Bourdieu (1993), for fields to function, “there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game, endowed with the habitus that implies knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes, and so on” (p. 72). We recognized that as our knowledge of the field increased and we acquired the cultural capital to operate effectively within it, we not only learned “to play the game” but to play *with* the “immanent laws of the field” and to gain certain forms of pleasure and pride as we gained access to culturally valued forms of capital (i.e., symbolic, cultural, social) for our embodied practices and performances. For example, Karen reflected that “*there was a kind of pride for me when I felt that others didn’t immediately assume I was Pakeha, or spoke to me in te reo Maori.*” Equally, Toni realized that she came to enjoy the “*ambiguity of having people wonder ‘am I lesbian or am I straight?’*” Holly realized she was operating from an implicit (though nonacademic) feminist position: “*Everyone in my university classes knew me as ‘that snowboarder girl’ and I enjoyed disrupting the ‘jock’ stereotype that had become hegemonic within my physical education program. They wore track-pants, official sports team t-shirts and running shoes; I wore baggy jeans, studded belts, beanies and skate shoes, and for a while I had dreadlocks and piercings. On the mountain, I loved getting hoots from male snowboarders for stomping a big trick in the terrain park. If I saw them later in the day, I enjoyed surprising them by taking off my beanie: ‘Whoa, you’re a girl! I didn’t know girls could snowboard like that.’ Nothing felt better than simultaneously being acknowledged for my skills and challenging them to reconsider their assumptions about the potential of the female snowboarding body.*”

Of course, our individual ability to negotiate various aspects of our identities within and across various social fields is a privileged position not available to all, and reflecting upon some of these practices from a feminist academic field and a different sociocultural-temporal context evoked some feelings of unease. In other words, some of our past practices, which made sense within the field at the time, no longer sit so well with us. For example, reflecting upon her passive embodiment of some of the problematic aspects of the (masculine) snowboarding habitus, Holly feels “*somewhat ashamed*” that during her early entry into the snowboarding field (before commencing her graduate studies) she “*occasionally joined in with some of their sexist banter*”; while Karen admits that her choice to accumulate capital in the field of waka ama by adapting some of her behaviors “*provoked an uncomfortable tension within me as I struggled to balance my feminist commitments with my engagement in this new field*” (see also Tsang, 2000). Toni realizes that her capital accumulation was limited to the basketball field; she did not have to adapt her hexis (which “fit” this context) but was also unable (or did not choose) to accumulate the kind of capital that would have permitted space in the social field of the lesbian community where she lived.

## Regulated Liberties in Physical Cultural Fields

Despite some feelings of tension, embarrassment and/or guilt about some of our past personal choices, our theoretically-informed discussions also helped us recognize moments of agency. We each engaged in regulated liberties to disrupt unquestioned assumptions, rules and norms. For example, during one of her reflections, Toni acknowledged adopting “*a political position in which I refused, at least in small*

*ways, to take advantage of my (normative) heterosexual identity. The most obvious 'regulated liberty' was in relation to language: using the words 'my partner' rather than 'my boyfriend' as well as non-gendered pronouns when discussing my own and others' relationships, and structuring my teaching examples in ways that did not assume all students were heterosexual. Ultimately, my reflexivity led to a habitus in which I was sufficiently comfortable in my sexual identity to feel flattered rather than threatened when lesbian acquaintances or friends expressed interest in me. I was comfortable in my existing hexis and resisted changing it to 'fit' the broader gender field that I observed around me which seemed heavily invested in practices (such as women having long hair, full make-up, shaved legs, color-coordinated clothing) that separated men and women into two profoundly different genders. I hoped that these small exercises of power might (as McNay, 2000 suggests) resignify the existing social order in some way. However, I also knew that in other social fields (beyond our basketball team) my heterosexuality gave me unearned privileges and access to social and gender capital. In contrast to my lesbian teammates, the regulated liberties I practiced within and across fields were choices for me rather than the necessary strategies for survival in a homophobic culture required of them. For many of them, their agency in other social fields appeared based on the conscious choice not to embrace an 'out' lesbian identity, thus gaining access and capital via the strategic performance of an implicit heterosexual identity when necessary or desired."*

