

Foucault in Leotards: Corporeal Discipline in Women's Artistic Gymnastics

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Women's artistic gymnastics is an Olympic sport that involves intricate acrobatic and rhythmic activities. This kinesthetic proficiency demands muscular strength and courage, which have been argued to serve its athletes as a source of empowerment.

Various scholars question the positive effects of sport participation. This article builds on these doubts through a feminist Foucauldian study of WAG. An essayistic research story, compiled from data gained in an ethnographic study, serves as the basis for our analyses. The results demonstrate the complexity of WAG experiences and illustrate that gymnasts' athletic proficiency is only possible through an extensive and elaborate process of corporeal discipline.

La gymnastique artistique féminine (GAF) est un sport olympique qui implique des activités acrobatiques et rythmiques complexes. Cette compétence kinesthésique exige de la force musculaire et du courage et il a été suggéré que ces qualités sont perçues par les athlètes en tant que source « d'empowerment ». Plusieurs chercheurs remettent en question les effets positifs de la participation sportive. Cet article s'appuie sur ces doutes et porte sur une étude foucauldienne et féministe de la GAF. Nos résultats prennent la forme d'un essai rédigé à partir de données colligées lors d'une étude ethnographique. Ces résultats démontrent la complexité des expériences en GAF et illustrent le fait que la compétence sportive des gymnastes n'est possible que grâce à processus vaste et élaboré de discipline corporelle.

Women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) is a contemporary Olympic sport that entails girls and women performing routines of intricate acrobatic and rhythmic activities on four apparatus including the vault, uneven bars, balance beam and floor. The required acrobatic proficiency requires muscular strength and courage,

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as well as great precision and bodily control. Several scholars see WAG to present gymnasts with physical movement opportunities not generally possible for women. Rose (1990; 1991b; 1992), for instance, identified WAG as a sport that provides gymnasts with important moments of positive corporeal experiences, with the body offering a number of narcissistic satisfactions. Similarly, Chisholm (2002) regarded the exceptional sporting achievements of gymnasts to seemingly defy gravity as providing:

[A] powerful framework through which they can conceptualize, desire, cultivate, and experience the strengths and potentialities of their bodies. The resistant possibilities of such desires (potentially) emerge in an athletic context that reinforces the contention that the strength-to-size ratio of young girls may [surpass the ones of other female or male athletes] (p. 445-446).

WAG has thus been described to offer numerous possibilities for bodily and personal experiences that act in empowering ways. Recently, however, Foucauldian sport scholars such as Denison (2007), Markula and Pringle (2006), and Smith Maguire (2002) have alluded that sport participation may be more complex than previously suggested. For female athletes, particularly in an aesthetically-driven sport, the expectations to adhere to unwritten standards of feminine beauty, in addition to the rules of a sport, complicate their experiences. WAG is such an aesthetically-driven sport, although one that has become heavily “acrobatisized” during the past 30 years (Barker-Ruchti, 2009). In this paper, we conduct a feminist Foucauldian deconstruction of high-performance WAG to demonstrate how participation in gymnastics, as suggested by authors such as Rose and Chisholm, may be more complex. This article, therefore, provides an example of how gymnasts’ experiences are shaped by WAG and how this may lead to compliance and disappointment. Furthermore, we offer compelling insights into the training realities of contemporary gymnasts.

To frame our analysis, we will first outline Foucault’s concept “technologies of dominance”, with a particular focus on essential technologies of discipline and describe how this helps us to understand the experiences of artistic gymnasts. We will then present the research methods and explain how we represent our data. In the last section of this article, we offer feminist Foucauldian interpretations, which include analyses on the aspects of space and distribution, temporal regulations, progression, and succession and the coach-athlete relationship. These analyses are then used to illustrate how the gymnasts of this study were affected and shaped by their sport participation.

Technologies of Domination—Bodies Governed by Disciplinary Power

Feminist scholars have adopted Foucauldian theories to study sport. Through this lens, power is seen to operate locally, acting through discourses on the body as the primary site of effect, while at the same time critiquing Western patriarchal contexts and scientific normativity (McLaren, 2002). Through the theory of power as a network of relations, Foucault focused his scholarly work on the different ways through which humans define and experience themselves and their conduct and

developed concepts—technologies of domination, biopower, governmentality and technologies of the self—to analyze these processes.

Technologies of dominance involve modes of objectification that classify, discipline and normalize individuals without them having much control over these processes. According to Foucault (1978a), this form of power emerged from its sovereign precursor during the 19th Century, replacing the top-down form of power exercised by royal rulers. While the brutality of sovereign power disappeared, it did not allow citizens greater amount of freedom and space to shape their own selves. In contrast, Foucault convincingly portrayed how modern forms of power, particularly through various and diverse techniques of discipline, hierarchies and punishments, control and normalize individuals to the extent of docility.

Several scholars have applied Foucault's concept of technologies of dominance to the study of sport (e.g., Chapman, 1997; Heikkala, 1993; Johns & Johns, 2000; Shogan, 1999; Smith Maguire, 2002). The interpretations offered in these works point to the controlling nature of sport, demonstrating that sport is an important social regulator. Chapman (1997), for instance, showed how female rowers "made weight", which mostly involved losing weight. These athletes enjoyed this process, in part because it enabled them to fulfill dominant feminine ideals. While the athletes in Chapman's study did not seem to be affected adversely, Johns & Johns (1998; 2000) pointed to the negative consequences losing weight had for the rhythmic gymnasts of their study. These gymnasts diligently followed the training and nutrition regimes to the extent of eating disorders and low self-confidence. Becoming blind "dupes", (Heikkala, 1993; Shogan, 1999) may be a common consequence of participation in high-performance sport. While such passive compliance may be considered an ideal athlete-quality by coaching staff, it may also be conducive to loss of motivation (Denison, 2007), injuries, and athlete abuse (Barker-Ruchti, 2007; 2008).

