

# The Gender Game: Rewriting the Rules of Basketball Through Autoethnography

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Hey, you!  
I've got something to say  
I stand alone on a bench in this park  
Breath freezes as it comes out the dark  
Eyes linger on my mobile statue  
Yes, I'm talking at you

Hey, you!  
I've got something to say  
I jump, wave, and shout  
Thoughts making me move my body about  
Feel the energy your presence brings  
Do you know why the caged bird sings?

Hey, you!  
I've got something to say  
It's my story, my body, my space  
Stop walking past me and look at my face  
It's your story too; you're part of it now  
You can share yours; I'll show you how

Hey, you!  
I've got something to say  
"Hi," you smile and shake my hand  
I pull you up to where I stand  
Scared now, afraid I might fall  
So, umm, do you ever play basketball?

## 1st Quarter: Traveling. Time-Out. truths.

*truths: A capital T is a technical foul.*<sup>1</sup>

This autoethnography is divided into four quarters of a basketball game.<sup>2</sup> The quartering of my narrative is meant to reflect the complexity of my many selves and those of other women who are too often oversimplified through patriarchal meta-narratives.<sup>3</sup> My wholeness is broken apart; my “acceptable femininity” is quartered out of my Self by a society that refuses to see *all* that I am. The quarters of this paper also represent the four existentials of the *lifeworld*—lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived human relation—through which I negotiate my identity.<sup>4</sup> I throw my existence out into the *lifeworld* through my bodily movements, challenging and changing the social landscape that surrounds me. I also take into my bodily Self the very surroundings that I have just altered. My “flesh of the world,” as Merleau-Ponty describes, is the medium through which I experience my environment, and it exists as a reciprocally active relationship between the human body and the spatial world.<sup>5</sup> In sport this relationship becomes messy; it feels one-sided, as if my body is taking on the weight of patriarchy, but the world of sport refuses to allow me to change it. Resting heavily atop my shoulders lies the history of the patriarchal gender game.

This bodily Self is also influenced by histories of women’s sporting past. Corset-wearing croquet players, daring cyclists, heavily skirted swimmers—they all become a part of me as I acknowledge their struggles and try to reintroduce their bodies into sport history. I write from inside, through my body, as I explore my varying femininities and the past from which they are born, characterizing the game not as a contest between two teams fighting for possession of a ball, but as my internalization of societal pressures to be at once championed athlete and womanly being. I play with time and the ways it carries beliefs and traditions both in sport and scholarship, and I investigate how the past is brought to life and reinterpreted through my own physical dimensions, the interpretive text of my body.

Locating myself historically I can do history through my own material situatedness, examining the sporting female body as socially and historically constructed.<sup>6</sup> I take up Rinehart’s call to experiment with new and nontraditional ways of doing history<sup>7</sup> and move beyond “museumized” histories under Denzin’s call for performative texts.<sup>8</sup> Through poetry, narrative, and embodied writing, I hope to draw you into genuine dialogue with my text, that you may feel something new and unimagined. Using autoethnography I attempt to build upon the innovative research of the likes of Synthia Sydnor<sup>9</sup> and Megan Popovic,<sup>10</sup> who are not afraid to “play” with our histories. From a feminist standpoint theory, I acknowledge my own female voice as valuable in understanding the lived body experiences of female athletes and the ways gender inequalities from the past are still embodied by women in present-day sport.<sup>11</sup> I question the ways that our bodies are literally shaped by the past, and I consider the ways our movements reflect or refract from social femininity norms that have been driven into our subconscious minds, our mothers’ minds before us, and their mothers’ minds before them, since birth.<sup>12</sup> How do our bodies relate to issues of time, gender, and power as we continue to challenge the rules of femininity in our *lifeworlds*?