While Karen's participation in the waka ama culture likely challenged some of her fellow paddlers' assumptions about Pakeha women, she also actively engaged in embodied practices such as having long blonde dreadlocks and tattoos that in other social fields (e.g., teaching, academic conferences, local community) challenged understandings about what it means to be an academic (see Barbour, 2011). For Holly, as well as challenging her male peers' assumptions about the potential of the female body by demonstrating physical prowess, courage and cultural commitment, she also engaged in other moments of agency, such as challenging event organizers' decisions to exclude female competitors, and writing a column for a female board-sport magazine that raised gender issues. We each regularly engaged in small exercises of power that subtly resignified the athletic (white, female, heterosexual/lesbian) body from *within* the field. While these practices may suggest instability within our physical cultural fields, they did not subvert them; as Chambers (2005, p. 339) argues, our practices lacked "the cohesive, collective character required for wide-ranging social change" and political mobilization necessary for effective resistance. While our regulated liberties may have had an impact "only on the relatively superficial "effective" relations of a field rather than its deeper structural relations" (Bourdieu, 1992, cited in McNay, 2000, p. 62), our engagements with feminist interpretations of Bourdieu's habitus-field complex, and particularly the notion of regulated liberties, helped us identify some of the "uneven and non-systematic ways in which subordination and autonomy" were realized during our physical cultural experiences (McNay, 2000, p. 71). Reflecting critically on the past, we recognized our agency and reflexivity as "complex processes of investment and negotiation" rather than "binaries of domination and resistance" (McNay, 2000, p. 58). Expanding beyond our own experiences, we recognize the female physical cultural subject as "synchronically produced as the object of regulatory norms" by symbolic systems or fields, *and* "formed as a subject or agent who may resist these

norms” (McNay, 2000, p. 58). Moreover, our conversations led us to realize that, like all people, some aspects of our Pakeha, female, heterosexual, middle-class, New Zealand habitus are more difficult to reflexively access than others. What we found interesting in Karen’s reflections was the idea that, despite her critical knowledge and understanding of the rules of the field, some aspects of her habitus and hexis were not conscious; they could not be reduced to “performance” (McNay, 2000). According to Bourdieu (1992), “what is ‘learned by the body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished but something that one is” (cited in Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 125). We think there is an interesting distinction between *performing* culture and/or gender and *embodying* culture and/or gender (or sexuality, class or nationality for that matter). As Karen reflected: *“Interestingly, it is only now, wondering some years later, that I have come to question how I might have embodied some of the cultural norms and values within waka ama, while simultaneously ‘performing’ other aspects of the culture. I realize that engagement in waka ama actually led to my subconscious re-evaluation of the integral importance of family in my life, occurring simultaneously with my romance with my Maori partner and the subsequent birth of our son. (Previously I had not wanted to have children at all!) The cultural capital I developed while participating in the field of waka ama and my expanded awareness of habitus and hexis is of constant value as I now negotiate the complexities of my lifelong commitment, through my family, to participating in Maori communities. Obviously this reflects not a ‘mere’ performing of culture, but an embodiment of cultural values”.*