Enclosure and distribution are key aspects with regard to individuals becoming controlled and disciplined. Foucault (1978a) used the panoptic prison structure as an analogy to describe the subtle and efficient effects of spatial and temporal regulations. While inmates of a panoptic prison had to adhere to various known rules, the control was predominantly facilitated by the building structure. The tower built within a circle of prison cells allowed prison guards to monitor the inmates, while the prisoners themselves had no means to identify the surveillance. Fear of detection, which would cause punishment, forced prisoners to adopt expected conduct. Foucault regarded modern society a panoptic structure, one that forces individuals to continually reflect upon themselves and their behaviors and to confess wrongdoings through dominant discourses and practices

Self-regulation, as an effect of panopticism, is possible because individuals internalize or incorporate the sociohistoric surroundings in which they live, including the nature of modern forms of power (Foucault, 1978a; 1984). Foucault argued that an individual internalizes dominant social, cultural, and historical discourses: "Something is "internalized" as women incorporate ideologies in their selves and subsequently, direct women's actions and behaviors" (Bartky, 1990, p. 77). Such inscription, or embodiment, is a continuous process, one that is produced through a complex network of dominant discursive practices.

Internalization of gendered identity makes the individual subject to someone else's control, but also "ties him/her in his/her own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 138). This ensures effectiveness

and guarantees the complete naturalization of the subjectivation process. Mostly, individuals are unaware of their subjection, which renders its influence difficult to dismantle. As the modern form of power exists without being “seen” or “felt”, individuals are led to believe that they can construct their selves and lead their lives through freedom of choice. Denison (2007) offered a fitting example of how an athlete and coach internalized the culture of their sport, in this case cross country running. While both felt that their relationship was “prosperous”, and both assumed that they were able to shape their relationship and training regimen, the athlete seemed to develop compliance and apathy. In the end, the runner could not explain his loss of drive and motivation and eventually retired from the sport. It is this link between a sport’s code and its training culture, and athlete-conformity, that we believe offers great potential for the analysis of motivation loss, retirement, as well as athlete abuse, and will be examined in this paper through our analyses of WAG.

Foucault (1978a) saw scientific classification, dividing practices, and subjectivation as three key factors that enhance the effectiveness of modern power. He developed four analytic tools to illustrate how individuals are regulated and controlled to create utmost efficiency and productivity: the art of distribution, control of activity, composition of forces and the organization of geneses. In the art of distribution, Foucault analyzed aspects such as enclosure and spatial distribution of individuals, which involves partitioning according to personal attributes such as intelligence, health, age, or rank. It further involves individuals’ organization through time-tables and levels of progression, efficiency of movement, economy of practices and manipulation of objects. In the control of activity, Foucault examined forms of temporal control, through, for instance, timetables, schedules and agendas. He saw such documents and processes to not only control individuals with regard to time, but also in terms of activity control. The composition of forces involved selflessness, timing and command, with regard to oneself and others. Lastly, in the organization of geneses, Foucault referred to the different, but progressively linear stages of learning. This, he argued, makes possible the detailed control and regular intervention through differentiation, correction, punishment and elimination.

Markula & Pringle (2006) and Shogan (1999) have used Foucault’s four analytic tools to detail how technologies of discipline function in sport and exercise settings. Their works are important as they point to the subtle disciplinary effects sports spaces and the distribution of individuals within them, as well as the temporal regulations of a sports code, have on the athletes. As these disciplining factors provide an environment that allows for competitive sports to take place, and develop athletic proficiency, they appear appropriate and useful. However, sports codes and training cultures also teach athletes self-control. In gymnastics, the gymnasium and the organization of the gymnasts within this space, the various temporal regulations, as well as learning progression procedures and the relationship between coaches and athletes, maximize training efficiency and skill development. The gymnasts become productive. At the same time, however, these structures, and how the gymnasts make sense of them, control the gymnasts’ behaviors.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand that Foucault (1980) saw individuals as active subjects within relations of power. Power cannot be possessed. Rather, power is everywhere and can be used by anyone (Foucault, 1978a). However, its interplays and relationships are dependent on resources and, as these are distributed unequally, inequality is the consequence (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Seen through

a feminist lens, women are often disadvantaged with regard to resources and may thus experience greater inequality than men. Similarly, gymnasts' relations to their coaches may be unequal due to their gender and lesser age. However, Foucault's (1978a, p. 194) asserted that, while "it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'", power is not solely oppressive. On the contrary, one of his important points was the notion of productivity, as power "produces; it produces reality: it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p. 194)¹.

In WAG, high-performance gymnasts certainly are productive with regard to their training efforts. They may also obtain power to resist the culture of their sport or, for instance, the practices of their coaches. However, and as the following research story and our interpretations demonstrate, the gymnasts appear to have minimal resources for resistance or self-determination.

Research Methods

A multimethod ethnographic design was used to study the lives and experiences of seven Australian female elite artistic gymnasts and their two coaches (Reinharz, 1992). Multimethod ethnography was chosen as a suitable research method as it enabled us, first and foremost, to examine WAG from various angles, that of the coaches, athletes and researcher, and through multiple methods. This allowed us to *understand* the gymnasts' realities, in their social and historical contexts, and to add an explanatory level to the descriptive one we aimed for (Brewer, 2000). With such a framework, social phenomena are seen to be created discursively: they develop as emergences and in connection to existing knowledges and relations of power. In our ethnography, we aimed to give meaning to such emergences and interrelationships.

