



'Taking emotions seriously': Feeling female and becoming-surfer through UK Surf Space



Georgina Roy*

Chelsea School, University of Brighton, Hillbrow, Denton Road, Eastbourne BN20 7SR, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 December 2012

Received in revised form

14 June 2013

Accepted 30 July 2013

Keywords:

Emotion

Surfing

Space

Female

Gender

UK

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I consider the importance of "taking emotions seriously" in relation to my research into women and surfing in the UK. I draw on feminist work in the areas of emotion, space and subjectivity, and relevant literature on surfing, in order to explore the significance of affectual and emotional experiences for women who surf. I contend that by exploring how women emotionally experience surfing spaces, we might better understand the dynamic intricacies of surfing as an embodied, gendered space. In particular, I explore feelings of fear, freedom, belonging and anger in the context of female subjectivities caught up in a spatial becoming-surfer. My findings suggest that although surfing remains dominated by men, the fluidity of the space offers many possibilities for women to experience their gendered embodiment differently. I also contend that an association of surfing with masculinity continues to shape gendered relations and spatial becomings in the surf.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Laying a rail into a glassy face and feeling the acceleration, the lines we draw and the subtle movements of our bodies. This is where the internal becomes external

(Extract from a poem written by Bella, Newquay, 2012).

B – Why do you surf??

G – because I love it.

B – what about it do you love?

G – er... that is a difficult question. I think it's just... you can't put your finger on it, it's called the stoke isn't it, that's what they call it... there is no other word... the one thing that actually makes you think... like, on a good day, there's literally... nothing else better, in life.

(Conversation between myself and Bella, 2011).

This paper focuses on how women negotiate the interweaving of emotions, gender and embodiment in the surfing spaces of the UK. The research findings I utilise are drawn from ethnographic research carried out with female surfers in Britain. As part of my

investigations, I asked many participants to explain to me why they surf, and what they enjoy about it. At the time, this seemed to be a fairly straightforward question. However, when asked by Bella to explain why I surf, I struggled to translate into discourse the intricacies of surfing, for me, as an altogether emotional, embodied and spatial experience. Doing surf ethnography means that I am always analytically "aware of" gender in the surf. I observe gendered relations between surfers, I consider how I feel – gendered – surf space, and how space is occupied by myself and others. However, there are times during fieldwork when I "lose" my (gendered) self in the surf. I feel so enmeshed in a surfing experience that I become almost unaware of my own gender/researcher/subjectivity. It is as though, as Bella writes, I am caught in a moment of immanent folding, where the "internal becomes external", and vice versa. To utilise a Deleuzian (1987) notion, I am caught up in a momentary *becoming-surfer*.

It is important not to let the feminist implications of such spatial becomings go un-noticed. Surfing has strong links to masculine norms, and a long history of heterosexist male domination (Stedman, 1997; Booth, 2001, 2001a; Henderson, 2001). Females in surf culture, and in extreme sports culture more generally, have been subjected to various strategies of containment, such as sexism, sexual objectification and trivialisation as part of maintaining what Kusz describes as 'a racially and gender exclusive place... where (white) men can un-apologetically perform an ideal masculinity...' (2004, 205). At the same time, Waitt suggests that

* Tel.: +44 122853254.

E-mail addresses: g.roy@bton.ac.uk, g.roy@brighton.ac.uk.

'surfing spaces are neither intrinsically oppressive nor liberatory, but offer variable pressures and possibilities for gendered embodiment' (2008, 77).

Given the distinctly gendered discourses connected to surfing, how surfers feel in surf space is both academically relevant, and potentially, politically important. In the extract above, I try to articulate how the surf space 'on a good day' invokes feelings of comfort, pleasure, joy. At other times I experience fear, anger or frustration. These words represent just a small fraction of what I feel whilst in the surf; a space filled with 'all-enveloping' sensation, affect and emotion (Ingold, 2011: 135). Gendered subjectivities interweave with these embodied affects in various ways. Here, I focus on the felt, emotional and affectual experiences of women who surf as a means through which to examine some of these 'variable pressures and possibilities for gendered embodiment' in surfing.

2. Moving through theory: feeling, affect and emotion

Emotions and affects are mobile. While both have a place for 'patterns'... such as long-standing geographies of fear, for example... basically they are interested in movements and circulations: in flows between people, and other things. They share, then, a relational ontology that privileges the fluid over the fixed.