### **Collaborative Reflection and the Physical Cultural Habitus**

One of our intentions was to challenge each other to reflect critically on silences or absences in our stories. For each of us, there were elements that we had not written, or chose not to write, about. Our different experiences encouraged us to consider “why certain aspects of habituated practice, and not others, become reflexively drawn upon under given circumstances” (Bottero, 2010, p. 9). For example, we know there are important cultural differences between Maori and Pakeha culture, and that Pakeha identity is considered much less secure than white identity in other colonized nations (see Dugdale, 2000; Spoonley, 1995). Yet Karen’s racial and ethnic habitus, while acknowledged, was not particularly central to her story. She agreed that *“the narrative, originally constructed after I ‘retired’ from competitive sport, was perhaps nostalgic, revealing certain reflexive insights about my gendered identity but ‘washing over’ my deeper reconsideration of cultural identity for myself as Pakeha, in relation to Maori.”* As a result, we challenged Karen to consider how her immersion in the field of waka ama had influenced her own Pakeha identity. We pointed out that that in her narrative, Karen speaks to herself in both English and Maori; her use of instructions in Maori and ending with a Maori phrase demonstrate she has some grasp of the language. *“When I wrote this story, I shifted between languages without much thought, as I regularly did when paddling. I realize now that my understanding, even as a beginner speaker of te reo Maori, provided me with a form of cultural, linguistic capital that would not have gone unnoticed by my teammates, even if I wasn’t aware of it. As my understanding of te reo grows, I am much more conscious about the real access that language provides me in participating in Maori communities. This consciousness has led me to assert that Pakeha*

*identity must grow beyond white 'European New Zealander' identity if we are to progress towards a functional and ethical biculturalism in Aotearoa. In embracing being Pakeha, I argue we must make a shift towards genuine partnership and participation in Maori communities and te reo Maori language (Barbour, 2011)."*

We challenged Toni to consider why her narrative focused on sexual identity rather than race, gender or class: "*Reading Karen's and Holly's stories pushed me to acknowledge or recognize the elements of my experience that were not so visible at the time. Bottero's (2010) argument that, in terms of habitus, most people tend to associate with others much like themselves, seeking out the familiar and similar, made sense to me. In my case, I was associating with others who were much like me on axes of identity such as gender, age, class and race: all the players were female, and most were white, presumably middle-class given their attendance at university, and in their late 20s to early 30s. And, at least initially, I also assumed they were similar in terms of sexual identity; I lived that form of embodied existence in New Zealand and assumed, based on previous experiences with players who explicitly identified as heterosexual or were silent about their sexual identity, that all of my teammates did also; in the United States, based on information gathered during graduate study and in concrete networks, I assumed that at least some, and probably most, of my fellow players were heterosexual. Scholars following Bourdieu's ideas argue that reflexivity emerges "from moments of 'crisis', from mismatches between habitus and field" (Bottero, 2010, p. 11). So it is not surprising that my reflection focuses on the axis of identity where the most obvious mismatch occurred. However, by the time my teammates "revealed" my difference to me, I was embedded enough in the academic field to have some tools for reflection; an understanding that gender, race, class and sexual orientation were social constructions although generally embodied and acted upon as a biological facts. My academic knowledge (not to mention my existing friendships) allowed me to embrace my basketball field experiences as an opportunity for reflexivity rather than choosing to leave the team to avoid 'interruptions, crises or challenges' to my (heterosexual) habitus (Bottero, 2010, p. 18)."* During our conversations Karen was surprised to recognize how little attention she had given to issues regarding sexuality: "*I didn't give a lot of thought to my sexuality within my sporting experiences, even though I considered sexuality within my other dancing self-representations. Within the field of waka ama, the Maori cultural and whanau (family) context tended to foreground heterosexual relationships. As a result, being a heterosexual woman myself, I was not cognizant or reflexive about issues of sexuality in sport."*

We also found it interesting that Holly's narrative said very little about class or race privilege. "At the time of writing this narrative I was heavily immersed in feminist literature, so it is perhaps not surprising that I focused primarily on gendered aspects of my snowboarding experiences. The maleness of the snowboarding field also prompted me to reflect on problematic gender norms and values. But, within a snowboarding field dominated by white, middle-upper class, heterosexual youth, I experienced few moments of disalignment or tension regarding other dimensions of my habitus (e.g., race, class, and sexuality). This observation seems to support Chambers' (2005) assertion that, while some fields prompt us to reflect critically upon some aspects of our habitus, they may also reinforce other dimensions. Some aspects of our habitus are more difficult (though not impossible) to reflexively access than others (Noble & Watkins, 2003). Admittedly, it took me a long time

to really see the whiteness of the snowboarding culture and the privileged nature of the activity. This had important consequences for my early research in terms of the questions I posed, methods I used, participants I interviewed, and theories and representation styles I employed”.