The data collection methods of this project included observations, participant observations, and interviews. The participants' training sessions were observed weekly during the course of one year. The focus was on the activities of individual training sessions, including relevant verbal exchanges and the researcher's thoughts and emotional reactions. Several competitions were also observed in a similar way, however, with much less proximity to the gymnasts. Participant observations with three gymnasts provided data on issues such as the gymnasts' relationships with parents and siblings, daily routine, schooling, friends and journeying to and from the gymnasium. During these observations, we had numerous opportunities to chat with the gymnasts or ask questions. Lastly, we chose the individualized structured and semistructured interview method to talk to three of the gymnasts and their two coaches (Rapley, 2004). For both strategies, the schedules were developed from the collected observational material. We aimed to explore, for instance, training session planning, personal backgrounds, and body ideals with the coaches, while we intended to discuss particular training instances with the gymnasts (injuries, particular coaching methods, motivation for the sport). To invite the coaches to speak freely, we aimed to investigate these topics without specific questions. We felt, however, that a more structured approach with preplanned interview questions would best suit the gymnasts' maturity. Before the start of the project, the research project was introduced to the gymnastics institution and the participants, as well as their parents. Consent was collected from all involved parties. The data from

the observations, participant observations, and interviews was tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data are presented as an essayistic research story (Markula & Denison, 2005). We adopted this writing style to show what it feels like to participate in high-performance gymnastics (Denison & Markula, 2003). A research story focuses on concrete details of daily life, which includes a display of the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of those being studied. To achieve further authenticity, the thoughts and emotions of the primary researcher were included. An evocative writing style was used to let the subjects' experiences "speak for themselves". However, the truthful recounting of what was observed in the training sessions and told in the interviews was important to us. Several authors have provided "readers with a fleshed-out, embodied portrait of movement as a practice of living" (Denison & Markula, 2003, p. 13) through this type of writing (e.g., Bloom, 1996; Bruce, 2003; Sparkes, 1996). The writing of the research stories also served as analytic process as the ethnographic material was read, grouped into coherences relevant to feminist and Foucauldian themes, written as stories, regrouped, reordered, and rewritten. As Richardson (2000) argued, writing *is* a method of inquiry, and a method through which researchers discover about themselves and the study topic.

In the following, we present an essayistic research story. It contains several key occurrences that we feel typify the gymnasts' training realities and the effects these had on the athletes. In particular, excerpts that exemplify Foucault's technologies of discipline were chosen and compiled in an account of one training session. The story further includes data that was acquired in interviews and the talks with the gymnasts who were part of the participant observations. The story is written in the first person, which represents the first author of this article. Pseudonyms are used throughout the story.

The setting of the research was the high-performance gymnastics center at Ocean View College, a private girl's school with a specific focus on high performance sport and arts. WAG was one excellence focus. Seven elite gymnasts (Bec, and Olivia, both 15, Briana, 14, Phoebe, 13, Naomi and Jess, 11 and Leonie 10 years old) and their two Russian coaches, Dina and Valeriy, were part of the gymnastics team. The two coaches had an extensive background in Soviet gymnastics, as athletes, tertiary gymnastics students and coaches. The gymnasts trained approximately 30 hours per week, on a twice-daily basis. While the older three athletes had established national and international reputations, the younger ones aspired to do so.

Training Realities

I open the door to the gymnasium. As I step inside, I squint my eyes to adjust to the dim light. I am struck with a familiar odor; that of chalk, feet and sweat. Immediately, I feel at home.

I scan the gymnasium. I see dust particles floating in the rays of sunlight scintillating through the shuttered windows on the left-hand-side wall. I notice that the gymnasium is well-equipped. Every inch of space is used up with equipment or mats. All equipment stands in order, nicely organized.

A twelve-by-twelve meter floor dominates the high-ceiling space. On its right, there are three regular balance beams standing next to each other. Two ankle-height beams stand immediately in front of these. Two uneven bars are placed to my left. The vault and tumble track are by the left-hand side wall and lead into the gym's foam pit. A third set of uneven bars stands over the pit.

The remaining areas in between the apparatuses are covered with blue mats or carpet. The walls are decorated with gymnastics posters; one side is covered with mirrors. Right by the entrance, a placard declares behavioral rules and regulations.

I trace the voices I hear. I find the faces of two coaches, a woman and a man. They stand close by several gymnasts who appear to be warming-up. The coaches are dressed in tracksuits; the girls wear short pants and bra-type tops made of lycra fabrics. There is no talking among the gymnasts.

The girls perform a variety of strength exercises. They do not receive instruction during these drills. They seem to know these exercises by heart. They begin by lying down on their stomachs next to each other. Dina stands looking down at them. As the coach starts to count, the girls begin their rocking exercises. "One, two, three, four", Dina continues to ten, clapping her hands with each count. She moves along the row, closely monitoring the gymnasts' executions. "Olivia, legs tight"! she calls out. After Dina's last count, the girls turn onto their stomachs, continuing the repetitions in this position. Now the girls' stomachs and leg muscles are clearly visible. Dina starts counting again. "One, two, three", she exclaims carrying on. "See, you're loose there", Dina corrects Olivia's leg position in between counts. She pulls on the gymnast's leg. Olivia pulls her leg away in response and looks at her coach. I hold my breath. Dina is angered by Olivia's reaction and she slaps her leg. I swallow. Olivia bites her lips and continues the exercise, rocking on her side.

The girls move to the ballet room with Dina. She ushers the girls to their respective places on the ballet bar. The girls appear bored and unenthusiastic. From the outset of the lesson, Dina is stern and becomes frustrated when the girls do not perform to her expectations. "You're leaning forward", Dina demonstrates on herself, exaggerating the motion. "It doesn't look elegant". Again, the girls lift their legs to Dina's counting and clapping. Dina shakes her head. "You don't want to be gymnasts", she accuses the girls. "You don't want to do it properly. Arm here, and shoulders down"! she exclaims. Dina walks over to Jess and puts the gymnast's hand into the right position. Jess is upset about Dina's remarks. "You must release", demands Dina, "be a gymnast".

"I don't even like the music", Jess thinks. "I can't copy the moves, I'm embarrassed. And I hate those mirrors".

"Don't use your muscles, open your hips". Dina walks over to Jess again and pokes her fingers into the muscles she is supposed to relax. "I'm telling you the same things, all the time, it's impossible to do gymnastics if you can't control your hips"!

Phoebe is the only one that beams during this exercise. She flicks her hands, turns her head and moves her hips with rhythm. She can hardly stand still and glows with pleasure. She examines her body position and movements in the wall mirrors. She appears to like what she sees and experiments how her body appears in particular dance sequences.