(Pile, 2010: 10).

My theoretical approach to this research has been influenced by post-modern feminist theory, and the philosophical ideas of Deleuze and Guattari. These theoretical influences are characterized by fluidity. They shape my approach in various ways and are reflected in my treatment of emotion, affect and feeling. My engagement with the emotive and affective aspects of surf space has come about in part through an interest in this shared relation to fluidity, movement and mobility. Emotions and affects are, like 'the surf', always moving. They move through us, around us and between us; in the words of Thrift 'emotion [is] motion both literally and figurally' (2004, 60).

In this section I outline how I utilise emotion, affect and feeling. The concepts have been conceptualised in different ways and there are no stable definitions (Thrift, 2004). However, the terms are usually recognised as existing in relation to one another, and within this analysis I conceptualise them as intricately connected. Theoretical discussions of emotion and affect are many and varied (cf. Thrift, 2004; Wetherell, 2012); it is beyond the bounds of this paper to discuss them in depth here. It is however important to offer some working definitions of emotion, affect and feeling in terms of how I approach them in the context of this discussion. I begin with a definition of affect, as translated by Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: xvi) *A Thousand Plateaus*:

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling... L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) reference to affect implies that it not be thought of as a personal or individual feeling, but a felt intensity which is beyond cognition. In this sense, affects are seen to exist as part of a 'supra-individual or transhuman affective field' (Conradson, 2005: 105). In terms of how I think through affect and emotion here, the relation to the 'individual', or to subjectivity, represents a key distinction. As Conradson (2005: 105) explains 'in comparison to individualised formulations of emotion, affect is...

more attentive to both the embodied and intersubjective dimensions of human feeling'. In other words, whilst emotions manifest through individual feelings, affects represents felt noncognitive intensity which can also be 'mutual between bodies, or between bodies and things'; it is essentially the capacity of the body for relations with others (Paterson, 2005: 164).

Related to this, another key distinction between emotion and affect concerns how they are discursively constructed. The notion of affect, as beyond cognition, is closely aligned with non-representational theory (Thrift, 2004; Pile, 2010). Emotion on the other hand represents a sort of personal and discursive "making sense" of feeling, or as Wetherell (2012: 4) describes it, 'embodied meaning-making'. Massumi (2002) refers to this discursive expression of feeling as the 'capture' of affect. 'Emotion is qualified intensity... into semantically and semiotically formed progressions... into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognised' (Massumi, 2002: 28). Quoting Masters, Munt (2008: 5) also summarises:

Affect is an innately structured, non-cognitive evaluative sensation that may or may not register in consciousness; feeling is affect made conscious, possessing an evaluative capacity...; and emotion is psychologically constructed, dramatized feeling.

The distinctions I have outlined are useful in providing theoretical context to this discussion of how female surfers feel in surf space. I do not however place any epistemological emphasis on the importance of one concept over another. Rather, I recognise the existence of affective intensities, which manifest themselves both within and between bodies. I also explore how these affects are felt through surfing bodies, and discuss these feelings in terms of how they are expressed emotionally. I contend that all of these experiential aspects and forms of enquiry are important elements of doing feminist surf research.

3. Exploring emotion and affect in sporting spaces

In the last decade, the 'turn to affect' has seen a 'welling-up of emotion within geography' (Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 524). Anderson and Smith (2001: 9) have been instrumental in urging geographers to pay closer attention to 'how emotional relations shape society and space'. As researchers of sport and the moving body, sports studies scholars have a greater opportunity than most to explore the affective and emotional ways of knowing, understanding and representing how we feel our way through social spaces (Rinehart, 2010).

After all, the body [is] the site of emotional experience and expression par excellence ... Embodiment and its theorists thus do well to take emotion seriously—since there is little we do with our bodies that we can think apart from feeling.

(Davidson and Milligan, 2004: 523)

It is arguably the case that 'scholars studying sport and its related areas should be leading the discussions of affect' and how it shapes bodies, space and cultural relations (Rinehart, 2010: 187). And yet, sport scholars continue to overlook the significance of affect, emotion, and the more evocative ways of engaging with research (Sparkes, 2002). I would argue that this lack of acknowledgement for emotion is closely connected to the gendered nature of sporting cultures. As Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) note:

[The] marginalization of emotion has been part of a gender politics of research in which detachment, objectivity and rationality have been valued, and implicitly masculinised, while

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946634>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946634>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)