For others reading our narratives and reflections in different sociocultural-political-temporal contexts, different issues or absences may come to the fore. Indeed, we would suggest that our habitus not only influences the stories we tell about our lived experiences, but also the meaning we make of others’ narratives. Thus, we encourage readers to reflexively consider how their own position within various social fields influences their interpretations of our narratives and reflections.

## Final Thoughts: Feminist Physical Cultural Studies and Collaborative Writing

In this project we used the metaphors of “wandering and wondering” to theoretically interrogate our experiences of the practices and politics of female bodies in specific physical cultural fields. If, as Chambers (2005) explains, we “tend to remain within compatible fields most of the time” (p. 340) and many dimensions of our habitus go unquestioned, how might we come to reflect upon those unquestioned, silent aspects of our habitus? Arguably, sharing narratives of our experiences and exploring them further with theory, offers a good place to begin new conversations that may push our physical cultural studies research, writing and theoretically-informed reflections in new directions. Of course, the challenges of this kind of work are coordinating time for it within already busy professional and private lives (see also Gale & Wyatt, 2009), as well as adopting appropriate representational methods of writing and affirming the value of the collaborative process. Based on our experiences, we suggest that collaborative conversations and reflections do facilitate the efforts of feminist scholars working within neoliberal contexts where genuine collegiality, quality collaboration and effective collective social change are too often sidelined, and are well worth the effort.

## Notes

1. The individual process of auto-ethnographic writing was familiar to us (Barbour, 2000, 2005, 2007a, 2011; Bruce, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2010; Thorpe, 2007); the potential of collaborating for enhancing reflection was new and exciting.
2. *Waka ama* is also known as outrigger canoeing (see Barbour, 2007b).
3. Parts of these narratives have been published and/or presented elsewhere (see Barbour, 2005; Bruce, 2003; de Carnegie, 1997; Thorpe, 2007, 2011).
4. *Pakeha*, a Maori term, generally refers to a New Zealander of European heritage, but is increasingly under discussion (Barbour, 2011; King, 1999; Spoonley, Macpherson & Pearson, 2004).
5. Contextual equivalents for Maori language words: *Kia kaha*—stay strong; *te reo Maori*—indigenous Maori language; *Waka ama*—outrigger canoe with pontoon on left side of hull; *tikanga*—protocols and customs embedded in a Maori worldview; *kiato*—spars connecting hull

to pontoon; *Kua rere*—are you ready?; *Ae*—yes; *Kia rite*—get ready/into position; *Hika*—used as an exclamation like “crikey”; *Hoe-a*—paddle now; *Hoe*—a single paddle, or in this case the call to change paddling to the other side of the canoe; *Kei te pai*—an expression similar to “good work anyway”.

6. The theoretical overview draws heavily upon the first author’s published work (see Thorpe, 2009, 2010).

7. For those seeking a more detailed critical introduction to Bourdieu’s original work, we refer readers to Jenkins (2002). For an insightful discussion of the applicability of Bourdieu’s conceptual schema for sports studies, see Booth and Loy (1999), Laberge and Kay (2002), Tomlinson (2002).

## Process Notes

8. We did not record our face-to-face conversations (at coffee shops, in offices, in the staffroom). Much of our work was conducted by e-mail and later by Skype (see also process note 10).

9. Throughout this experience we tried to remain focused on the process of collaborative reflection, engaging as colleagues and “playing” creatively with representing ourselves as academics theorizing about our physical cultural experiences. We desired open, honest conversation that allowed us to know each other more holistically, and was not dependent upon a particular research “output” or conclusion. We sought a “bridge” across the spaces “between us” so that we could talk and write together (similar to, but not the same as, the projects of betweener talk (Diversi & Moreira, 2009) and between-the-tuos (Gale & Wyatt, 2009). Yet, the demands of our personal and academic lives meant that there were inevitable tensions between our intentions and our ability to deliver on them. Multiple e-mail conversations throughout the 18 months of working on this project revealed these tensions, as is evident in the e-mail exchange below:

2/12/2009, 9:46am: Holly: wow, another Wednesday is upon us....I guess we are all heavily immersed in other projects at the moment. Does anyone have any time (or motivation) to meet this week to discuss our potential paper? I could do this afternoon or Friday, but I don’t want anyone to feel obliged if they are too busy at this particular moment. If we are all keen to make this happen, I think we need to establish a clear timeframe to make sure it actually happens, otherwise it may just fade away as Christmas looms....Let me know your thoughts.