When returning to the main hall, the gymnasium has filled with other gymnasts. They do not belong to the high-performance group. They do not look as trained and are noisy chatting and laughing with each other. Their groups are much bigger than the two elite ones, and they currently occupy the floor square and the beams only. Dina and Valeriy would prefer the gymnasium to themselves. They hardly greet the new gymnasts and coaches but instruct them to free the floor for Bec, Briana, and Phoebe.

After a small drink pause, the gymnasts begin their apparatus work. “See, that’s how you have to do it! Faster, faster”! I hear Dina calling out to Jess. Jess nods and hurries back to the start of the vault run-up. “If only the knee stopped hurting”, she thinks. She runs, jumps off the beat-board and lands. She grimaces from the pain, but does not show this to her coach. Dina throws her arms away from her body. “No, no, what’s this supposed to be”? she asks Jess after the next vault, raising her voice. “I’ve told you this many times now, don’t you want to change your mistakes”? Dina asks her gymnast. “If I say something, you do it”! Dina exclaims. She turns away from Jess and mutters: “If you don’t like vault, don’t come here”, and shakes her head. Jess cries. Another vault. “It’s just not enough”, Dina says to Jess after her next attempt and walks away from the vault.

Jess laughs the disapproval off in her head. She realizes that she needs to improve her vault. Actually, Jess appreciates Dina and Valeriy being tough with her. She is glad, because it will make it easier for her to make it to the top. “Phoebe isn’t really training properly”, she thinks, “the coaches are too nice with her”. Jess trusts her coaches, she knows that they are the best. That’s why she travels 40 minutes each way to come to Ocean View. “I must improve my vault”, Jess thinks. “Dina wants me to be better, that’s why she is so tough with me”.

The girls have rotated to other equipment. Those from the vault and bars now train on the beam. Their warm-up resembles swimmers doing laps, to and from one end of the beam to the other. They walk forward, backward, and sideways – all the while on tiptoes. I find it monotonous. The coach instructs them to squeeze their buttocks, to stand high, to keep their arms and legs straight, to tuck in their stomachs and straighten their backs, to lift their chins, and to tense their fingers. The girls are frowning with concentration and focus on the task.

After the lengthy warm-up, the girls practice more complex skills: the front and back walk-overs, cartwheels and flic-flacs. Dina places mats over a couple of the beams. “Girls, if you’ve been practicing your skills on the low beam for a while now, please move to the upper beams – we need to work them there now”, the coach urges her novices. “Leonie, you in particular, I want to see

that flic-flac on the high beam today, by yourself"! Leonie nods. Tentatively, she moves to the high beam and climbs up. She lingers there for a while, but eventually places herself in the flic-flac starting position. Dina stands a few feet away, observing her gymnast. Leonie relaxes her arms, dropping her shoulders and looking over to Dina. Dina lifts her eyebrows questioningly. "Ok", she agrees, "I'll spot one, but then you're on your own". Dina holds her hand to Leonie's bottom, and the gymnast performs the flic-flac. Dina walks away. Leonie moves forward on the beam, lifts her arms, swings them down and bends her knees, but, just on take-off, steps back, and stops the motion. She looks over to her coach, waiting to see her reaction. Dina does not respond. Leonie sighs. She jumps off the beam, stands back on the low one, and executes the skill. Quickly, she moves back up to the beam and stands in position. The gymnast is pressing her lips tightly together. "Jump high, straight legs, arms tight, hands together, spot the beam, keep my hips tense", Leonie thinks. She performs the flic! Dina and the other gymnasts clap. "Well done", the coach praises. "See, it's no problem for you". Leonie smiles with relief.

"Gosh, I'm so glad I got that out of the way and Dina is pleased, too".

Again, the girls change equipment. Briana is now on beam. She does not appear happy, stomping her foot on the beam. She was unable to connect her split front layout with the handspring. She tries again, but fails. She frowns and rolls her eyes. "Grrh, why can't I do it"? she mumbles under her breath. She jumps off the beam. "God, I'm useless, I've done it before, and I really need it for the next comp".

Why is she stressing over this so much? I ask myself. She is such a talented gymnast, she can do so many difficult moves. I don't understand. Why does she put herself down so much?

Briana has walked over to the chalk bucket and dabs chalk on her feet. She begins her routine again. Smoothly, she moves from one element to the next. She performs beautifully. But again, she fails on the acrobatic combination, ever so slightly. Her shoulders slump and tears appear in her eyes. Briana's team-mates have already moved to the next apparatus, but Briana has to complete the required set of six routines without falls. "Shit, now I'm the only one here". She tries anew. Dina watches Briana closely. She realizes that this gymnast is struggling, but believes that repetition is the key to gymnastics success. Not just with regard to perfecting skills, but also to gain confidence.

It is not working for Briana today, though. Again, Briana falls. She throws her head back in frustration. Her next routine is worse. She falls several times. Briana sighs. "Can I get a drink"? she asks her coach in a flat voice. Dina nods.

I still struggle to understand Briana's frustration. She seems to be pulling herself down. Why can't she see how good she is? Why is she so negative? Surely, if Briana thought more positively about herself, she would be able to connect the two movements?

When returning to the beam, Briana falls several times again. After landing her dismount, she cries quietly.

I am distraught. What a mess. Briana is such a good gymnast, and yet she appears unconfident and at this moment, even inconsolable. Why do the coaches not help her?

The girls are now on the fourth and last apparatus. Phoebe is on beam. As Briana, she is struggling with her skills. She is practicing her routine, but falls off repeatedly. She cries. Dina has been watching this gymnast. She is not happy with Phoebe, throwing her arms away from her body in despair and turning her back towards the gymnast. Dina walks away from the beam. She is distressed at Phoebe's anguish. "Phoebe isn't allowed to give in. She must keep going, and going, or she'll not be strong enough". Dina is frustrated about the Australian way of life. "The children here can do whatever they choose; and if they give in, nobody minds, it's no drama". Dina knows that Phoebe can do so much better. "She's just not tough enough".

