



BME PARIS
BioMedical Engineering
MASTER'S PROGRAM

What if the world's biggest wave surfer was a woman?

Open Your Mind Seminar

Friday, Dec 13 2024
1.30 pm – 2.30 pm

Amphitheater FOURNEL
Arts et Métiers Institute of Technology
155 boulevard de l'Hôpital, 75013 Paris

The sex bicategorisation subversion by women big wave surfing pioneers

In winter 2020, as the race for the record for the biggest wave ever surfed rages on, Maya Gabeira and Justine Dupont outperformed the men. However, women's access to big-wave competition is a recent development resulting from a battle waged by women pioneers in the sport. This article traces the path of the XXL surfing pioneers and reveals the foundations of the institutional construction of gender categories in surfing. Indeed, the difficulties encountered by these surfers when they entered mainstream competitions illustrate the injunctions to femininity made to female surfers' bodies. Rather than encouraging surfers to excel on the waves, sponsorship – the main source of remuneration for these sportswomen – imposes a feminisation of bodies that contradicts a powerful, muscular, (over)trained and efficient body. As a result, supposedly 'natural' differences are then erected as evidence and justification for a gendered bi-categorisation that is ultimately constructed and reified. This article then shows how XXL surfing functions for these surfers as an escape route where athletic performance takes precedence over gender performance. However, while the equalisation of female and male performance challenges the gendered bi-categorisation, the gendered interpretation of achievements and failures and the maintenance of gender categories continue to maintain a sporting separation between men and women.

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