2/12/2009, 10:00am: Karen: Hi. I went to Melbourne and then had a day off with my son and so I guess that must be where my two last weeks went! ...Yes I am keen and am happy for you to coordinate meeting times for me so the ideas don’t fade away. Friday would be better for me from lunchtime on and before I pick my son up from Kohanga Reo at about 4pm.

2/12/2009, 10:07am: Toni: I could meet this week but feel I would be better prepared if we shifted it to next Wednesday. I know for sure I won’t have a photo or anything else to bring to the meeting – mostly because I’ve been on leave for 3 days and have a lot of other things to get through this week. We have a dept meeting at 1pm next week; maybe we could meet after that?

2/12/2009, 10:37am: Holly: Hi, thanks for your prompt responses. If it suits you both, let’s meet after next week’s staff meeting. In the meantime, to continue developing our ideas I suggest the following ... Enjoy your rainy Wednesday.

The challenges of coordinating three people were constant. As Holly recalls, during an extended fellowship in the UK, “There was an intense period when we were working 24-7 on this project. I’d be going to bed at 11 o’clock at night, winding down, and then all the morning emails would be coming in, people firing up for the day. I’d end up going to bed at 2am still firing.”

10. While we began this project with a level of trust and excited about the potential for collaboration, the realities of trying to complete such a task within tight timeframes can evoke highly affective responses, including guilt, anxiety, frustration and disappointment, which can pose risks to collegial relationships and friendships if not approached with honesty and on-going open communication. Toni recalls that “for one meeting, I was so stressed about not having done what I was supposed to do that I seriously considered lying and calling in sick.” Holly: “Yeah. There was that moment when you were scared to meet because you felt I was putting so much pressure on you.” Reflecting on her actions, Toni decides that “in the end I wanted to ‘own’ my contributions (or lack of them) to the project so I fronted up and admitted that I’d thought about bailing.” Although Karen did not reveal her fears to us at the time, she admitted “I was worried that if I couldn’t find any time for this project you might dump me altogether”. We have, however, not only survived but ended the process of producing this manuscript on a high note, with four full days of intensive rewriting that have brought us back to the enjoyment of working *together*, as we pop in and out of each other’s offices, congregate in our shared hallway, and e-mail suggestions and responses about what we hope is the final version of our manuscript.

11. Our desire to engage creatively led to us exploring different ways to represent our personal narratives, collaborative theorizing and conversations. We wanted to somehow reveal the messiness and tensions in the process of collaborating as writers as well as in our experiences as sportswomen. However, after we decided to submit our work for publication in a special issue of this journal we began to feel pressure to “conform” to more traditional modes of representation and to produce a more formally crafted text. Our academic experiences overtook our personal “wanderings” and focused theorizing began to supplant “wondering”. We felt like we had limited opportunities to express our regulated liberties and were instead reexperiencing a disjunction between the originating freedom to play (wonder) and the expectations of the editors and reviewers in the field of the academy. Initially we submitted our narratives in three columns next to each other, wanting them to rub up against each other and force readers to interpret, in, and through each story almost simultaneously. Yet, other than these auto-ethnographic triggers, the remainder of the manuscript was relatively standard in its approach. In response to Reviewer 1 who implored us to become more strident in our application of performative and self-reflexive representational strategies, we restructured the manuscript so that our narratives appeared in the left column, one after the other, with an attempt at a conversational representation of our collaborative theorizing running alongside in a right hand column. Again, under significant time constraints and collaborating across international time zones and borders, we worried about our ability to achieve our (and the reviewers’) desired outcomes:

26/07/2010 9:34 PM: Karen: Hi there... Holly... you asked how I am feeling about the direction of the manuscript... hmmm... To be honest, I feel we are moving further away from the exciting potential of the piece in terms of innovative representation - our reflections almost read like an interview... and the place of the original narrative is not as strong... this is a bit frustrating...