Phoebe mounts the beam again, and attempts the front layout. She falls off. She leans onto the beam and places her head onto it. She sobs uncontrollably. Dina briskly walks over to Phoebe, leans towards her gymnast. "What's the matter with you"? She asks in an irritated voice. Phoebe tries to explain that she has a sore back. Dina shakes her head. "You're always sore", she says. "It's all in your head so that you don't have to train properly"! Phoebe shakes her head, sobbing.

Dina worries about Phoebe's back. "Is she just twisting things again, or is she really sore? If only I could see inside her head. I'll get her to do less repetitions tomorrow ... and I must talk to her mother. If only Phoebe wasn't such a spoiled child and her parents would push her a little more".

Phoebe climbs onto the beam again and tries the salto again. But she falls. "Your gymnastics makes me sick"! Dina shouts. "It's level zero gymnastics, zero gymnastics, nothing", Dina yells at her. "Go back to levels gymnastics, if you behave like this"! "Arrgh, this girl just needs to grow up. Be more patient—and focused. I definitely need to talk to her mother. We must find a way for Phoebe to become more determined and focused", Dina thinks.

I cannot believe what is going on. I feel sorry for Phoebe. She has been struggling for several weeks now, surely she will quit this. I wish I could walk over and give her a hug. She is so small and frail. What would her mother say if she saw this?

This evening's training session is coming to a close. I am glad. The girls are completing a few final strength exercises. Again, the coaches do not instruct the girls on what to do. The girls seem relaxed, yet work hard. "God, I'm exhausted, but soon I'll be able to collapse on the couch", Bec reminds herself. "I just need to push myself really hard now", which will allow her to feel nice and happy about herself. "But gee, I'm buggered. At least I've given it what I can".

When the girls have finished, they walk over to Dina and Valeriy, and say good-bye by shaking their hand. They then move to the locker room, get changed and leave the gymnasium. They are tired, but chat with one another happily.

They will be here again at 7 in the morning.

Why did the high-performance gymnasts at Ocean View do what they did? Why did they invest into their sporting careers, while enduring the training climate described in the tale? In the following, we interpret the above narrative text using the feminist Foucauldian lens proposed above. These analyses, in our view, help explain the gymnasts' commitment and motivation for this sport, while illustrating how their ability to reflect upon their sport and sporting experiences is limited by the "culture" of WAG training. The analysis further points to the relationship between the gymnasts' movement expertise they developed and the corporeal discipline this requires.

Spatial Control and Distribution of Gymnasts

Foucault (1978a, p. 141) wrote that "in the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space." That is, specific tactics of positioning individuals allow for disciplinary power to work effectively. Foucault called this the "art of distribution". Such spatial arrangement requires an enclosure. At Ocean View College, the gymnasts were enclosed in a gymnasium, which served as "the protected place of disciplinary monotony" (Foucault, 1978a, p. 141). As movements were restricted to the one site and distractions from outside were reduced, the gymnasts' training could be optimized.

The partitioning of the athletes within the space further enhanced training efficiency. The gymnasts were separated according to their ages into a junior and senior elite training group, usually distributed between two or three apparatuses. They were also kept apart from the nonelite gymnasts, whose training culture was less intense and focused. Foucault (1978a) suggested that such spatial distribution eliminates:

The effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it is a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration (p. 143).

The divisions allowed coaches Dina and Valeriy to separate their gymnasts from distractions, be those from the outside (spectators, parents, noise) or inside (other gymnasts). It further allowed the coaches to see where their gymnasts were, how they worked or when they rested. They simply had to turn their heads to find the athletes. The hall was organized as "an analytical space," an area in which the coaches could, with minimal effort, observe and train the gymnasts efficiently and effectively (Foucault, 1978a).

The organization of this distribution had *productive* effects: First, it accelerated the gymnasts' learning processes as they did not have to wait for their turns. Second, the individual allocation of the gymnasts to differing apparatuses allowed the coaches to instantly detect and correct mistakes. Third, the individual and close distribution allowed the coaches to obtain personalized information about their

gymnasts. They could see when their athletes were struggling or hurting. While they often ignored these difficulties, their constant close contact meant that they were aware of their gymnasts' state of well-being.

While the enclosure and distribution facilitated external surveillance, the gymnasium's mirrors and posters provided the gymnasts with possibilities for *self-scrutiny*. Phoebe enjoyed this and examined her dance movements in the mirror. For Jess, on the other hand, the visibility was uncomfortable.

The gymnasium emerged, according to Vertinsky (2004), simultaneously to other, similar indoor enclosures such as the prison or hospital. In "the context of [the 18th and 19th Century need for] spatial disciplining and functionalization of social life", the indoor gymnasium secured discipline and sanctioned particular desired behaviors (Vertinsky, 2004, p. 52). The enclosed nature of the gymnasium meant that the trainings occurred in a *private*, rather than a public space. Only insiders (e.g., coaches, gymnasts, physiotherapists, massage therapists) were allowed to access the Ocean View gymnasium. This public-private distinction, according to Duncan (1996), is gendered. It legitimates "oppression and dependence on the basis of gender" (Duncan, 1996, p. 128). The Ocean View gymnasium fostered domesticity in terms of the gymnasts' training productivity and it allowed intimacy, as personal emotions and injuries remained concealed to outsiders. While private spheres could provide relative autonomy, safety and privacy (gymnasts could experience their bodies in physical ways away from the public eye), their coach dependency left the gymnasts subject to authority and surveillance.

The gymnasts' clothing standards, especially with regard to spectator access, further distinguished the gymnasium's privacy from public spaces. During training, in the safety of the gymnasium, the gymnasts wore less clothing than in the public space of a competition. The gymnasts' tight and scanty training outfits exposed the body to the coaches and accentuated their bodylines. Bare legs, for example, helped coaches to detect bent legs; a bare stomach and back ensured that coaches could see if the gymnasts tightened their muscles. The minimal clothes allowed maximal visibility of body shapes and forms, which in turn facilitated surveillance and correctional interference.

The gymnasts of this study spent the majority of their athletic careers behind the walls and within the confinement of the Ocean View gymnasium. Dina and Valeriy were the authoritative figures, with the gymnasts experiencing little responsibility and independence.

Temporal Regulations

The elite gymnasts' timetables, ranging from training schedules, competition programs, regulated gymnastics routine times to the athletes' career span and individual skill movement tempo, fit Foucault's notion of the "control of activity". They represented explicit forms of regulation as they prescribed the yearly agenda, training procedures and movement executions. These forms of temporal control, Foucault (1978a, p. 149) wrote, establish "rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition." In training, the gymnasts did not have to wait until the coaches decided which activity they should practice next; the weekly training schedule, the individual training sessions and the specific preparatory and apparatus programs had such a stable structure that the athletes knew these by heart.

Shogan (1999) suggested that the manipulation of movement cadence is also a form of temporal control. The gymnasts in this study had to learn, for instance, that walking on tiptoes on the beam demanded precision and careful control, while a vault required speed and muscular explosiveness. The younger gymnasts diligently practiced the various forms of walking on the beam, while Jess was urged to perform her vault fast. Temporal control is also necessary for gymnasts to combine gymnastics skills. Briana's efforts to join the split front layout with the handspring on the beam, necessitated timing in and precision of the movements. This gymnast needed to finish the layout balanced on one leg, with the other elevated so that she could step into the handspring with the second foot. She needed to discipline her body to be timed, and aligned with the beam.

The coordination Briana displayed is an extreme case of corporeal control. Foucault (1978a, p. 152) used the example of good handwriting, which necessitates the coordination of the entire body, to illustrate how "discipline is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture." This, however, involves a process of assimilation. The gymnasts of the junior training group had to learn to force their muscles to stand high on tiptoes and squeeze the buttocks to remain balanced on the beam, while at the same time relax the shoulders and lift their chins. Walking along the beam in this position was not an action with which the girls were familiar. In effect, the gymnasts' balancing and moving was an early "testament not to strength per se but rather to a mastery of timing and space" (Chisholm, 2002, p. 418). For Briana, the bodily control she needed to perform the acrobatic series on the beam was far greater, still. To achieve it, this gymnast needed numerous years of intense gymnastics training. At the stage of gymnastics Briana was at, her mind and body were so disciplined that she could attempt to connect the two complex movements on the beam.

Machinery of Progression and Succession

Foucault (1978a) wrote that the "organization of geneses" includes different, but progressively linear stages of learning. This, he argued, makes detailed control and regular intervention through differentiation, correction, punishment and elimination, possible. The gymnasts' training sessions were organized progressively. Each session began with a warm-up, which was followed by strength and flexibility exercises, continued with a dance sequence and then apparatus training, and finished with warm-down drills. Similarly, each apparatus work-out began with the gymnasts warming-up individual skills, before moving to complete routines. Foucault (1978a) saw gradual progression as a:

New technique for taking charge of the time of individual existences; for regulating the relations of time, bodies and forces; for assuring an accumulation of duration; and for turning to ever-increased profit or use the movement of passing time (p. 157).

The "'seriation' of successive activities", according to Foucault (1978a, p. 160), allows for the *accurate* employment of power. As training sessions were broken down into individual components and the learning of individual skills was split into various progressive stages, the coaches could observe each training component and progression unit closely. Foucault (1978a, p. 140) noted that the

“meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life and of the body” creates the disciplinary nature of institutional settings. Dina corrected each detail of her gymnasts’ movements, down to the position of the fingers during the ballet lesson. The graduated pattern of training and learning for junior gymnasts ensured that the gymnasts learned skills “safely” and “correctly”. Leonie was only allowed to move to the next level of her flic-flac upon Dina deciding that her gymnast had mastered the previous one. When Dina felt that this gymnast could perform the skill on the higher beam, she asked Leonie to do so. While this gymnast was initially allowed to place a thin mat over the beam to let her adjust to the increased height, she was later ordered to remove it. Leonie was ordered to gradually move through various steps until she could perform the flic-flac on the high beam by herself and without protective material. During each level, Dina was able to closely observe Leonie’s progression and detect and correct mistakes.

The meticulously executed progressions the gymnasts experienced involved the *efficient* and *accurate* teaching of a skill as “it imposes the best relation between a skill and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed” (Foucault, 1978a, p. 152). However, this corporeal precision had controlling undertones for the gymnast and bent their bodies and performances toward particular useful outcomes.

The Coach-Gymnast Relationship: “You Do as You’re Told”

While Foucault (1994) claimed that power is available to everyone, he did not deny the existence of domination and unequal power relations. The relationship the Ocean View gymnasts had with their coaches can be seen as an example of such inequality, in particular, as the coach-gymnast relationship consisted of and reflected patriarchal structures. Dina and Valeriy adopted what might be described as masculine, and at times militaristic, coaching strategies. It allowed them to dominate the gymnasts, ignore their needs, especially when they did not perform according to expectations, or abuse the athletes verbally.

This is not to say that Dina and Valeriy did not care for their gymnasts. Both coaches wanted the best for their athletes. Dina worried about Phoebe’s back, although she questioned whether this athlete was faking pain. They both wanted their gymnasts to be the best they could. The coaches rarely, however, showed compassion toward their gymnasts. Rather, Dina and Valeriy disliked distractions (injuries, other gymnasts, emotional problems) and preferred obedience. Dina was clear with Jess on vault. Dina expected that if she said something, her gymnast needed to obey and execute her demands. In this case, Dina raised her voice and even, as she did when coaching Phoebe on the beam, walked away from her gymnast to show her dissatisfaction.