26/07/2010 10:14 PM: Toni: Hi Karen, Holly. I think your response has kind of hit the nail on the head Karen (and I think addresses things reviewers wanted too) - which was more of the messiness and nuance (which we haven’t achieved really nor do we have the space or time to do it now)...

26/07/2010 10:20 PM: Holly: Hi, yes, lots of frustrations and compromises.... but let’s push ahead for now, submit, and see what comes back. If the feedback is major, then we might have to park it, and rethink our approach. But for now, let’s see where it leads. I am working on the dialogue now.... we might be able to pull it off.... I am (perhaps naively) optimistic. I really wish we could be having this conversation in person though...

27/07/2010 12:37 AM: Karen: Yay Holly - I look forward to reading what you have in the morning and commenting. If you are optimistic then I am too! Talking in person is so much



easier, but obviously not possible right now (something for us to factor into our process when we work together again!).

Some parts of our revision worked well: One reviewer responded that “The manuscript is very much improved since it was first submitted and I congratulate the authors on engaging in the kind of self-reflexive work needed to respond to critiques of one’s work. Indeed, the authors’ responses to the first set of reviews, clearly mirrors the self-reflexive processes that they engaged in during the construction of this collaborative work.” Yet our conversational approach, as we feared, had not quite found its feet. One reviewer wrote, “I appreciate the ‘new’ presentation of material in two-column format, and concur with the authors stated intentions for doing so. However, I remain unconvinced of its necessity or utility in this instance (though I am open to being convinced); I think it would be just as effective in a traditional presentation. More problematically, however, is the commentary found in the right-hand column itself—as a conversation (or a conversational performance, perhaps), it seems rather forced at times.” The reviewers’ comments take us again to our structure, and we debate how to respond; whether to push the “personal/conversational” (the process) further or to refocus on our more formal written responses to the questions that arose during our conversations (the outcomes). As we discuss this, we realize we have different levels of willingness for sharing our nonacademic “voices” and collectively decide to stay true to our original intentions. We deliberately did not record our conversations because we wanted to speak freely, to test ideas and each other, to “wonder” without worrying about our academic peers looking over our shoulders. Our conversations were intended to progress our theorizing and add to the depth of our written reflections, rather than as “data” for the manuscript. We decide we agree with the reviewer that the two-columned format might work just as well in a standard format, and begin the intensive work on the final revision.

12. Ultimately, our shared experiences of working through the ups and downs of the project have enhanced our relationships with one another, and our understanding of the potential pleasures and perils of collaborative work. Near the end of the process, on 25/11/2010 during a meandering conversation over coffee, Karen explained: “Sometimes I know arts collaborations can end up being less than the parts, it gets watered down to one director’s vision. [But] when everyone starts together and works alongside each other throughout the process, it is less likely to get watered down ‘cos everyone takes responsibility for their parts so we can let go of things a bit because we can trust that we started together and are still on the same kaupapa [agenda]. Holly admits “I am a bit of a ‘control freak’ so letting go of this paper was a real challenge at some points”. Karen: “I hadn’t explored Bourdieu much until this project and this was one of the ways the project pushed me”. Holly: “It pushed me too, with the representational styles...” Karen: “and perhaps all of us in terms of reflexivity of our experiences”. Holly also reflects: “I’ve certainly learned a lot from both of you in terms of the importance of creating time for your family and life apart from academe. It’s always interesting to learn how other female academics balance their busy lives. I think this process has helped us recognize each other’s personal and professional strengths, and learn from one another’s experiences in various social fields like sport, academe, family and community”.

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