While the athletes’ trust in their coaches may be necessary for a fruitful relationship, the authoritative nature of the relationship Dina and Valeriy had with their gymnasts reinforced their acceptance of the coaching methods. For instance, Dina assisted Leonie when performing the flic-flac on beam and decided when this gymnast was ready to perform the skill without assistance. She acted, as Rose (1990, p. 71) has suggested, as protective and supportive “father figure,” who assisted and guided her gymnast. Further, the parental-type relationship

reinforced the gymnasts' childlike bodily and behavioral features placing them within a context of an immature/mature, defenseless/protecting, or "parenting but also ... pet ownership" relationship (Chisholm, 2002, p. 441). This nurturing environment obscured and justified the gymnasts' physical and personal malleability. Both Dina and Valeriy were the unquestioned leaders in the gymnasium, with their influence on the gymnasts being significant because of the extensive and long-term training relationship and the coaches' perceived superior status and older age.

Disciplined Selves and Conduct

The training "culture" at Ocean View College affected the gymnasts' selves and conduct to the extent that they did not question the "to-be-nurtured" position. These consequences are important to understand, chiefly because they prevented the gymnasts of this study from developing independence and self-determination. Instead they developed into docile athletes.

Diligence and hard work through individual physical exertion were two qualities that the training culture had instilled in the Ocean View gymnasts. All seven gymnasts worked extremely hard and conscientiously. Jess, for instance, believed that her industriousness and efforts would allow her to become a successful gymnast. In reflection of this, she felt that Phoebe's training difficulties were treated too leniently by the coaches and would slow this gymnast's progress down. Instead, Jess appreciated the tough training methods she received from Dina and Valeriy. Foucault (1978a) wrote about industriousness as a quality important to and valued in modern society, citing Léon Faucher to support this argument: "Work is the providence of the modern peoples; it replaces morality, fills the gap left by beliefs and is regarded as the principle of all good" (p. 242). Bec even enjoyed the feelings of muscular pain during the strength exercises she performed at the end of the training session. She understood the sensations as positive and useful for her gymnastics ambitions. Foucault saw industriousness as a necessary quality in a capitalistic society. The gymnasts of this study relied on their bodies, and extensive and arduous training was seen as the only way for them to achieve gymnastics triumphs. Dina and Valeriy also regarded focus and determination, which included repetition, patience and toughness, essential for progress. This, they realized, was problematic within the Australian lifestyle. With regard to Phoebe's training difficulties, they blamed the country's relaxed way of life and her pampered personality for her dislike of repetition. It was, therefore, very important for the coaches to instill in her, but also in the other girls, virtues such as discipline, commitment, and patience.

The training culture and the demands set by the coaches at Ocean View further affected the gymnasts' conduct in that they regularly disregarded physiological signals from their bodies. Jess, for instance, did not show the pain she felt in her knee to Dina. This gymnast realized that she needed to continue training and improve her vault performance. Foucault (1978a) wrote that:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body (p. 138).

Women have been found to be more inclined to objectify their bodies, in particular as their behaviors appear more dictated by contemporary ideals of appearance (Cole, 1994; Dworkin, 2003; Markula & Pringle, 2006). To achieve the ideal gymnastics image, the athletes of this study distanced themselves from their bodies by ignoring fear and pain. Jess and Phoebe had learnt “to be intensely aware of the importance of the body and adopt technologies” that allowed them to continue training with pain or injuries (Johns & Johns, 2000, p. 225).

The meticulous control over gymnastics skills and the attentiveness this requires of the body, demands gymnasts to scrutinize their bodies extensively and continuously. However, meticulous performance is difficult to achieve. Despite treating the body as a mechanical entity, a perfect and automated performance is near impossible. Despite diligent training habits and attempts for bodily control, the gymnasts in this study struggled during training. Further, they often appeared disappointed because they could not perform according to their own and their coaches’ expectations. Briana, for instance, ended up doubting her capability on the beam because she had aimed to connect the two skills flawlessly.

The gymnasts’ embodiment of disciplined work-ethic and body-as-object rendered their bodies practiced and subjected, or as Foucault (1978a) saw it, *docile*. The gymnast began “to obey whatever [she was] ordered to do; [her] obedience [was] prompt and blind; an appearance of docility, the least delay would be a crime” (p. 166). This docility is problematic. It demands conformity, but also repetitive and detailed training until the athletes achieve automated performances (Shogan, 1999). As Briana, for instance, became more efficient in performing gymnastics movements on the beam, she was under greater pressure to perform more complex skills, which in turn demanded greater physical control, as the example of the combination of the two complex beam movements illustrated. Briana became extremely frustrated and down with herself as she could not master the movement combination. In the end, this gymnast appeared distraught.

It was evident, nevertheless, that docility was not passivity. Rather, the athletes’ compliance and desire to be successful left them *actively passive*. They were active in terms of bodily movements, but passive in terms of making decisions, creating routines, or reflecting on their sport. Paradoxically, “the dynamism of athletes on the playing field may be evidence of their conformity” (Shogan, 1999, p. 14). Shogan further suggested that the more complex and difficult athletic performance becomes, the more exacting the discipline acts on the body: the attention the gymnasts must give their bodies to achieve the necessary skills increases the control over their bodies. The disciplinary characteristics of modern forms of power, it can be argued, are inscribed on the gymnasts’ bodies with greater intensity.

Several scholars have argued that the female body is more docile, malleable and impressionable than the male body (Beyer Broch, 2003; Cole, 1994). Balsamo (1996, p. 56) pointed out that the female body is seen as “pathological, excessive, unruly, and potentially threatening of the dominant order.” A myriad of contemporary medical, dietary and cosmetic techniques are currently available for women to “correct” their bodies. Similarly, the fixed apparatus and prescribed movements of WAG extensively and continuously mold and prepare the young bodies of beginner gymnasts for potential success. The pliability of these athletes is used to coerce them into a specific ideal.

The Ocean View gymnasts did not seem to be dissatisfied with their lack of decision-making power or resistance. Instead, they had adopted the training culture and even appreciated the disciplinary training methods. Jess preferred her coaches' strict treatment, as she believed that the disciplining would facilitate her gymnastics success. These gymnasts had also developed mental coping strategies (Jess laughing Dina's disapproval off in her head, Leonie thinking of what she needs to do rather than the fear she feels). Shogan (1999) writes that athletes' confidence in their coaches is the reason they eagerly accept and adhere to the decisions their coaches make for them. In fact, the more disciplined athletes are, the more they "are willing to be told what is in their best interests" (p. 82). However, trusting athletes, Shogan continues, are vulnerable to possible abuse.²

We suggest that the developed control over the body adversely affected the gymnasts' confidence in their ability as athletes. As Briana's and Phoebe's experiences showed, situations of frustration were frequent, often combined with elaborate crying. While the gymnasts continued training, their frustration with themselves and their apparent lack of confidence in their performance was, at least at times, striking. All the other gymnasts from this study except for Phoebe and Jess have since retired from WAG. As Denison (2007) showed, the classification, distribution, and subjectivation caused by the disciplinary techniques of running, and the type of coach-athlete relationship this produced, resulted in the athlete losing his motivation to continue competitive running. A similar scenario may be applicable to the Ocean View gymnasts. As gymnasts could minimally influence their sporting experiences, they could not shape their realities. As Foucault (1978a) suggested, they adopted particular useful attitudes, about themselves and their surroundings, which may, at a later stage of their careers, have lost appeal.

Conclusion

In this article we set out to analyze the WAG training culture at Ocean View College using Foucault's concept of "technologies of dominance," and his technologies of discipline in particular. We provided an essayistic research story to demonstrate how contemporary gymnasts experience training WAG and the effects this has on their selves and conduct. The story was written from data gained through observations of training sessions, interviews with coaches and gymnasts and participant observations with several of the participating athletes. Our interpretations offer insight into how the gymnasium's enclosure and the gymnasts' specific distribution within this space allowed the coaches to easily observe, control, and regulate their athletes. Further, the strict and specific time-tabling of gymnastics training, as well as the particular levels of learning progressions, allowed coaches to monitor and correct the performances of the gymnasts. Both the distributional organization and the training procedures reinforced the coaches' leading role and naturalized the gymnasts' inferior position and limited their use of power. Gymnasts had little involvement in their training and gymnastics career developments and they had adopted this position unquestioningly.

Foucault's theory of inscription illustrates how the Ocean View gymnasts came to embody submissiveness and dependence, as well as the notion of body-as-machine. It appeared as a covert process, one that the gymnasts not only experienced through sensory mechanisms, but also through the actual physical practice

of gymnastics movements. It is a long-term process of molding and normalization, through which the gymnasts became proficient gymnasts, while at the same time developing useful training qualities such as diligence, industriousness, and submission. Several gymnasts had also adopted coping strategies to deal with the coaching methods employed by Dina and Valeriy and the fear they experienced when having to perform new gymnastics moves without assistance from a coach or protective material.

With regard to the relationship between gymnastics proficiency and the corporeal discipline this requires, a paradox emerges. On the one hand, the movement requirements of WAG may offer gymnasts the potential for kinesthetic experiences, physical strength, and corporeal expertise not traditionally possible for women. On the other hand, such athletic dynamism is “evidence of [athletes’] conformity” (Shogan, 1999, p. 14). The training realities of the gymnasts in this study illustrate the elaborate structural and organizational limitations of the gymnastics context. Spatial boundaries, learning structures, and the unequal coach-gymnast relationship are key aspects that restricted the gymnasts’ whereabouts and choices. Further, extensive physical disciplining and controlling appeared necessary for gymnasts to achieve movement prowess. The repetition that this proficiency required stabilized an identity that was marked by diligence, submission and perfectionism.

We suggest that the degree of discipline and submissiveness required by gymnasts is key in preventing these athletes from reflecting upon themselves as individuals, their conduct, as well as their sport, and thus using their experiences as a space to invent themselves. While the gymnasts’ physical strength and kinesthetic prowess challenged traditional ideas of womanhood, they did not consciously question traditional gender stereotypes or their sport. Rather, the challenging of traditional gender ideals was a side-effect, one that the gymnasts were subtly taught to hide through regulations such as clothing prescriptions for competitions and prescribed aesthetic sequences in their routines. The clothing partially hid the gymnasts’ muscular torsos and arms and emphasized their feminine body-line. The aesthetic dimensions of WAG required the gymnasts to portray feminine attributes such as gracefulness and elegance. However, while the gymnasts at Ocean View enjoyed becoming physically stronger and more adept athletes which also motivated them to continue training, they also became subject to increased corporeal domination.

Denison (2007) also showed that such corporeal domination resulted in athletes losing motivation and retiring from the sport. The gymnasts of this study continued training during our research project, yet only Phoebe and Jess are currently still at Ocean View. The others retired soon after the conclusion of this project. For us, the connection between emotional and bodily domination as experienced by the gymnasts of this study and their retirement cannot be ignored and we suggest that more research using a sociotheoretical lens is required to understand athletes’ performances. We conclude, however, that as long as the WAG culture remains as presented in this article’s research story, the notion of discipline and subordination resulting from participation in high-performance gymnastics must be taken seriously. We hope that other scholars will conduct further research on a practical and transformative level while we agree with Markula and Pringle (2006, p. 219) that it must be those with “a larger margin for resistance” within the operating relations of power that have the responsibility to ensure that detrimental consequences are limited and positive ones can be facilitated.

Notes

1. While Foucault's idea of power may be enabling, his initial works on subjectivation granted individuals little agency in constituting their identity. He was criticized for this and in his three volumes of *History of Sexuality* (1978b; 1985; 1986), developed the concept "technologies of the self". While Foucault previously saw individuals to be solely formed by their surroundings, he now granted individuals agency for self-stylization and -transformation. For this paper, however, technologies of dominance provide us with an ideal analytic tool to problematize the contemporary culture of WAG training and to challenge the empowering potentials seen possible through participation in this sport.

2. Several authors, chief among them Brackenridge and Rose, see gymnasts' dependence on their coaches to create a potentially abusive situation (for useful examples see Brackenridge, 1997; Brackenridge, 1999; Brackenridge & Kirby, 1990; Rose, 1991a).

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